'BUT LATER YOU REGRET IT'. ROMA YOUTH NAVIGATING ASPIRATIONAL DILEMMAS

"Pero luego te arrepientes". La juventud gitana navegando entre dilemas de aspiración.

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Abstract:

This article reflects on the Spanish Roma people's aspiration dilemmas about their school-to-work transition (STWT). Study of the STWT of Roma young people casts light on the social and economic inequalities in Spanish society. Academic and occupational *aspiration dilemmas* reveal aspects of the interplay between structural-historical, societal, institutional and community-level factors that condition Roma people's "capacity to aspire", which Appadurai defines as a navigational capacity. Drawing on 31 interviews with Roma people living in a mid-sized Catalan city, we explore the following types of intermingled aspiration dilemmas: concrete vs. abstract, misaligned and insecure, misrecognised, interrupted, and postponed aspirations. We also unpack two cross-cutting aspects – young people's capacity and strategies for navigating among aspiration-related resources and negotiating the meanings, terms, and conditions of aspiring school-to-work transition under multiple forms of pressure.

Keywords: *academic and occupational aspirations; aspirational dilemmas; capacity to aspire; Roma youth; Spain.*

Resumen:

Este artículo reflexiona acerca de los dilemas de aspiración de las personas gitanas españolas en su transición de la escuela al trabajo (TET). El estudio de la TET de los jóvenes gitanos arroja luz sobre las desigualdades sociales y económicas de la sociedad española. Los *dilemas de aspiración* académicos y ocupacionales revelan

aspectos de la interacción entre factores estructurales-históricos, sociales, institucionales y comunitarios que condicionan la "capacidad de aspirar" de las personas gitanas, que Appadurai define como una "capacidad de navegación". En base a 31 entrevistas con personas gitanas de una ciudad catalana de tamaño medio, se exploran los siguientes tipos entremezclados de dilemas de aspiración: aspiraciones concretas versus abstractas, desalineadas e inseguras, mal reconocidas, interrumpidas y pospuestas. También se desglosan dos aspectos transversales: la capacidad y las estrategias de los jóvenes para navegar entre los recursos relacionados con las aspiraciones y negociar los significados, términos y condiciones de la TET bajo múltiples formas de presión.

Palabras clave: capacidad para aspirar; dilemas de aspiración académica y ocupacional; juventud gitana; España.

1. Introduction

This article aims to reflect on the Spanish Roma people's aspiration-related dilemmas about their school-to-work transition (STWT), receiving conflicting messages from their families, communities, and school agents regarding their future. It has been argued that aspirations have a complex influence on students' future educational behaviour and professional careers (see for example Khattab, 2015). Also, social researchers claim that aspiration is deeply informed by socioeconomic conditions, gender, and ethnicity, among other structural factors (Appadurai, 2004; Heinz, 2009; Khattab, 2015). Furthermore, aspiration is relational, embodied, "replete with classed desires and fantasies, defences and aversions, feelings of fear, shame and guilt, excitement and desire" (Allen, 2013, p. 5). Thus, studying the STWT-related aspirations of an ethnic minority group, and particularly their aspiration-related dilemmas, can contribute to understanding the complex interplay among structural-historical, societal, institutional and community-level factors that condition their "capacity to navigate" among STWT resources and negotiate their meanings.

Global capitalism, through employment flexibilization and successive crises, has augmented early career insecurity, unlinking educational and training efforts from future career goals (O'Reilly et al., 2019). As opposed to the linear models of earlier generations, STWT has become a growingly contingent process, in which the interaction of individual decisions, opportunity structures, and social pathways is unforeseeable (Heinz, 2009). The increasingly fragile bond between training and employment (Pohl & Walther, 2007) implies lifepaths in which young people are in education and employment in parallel, experience unfavourable work-to-work transitions, or become inactive (Pohl & Walther, 2007), not to mention the broadening gap between STWT and the transition to adulthood due to uncertain life chances. Also, a culture of individualism (Leschke, 2009) manifests itself in the responsibilisation of people to actively shape their own biographies (Heinz, 2009). The concept of the "biographisation of youth transitions" describes how, in a constantly changing socioeconomic and social environment, old collective models of transition cannot reliably support young people, who thus need to "invent adulthoods" (Thomson et al., 2004). Walther and colleagues (2005) show how uncertainty augments choice-related risk, particularly for those young people who may count on fewer resources and whose link to the regular transition system (education, training institutions, etc.) is weaker.

Here, we aim to discuss the STWT-related aspirations of Roma people, many of whom can be characterised as subject to these latter conditions – thus stuck in "risk

biographies" (Walther et al., 2005). We specifically focus on the aspiration-related dilemmas that Roma people encounter in navigating contradictory messages from their community and family on the one hand, and mainstream institutions on the other, with respect to desired future studies and work. With emphasis on agency, aspiration dilemmas can also be understood as a process of navigation among resources, and the negotiation of different meanings of STWT and the conditions of access, under the pressure of having to adjust one's "desired future" to a mainstream ethos of work.

Roma people, Europe's largest ethnic minority (numbering approx. 10-12 million), are overrepresented in the population exposed to social exclusion, poverty, marginalization, and discrimination (Fundamental Rights Agency, 2018). The Roma in Spain, called "Gitanos", make up the most numerous minority with a history of 600 years on the Iberian Peninsula. They comprise a highly heterogeneous ethnic-cultural group with diverse cultural, social, and territorial identities, and varying rates of social inclusion. Representative studies highlight a gap between the Roma and non-Roma population in terms of demography, educational attainment, the labour market, and health and housing (de la Rica et al., 2018; FSG, 2022; Laparra et al., 2013). 66% of the Roma population is below 30 years old, while only 30% apply to the mainstream population in Spain (de la Rica et al., 2018).

Most Roma young people (more than 90%)had finished primary school (ISCED 1), but only 17% percent had completed at least the lower secondary level (ISCED 2), as opposed to 77% of the mainstream population (de la Rica et al., 2018). Although last decades' improvements are notable, the minority-majority gap have not significantly decreased. Dropping out and early school leaving are generalised among the Roma young people, although the reengagement with basic studies and professional training through second chance structures is high (25,8% in the 18-24 age-group). At the post-16 level, a much larger proportion of Roma people, who continues the studies choose Vocational Education and Training (VET) than an academic track. In 2012, at the age of 18 only 1,9% of Roma young people studied in academic upper secondary tracks, as opposed to 12,3% in technical tracks. This proportion is 20,1% and 17,3% among total Spanish youth (FSG & CEET, 2013). Gender gap among the Roma pupils is broader than among the general population, placing Roma young women in a more vulnerable situation in comparison with their Roma male peers, in almost all aspects of schooling (de la Rica et al., 2018).

Roma in Spain have historically been excluded both from school and the mainstream labour market (Sánchez Ortega, 1987). Their experience of marginality and subsequent racial discrimination have historically shaped collective horizons of possibilities and constituted "the basis for collective aspirations" (Appadurai, 2004, p. 61). As Hellgren and Gabrielli (2021) demonstrate, Roma families sustain high expectations regarding school, despite their ambivalent experiences – a phenomenon that Yosso (2005) describes with the term "aspirational capital"; the capacity of minority groups to aim high despite structural inequalities. Hellgren and Gabrielli call this dilemma a dual gap: families maintain high aspirations despite their harsh social conditions on the one hand, but teachers misrecognise their efforts and accuse families of harbouring low expectations about school achievement on the other. Since the late 1970s, when Spanish public schools officially let Roma pupils in, researchers have insisted (Bereményi, 2011; San Román, 1980) that Roma families have high expectations regarding schooling.

Since the 1970s, the typical sources of income for the Spanish Roma have been flea markets, scrap metal collection, and jobs in the construction industry, agriculture, and the service sector; that is, in less prestigious niches of the economy. Roma people tend to access the labour market earlier and spend more years working in worse conditions: mainly self-employed, with less social security protection, higher rates of temporality, shorter working hours, and ultimately with lower rate of retirement (de la Rica et al., 2018). Gender-gap differences leave Roma women in less favourable conditions than their male peers. Both the financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic have affected the Spanish Roma population more severely than mainstream society.

In this article, drawing on interviews with Spanish Roma people in a mid-sized Catalan city located at approximately 30km from Barcelona, we explore the Roma people's aspiration-related dilemmas with respect to their STWT. The study is not representative of either the Spanish Roma young people in general, or the ones living in the city under scrutiny. However, in many senses we could detect patterns shared with other Roma communities in other Catalan cities in terms of housing, education, labour market inclusion and interethnic relations. Most interviews were collected from young people living in peripherical, working class neighbourhoods in housing blocks, whose families work in construction industry and/or in the flea market. As for the local school market, we can also observe similarity to earlier studies (Bereményi, 2011; Hellgren & Gabrielli, 2021) in the Barcelona Metropolitan Area: local public schools have become segregated, serving mostly families of Roma and immigrant origin, while more distant schools occasionally admit Roma pupils whose parents have higher than average aspirations and knowledge about the school system.

This article does not aim to take an interethnic comparative perspective, with respect to mainstream Spaniards or other minorities of immigrant origin. Despite great heterogeneity among the Roma families in our study, what holds their stories together is an expressed ethnic/cultural identity – one of whose manifestations is a community ethos as opposed to mainstream individualism -, as well as experiences of racialised discrimination and structural inequalities in many aspects of life.

The following questions will guide the presentation and interpretation of the data: What messages do Roma people perceive from their families, communities, and school staff with respect to their future choices between education and the labour market? What aspiration-related dilemmas do they encounter? First, we present the theoretical and analytical framework. Second, we detail the empirical findings. Finally, in a discussion we interpret findings and present conclusions about our main arguments.

2. Antecedents and theoretical framework

In the highly segmented dual Spanish labour market, with a "sub-protective" STWT regime that is characterised by lengthy and uncertain STWT, high level of skills mismatch and low labour demand, among others (Hadjivassiliou et al., 2019; Pohl & Walther, 2007), family support is crucial for young people's access to work. High rates of early school leaving (Eurostat, 2019), coupled with unprotected, precarious jobs and an informal economy, further decrease the chance of young people from vulnerable socioeconomic

conditions developing future-oriented positive aspirations with respect to their access to work. While critical race theory literature acknowledges ethnic minority families' and communities' "cultural wealth", highlighting their unrecognised forms of capital (Yosso, 2005), others warn that in times of the reconfiguration of youth transition regimes (Hadjivassiliou et al., 2019), parents' educational and labour market experiences seem insufficient to guide young people's STWT (Musset & Kurekova, 2018) and to feed their corresponding aspirations (Appadurai, 2004).

Most qualitative studies on aspiration focus on the interrelations among influencing factors. In contrast, we are interested in Roma people's aspiration-related dilemmas that emerge when they make decisions about their educational and professional careers. Appadurai (2004) suggests that "aspirations are never simply individual" (2004, p. 67), but rather form part of a system of ideas produced in a particular context, often far from rational calculation and market logics. Furthermore, the "capacity to aspire" is not uniformly distributed in any society. Zipin and colleagues (2012) argue that aspiration formation is defined in relation to capital, as "those with less access to social, cultural or economic resources must aspire in competition with those who have greater access" (2012, p. 187). For this author, the "capacity to aspire" is a sort of meta capacity; a collective asset that gives access to a deeper consciousness about the links between the more and the less immediate objects of aspiration. Thus, the wealthier have a broader pool of experience of the relationship between aspirations and outcomes. Allen (2014) adds that "aspirations – their performance, production and the capacity by which to secure them – are [...] made up of a complex interplay of material, cultural, discursive and psychological resources and dispositions" (2014, p. 775).

Appadurai sees aspiration as "cultural capacity", informed by the past, but oriented towards the future. Similarly, Yosso's (2005) term of "community cultural wealth" refers to socially marginalized groups' cultural knowledges, skills, and abilities. One of these elements, "aspirational capital", is described as the ability to face structural inequalities while holding onto hope and relying on community resources to challenge oppressive conditions.

In a context of unequal access to aspiration, schools play a fundamental role for students in recognising and contrasting different cognitive orientations (Hill et al., 2003), as well as mobilising resources, provisions, and strategies. Nevertheless, conflicting messages about the future to aspire to contribute to dilemmas. The multiplicity of perspectives and their interactions give rise to processes that we describe in this article as "aspirational dilemmas" from the point of view of the Roma people who experience them. Zipin and colleagues (2015) distinguish between the "doxic logic" of aspiration and the "habituated logic" thereof. The first refers to the normative desire for the future (images and values associated with ways of life, occupations, etc. transmitted by a school). In contrast, "habituated logic" projects a habituated disposition whereby desires, hopes, and plans are fed by past experiences rather than possible future events. Furthermore, the concept of "aspiration misalignment" problematises to what extent aspirations correspond to expectations (González Ferrer et al., 2015), and how professional goals match educational/training choices (Furlong & Biggart, 1999; Perry et al., 2016; Sabates et al., 2011). From this perspective, expectations have to do with realistic beliefs, or probabilistic judgments about the future (González Ferrer et al., 2015), while aspirations have an

idealistic, affective component that reflects preferences, hopes and wishes about the future within the "zone of acceptable alternatives" (Gottfredson 1981 quoted in Furlong et al., 1998). "Insecure aspirations", undecided career ambitions, are claimed to jeopardize the healthy construction of life paths, which can be particularly disadvantageous for young people with marginalised backgrounds (Sabates et al., 2011), as dilemmas push students to enter NEET status (Yates et al., 2011). Carrasco and colleagues (2018) discuss the misrecognised or "neglected aspirations" of students with low academic achievement whose active and motivated pathway choice is discouraged and neglected by both institutional agents and community members who consider their aspirations "unrealistic" or "misaligned". In a similar vein, Hellgren and Gabrielli (2021) identify a gap between Roma families' (high) expectations about education and schoolteachers' expectations that Roma students lack aspiration, leading to misinterpretations of difficulties that are related to socioeconomic marginalization rather than a lack of interest in education. Alternatively, students' overly modest aspirations can be criticised as insufficient or illegitimate. Channelling the latter into less prestigious vocational rather than academic tracks, ability grouping, and limiting career choices are some examples of failures to address individual strengths (Walther, 2005). Research on social mobility and the vulnerable Roma population (Bereményi & Carrasco, 2015; Padilla-Carmona et al., 2020) casts light on how structural, institutional, or even community-level factors block emerging training and occupational trajectories. These cases, described as "interrupted aspirations", imply painful individual dilemmas, while their potential is often transmitted to other community members. "Postponed aspirations" often support transgenerational social mobility (Bereményi, 2022).

Finally, we relate aspiration dilemmas to navigation and negotiation. Navigation is a process of identifying and accessing resources, while negotiation implies engagement with power relations and interactions with the aim of redefining, reframing, and legitimising alternative meanings (Harris et al., 2018). Navigation deploys individual decisions and activities, particularly among different life phases and spheres (Evans & Furlong, 1997). Appadurai (2004) describes the dynamic nature of aspiration as a "navigational capacity", illustrating this with the example of a "map of aspiration" that consists of a combination of nodes and pathways. Following this metaphor, map literacy skills are required to make best use of this tool. Namely, locational skills to understand where one is positioned with respect to other points; symbol-interpretation skills to figure out what symbolic elements mean and how to use them; and scaling capacity to appraise distances and compare areas. Those with less navigational capacity focus on fewer nodes and identify thinner pathways among them (2004, p. 69). Thus, aspiration is a capacity closely related to navigational skills and experiences, and the ability to negotiate terms of access and their meanings. Thus, alternative futures are linked to learning from earlier individual or collective experiments, bearing in mind that the economic, emotional, and social costs of possible failures are higher for those most in need (Bereményi & Durst, 2021).

Based on this conceptual, interpretative framework, we aim to understand what aspirational dilemmas Roma people face when perceiving conflicting messages from their families, communities, and school agents regarding their future.

3. Methods

The investigation was conducted within the framework of a wider cross-country comparative research project that focused on STWT among Roma youth, financed by the European Commission.[1]

Within "patchwork fieldwork" carried out during the months of COVID-19 (2020-2021), we conducted 31 interviews with Roma people and 21 with municipal administrators and high-school teachers. Contact with Roma young people was established through researchers' personal and professional networks, and partly through local Roma mediator and workers of local NGOs. Ethnic self-identification was the only criterium of inclusion in the sample. In this article, we only explore 31 interviews (14 men and 17 women, 22 of whom were aged between 17 and 30 years old, and 9 between 31 and 38 years old). Nine of them had dropped out of lower secondary education; thirteen had finished lower secondary education but had not accessed any post-secondary training, while nine had studied at a post-secondary level, and three in High Education (HE). We included interviewees of a wide range of ages (17-38) as our aim was to represent a variety of STWT. The geographical scope of the study is limited to a large city located approximately 30 kilometres from Barcelona city, with a significant Roma population whose members reside in various peripherical neighbourhoods. Although varied ethnographic activities were planned with Roma families, and especially with young people, the pandemic did not favour direct contact. Therefore, apart from one-off visits to the neighbourhoods, a great part of the data collection was limited to biographical interviews conducted mostly online, via Messenger and Zoom. Two Roma researchers with family ties in the city participated in both the collection and analysis of the data.

Data analysis was carried out in a series of thematic team meetings. The topic of "aspiration" was raised inductively in a team session as it emerged from the interviews. The analysis was guided by previously defined questions, but following a grounded theory approach (Morse et al., 2016) we defined further themes, variables, and indicators as we read over the interviews several times. We used ATLAS.ti.8 qualitative data analysis software for the codification and its analysis.

After explaining the purpose of the research project, we obtained recorded verbal informed consent from all interviewees. Interviews were anonymised to protect the confidentiality of the research participants. In the text, after the quotations in square brackets we indicate the code, sex, and age of the interviewees, with 'W' meaning woman and 'M' meaning man.

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[1] (Anonymised for double-blind peer review).

4. Results

As opposed to UK political discourse (Allen, 2014), in Spain aspiration is not a central concept in public policies. Instead, increasing motivation and expectations appear to be the keywords related to focusing on disengaged youth. This vocabulary mismatch, however, does not manifest itself in great differences in institutional practices or policy commitments. Several public policies, programmes and interventions targeting the Roma people set the goal of "increasing Roma students' and their families' expectations with respect to school" (PIPG[2] 2014-16) or "enhancing students' employability and transforming educational and job expectations in students' surroundings" (PIPG 2017-20), and "motivating Roma students to continue post-compulsory studies" (Roma School Promotion project[3]). An EU-funded labour market integration programme (*Aprender trabajando*) of an NGO that targets Roma youth also aims to impact, among other aspects, their academic and occupational expectations. While all these discourses are influential for Roma young people living in marginalised conditions, we centre our attention on how the latter experience the influence of community or family members and school agents on their aspiration development, and what related dilemmas they face.

4.1. Aspiration production through family support and teachers' guidance

4.1.1. Family support

Interviews revealed significant diversity among extended Roma families in terms of educational, training, and employment experiences, as well as alternative futures aspired to. These differences are mainly due to the conditions and capacity of earlier generations to accumulate capitals. While rural-urban migration within the Spanish state was a general pattern, we were able to identify a range of models in terms of housing strategies, interethnic relations, and occupational navigations in different labour market segments, as well as of the scope of investment in schooling.

For instance, one large extended Roma family had experienced significant social mobility, accumulated significant social and cultural capital throughout generations, and members had taken up jobs as municipal public servants, private company employees, or through self-employment. With this family we observed deep trust in school education as a means of social mobility. Nevertheless, younger generations do not uniformly share STWT aspirations through further education. Other Roma families without social mobility experiences may also rely on high-achieving community members, but in the interviews they tended to describe aspirations that do not challenge their parents' low-skilled STWT model. While all of the Roma families we interviewed share a positive belief about schooling as a means of social mobility (better working conditions), education does not necessarily occupy the same level of priority in their future aspirations. Young people from families who earlier were able to accumulate experiences of the relationship "between

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[2] The Integrated Roma Plan for Roma People in Catalonia (PIPG) has several renewed versions.
[3] This project is included in PIPG.

trial and harvest" in the fields of education and labour market have broader access to reference people and a wider horizon about future educational and occupational choices. In these social environments, employment in mainstream jobs is common: city civil servant, factory worker, mechanic, secretary, social worker, and salesperson, among others. In these families, the outstanding trajectories of advanced VET or HE studies are also present, which can serve as role models for family members.

> *I have a cousin who is finishing her law degree, and I think she is the only one*
> *in the family who has gone to university [28W29]*

Earlier research (Gibson, 2004; Méndez-Morse, 2004) indicates that, in ethnic minority communities, role models have an unquestionable influence on young people, substituting formal guidance and legitimating attitudes and routine practices. However, the scope of intergenerational mobility we observed is limited and by no means generalised. Most often, Roma youth achieve somewhat higher level qualifications than their parents – following the mainstream trends of educational expansion. Families that have fewer or no outstanding role models follow more traditional educational and occupational pathways, through early school leaving, engagement in marginal or low prestige jobs, and precarious working conditions, such as at flea markets, in construction, or occasionally trading in used cars. Here, parents' capacity to support the training of offspring is limited by their own short school experience. These parents' STWT aspirations projected onto their children are often transmitted in abstract terms ("a good job", "a better future") and sometimes incoherent with their lived experiences – a practice that contributes to young people's aspiration dilemmas. In terms of perceived family and community support, we were also able to observe diversity:

> *I didn't want to study, I didn't want to do anything and [my aunt] was the one*
> *who fought a lot for me to do something, and she was the one who signed me*
> *up for the course, the one who signed me up for the Youth Club. Thanks to her,*
> *I am where I am. [04W33]*

For many, such sustained support only becomes relevant at a more advanced age and in a non-linear manner. Reference persons are crucial, and they often represent a counterweight to other community members.

> *My mother has always supported me, my father the same. My grandmother,*
> *well, she was more ambivalent about what I do. [05W20]*

Backing can be conditional, limiting the scope of imaginable lifepaths or professional sectors, and is often differentiated by gender. Caring jobs (education, healthcare, and elderly care) were found to suit young women's traditionally gendered community roles. For instance, a male interviewee quit a hair-dressing VET course due to criticism from the community. In contrast, some women mentioned that their economic independence was fostered both by adult men and women, challenging traditional female roles in Roma communities.

> *My grandmother used to tell me, all her life: I don't want to see that a man has*
> *to support you!... Get your driving license! [28W29]*

Beyond parents' verbal reasoning, interviewees report on family's efforts to provide elements of middle-class cultural capital.

> *[my father] bought us an encyclopaedia, one of those Larousse ones [...] to motivate us to study, so that we would have something to look at in case of doubt. [29M34]*

But support is provided at unequal intensity among family members and at different key turning points throughout the school and transition years. Mismatches of messages contribute to the complex development of aspirations, and more traditional options may offer more security, but more challenging ones can provide more individual freedom.

> *They told me "this is your decision". They helped me take the first step. [They said] "study, that studies are good, that studies are my future, for my tomorrow." But of course, I'm telling you, the flea market attracted me. I spoke with them "Look, it's very good that you tell me this, but what I want to do is the flea market, because it's my kind of job, [...] it's my decision and that's it". [17M17]*

Working at a flea market – parents' and grandparents' source of living – is often represented as the ideal form of STWT, inasmuch as this is supported by community members and peers, and it permits postponing alternative labour market decisions until a more mature age. In these cases, continuing studies may appear to be an abstract promise "of a better future", with little related proof or accessible experience. Work ethics, a major underlying value, appear in parents' discourses as a guarantee of education-driven aspirations: i.e., the idea that effort can substitute experience.

> *We make it very clear. One has to work to live and to eat and to have a life in [such] conditions. [13M38]*

Roma young people appear to have significant autonomy in relation to decisions made about their training and careers. Parents' lack of training experience makes it difficult for them to transmit certainty regarding such education-driven aspirations.

> *…when the child will not [study], it's very difficult, no matter how much you scold, if he has no interest, in the end, no matter how much the parents insist... [04W33]*

4.1.2. Teachers' guidance

Besides community members, another crucial source of aspiration is school staff. In the interviews, primary school is often represented as a safe and familiar place where teachers could motivate Roma children to create a better future.

> *…my school tutor was decisive for me... she trusted me, she always told me "you can make it!", that is, she always told me, "you don't see the brain you have!"; that is, "you can take great advantage of it". [02W21]*

Interviews highlight the role of both primary and lower secondary school teachers' guidance in abstract and in concrete terms within the frame of a caring relationship.

> *I had two teachers who affected my life... they influenced me a lot to achieve what I wanted to do... they realized that I had potential [to do] video editing, that industry, a bit... When I left [secondary school] I already knew what I wanted to do... the teacher told me "please, wait, you're worth a lot", but waiting drove me crazy. [07M24]*

Young people leaving studies early is often recalled in the interviews as a dilemma involving teachers' projection of a successful professional career on the one hand, and pressure to contribute to the family budget on the other.

> I said, "I want to become a nursing assistant, and I want to study nursing at the university in the future, right?" Then I remembered that I had a teacher who always killed me [saying] "study! study!". Then I turned sixteen, and I dropped out of school, like my mates. [02W21]

The above cases show how, despite their aspirations, economic and peer pressure may deter Roma youth from being the first to take an alternative route. The first of the interviewees quoted above became a popular Youtuber, the second began a second-chance programme and became a nurse.

> And I had a teacher in the fourth year of secondary… He changed my mindset. I don't remember the conversation, but I said "oh yeah? Well, I'm going to get my degree!" [...] And I graduated from college. It costed me… you don't know how much... [05W20]

Together with positive peer-pressure, the teachers of the interviewee quoted above managed to feed her aspiration and she became a care assistant working with disabled people. Another young man [08M17], after dropping out of school, was able to obtain certification as an air-conditioning technician thanks to his teachers' and his family's support through a second-chance training course.

In contrast, in other cases young people did not perceive teachers' support in their STWT.

> I dropped out of school. I hadn't turned 16 yet, but the teachers didn't tell me anything… the teachers didn't pay any attention to me either. [16W23]

This interviewee dropped out of lower secondary school, like her friends and many other young women in our database, and at 23 years of age remained without any training and labour market experience.

4.2. Aspirational dilemmas

Above, we have detailed some aspects of the influences under which Spanish Roma people elaborate their academic and occupational aspirations. In the following we centre on different aspiration-related dilemmas that appear at turning points in youth's life-courses.

4.2.1. Concrete vs. abstract aspirations

Specific aspirations ("*I always wanted to be a doctor...*") linked to personal and community experiences facilitate the development of a coherent "road map" for the future of the youth. On the other hand, abstract desires ("*study to have a better future*") do not facilitate the construction of more specific plans. Most interviewees were influenced by their parents' projections for them in highly abstract terms, reflecting a mere desire for social mobility, but without information about the necessary steps:

…they motivated me to study, to get a job doing whatever I like because "working at what you like is like not working at all". [28W29]

…my parents, it's not that they didn't tell me anything, or that they didn't care [that I dropped out]. They told me "go [to school]!". But they worked a lot, and they couldn't keep an eye on me. [03M25]

Family members' imagination about "a better job" is often fed by one-off experiences or brief insights into professional jobs and a vague idea of what they mean in practice. Their understanding of the relationship between studies, training, and professions is often not enough to increase their offspring's "capacity to aspire". In contrast, concrete aspirations tended to emerge from one's lived experiences of social mobility and having access to information about the necessary steps and requirements to adjust to.

…when I finished 4th [year of school], I wanted to do the Early Childhood Education programme because it is what I had always wanted since I was little. [28W29]

Data suggests that concrete aspirations are interrelated with expectations - that is, desires and hopes interact with thinking and planning.

I always wanted to study Social Pedagogy, so I knew I had to get a good grade, because there are only limited places on this upper VET. [31M36]

This latter quotation is from one of the few interviews associated with not only a concrete goal but an understanding of the pathway to achieving it. It is true, though, that these plans emerged at the advanced secondary level. Interviewees who had role models associated with specific and successful job profiles (such as entrepreneurs or employees in the construction sector, or the service industry, children's free-time supervisor, teachers or administrators) showed more "capacity to aspire" even if through an uneven, discontinuous trajectory.

4.2.2. Habituated vs. doxic logic

Interviews reveal young people's dilemmas in the face of receiving contradictory messages from significant agents from the family, ethnic community, or institutions.

…when you do a job and then you go back to the flea market... It's totally different. You're with people, you talk to people, I don't know... I really like the market... you're happy with what you're doing... And you're not forced to do it. [24W36]

This latter interview focused on the positive aspects of the habituated logic of work learned organically within the family. For the interviewee it represented social relations and free choice. In contrast, the next quotation shows the difficult process of shifting among aspiration logics.

In the first years, it costs you a little more because you don't open your eyes, you don't even realize how important it is to have a degree... So, well, it cost me a bit more... [08M17]

Accommodating "doxic logic" for ethnic minorities living in vulnerable conditions, implies a process of cultural adaptation and reframing (Bereményi & Durst, 2021). It

requires negotiating community references in the hope of achieving social mobility (Naudet, 2018). This logic also entails additional pressure on the former to assume individual responsibility for their future under structural constraints (Heinz, 2009). This manifests itself in self-blaming in the event of failure (Carrasco, Ruíz-Haro, et al., 2018) or in frustration due to "not being good enough" (Bereményi, 2018), which can be described as the emotional cost of reframing an aspiration logic. Underlying structural causes are rarely mentioned by interviewees.

> At home, with the Play Station, and now, when I have matured, I regret everything, but of course at that time... adolescence didn't sit well with me... Working life, the flea-market is tough, it's hard and you learn, but it's not the same. [03M25]

> At that time, well, look, I was very stupid and what happens is that you later regret it. At the time you don't see it, but then you regret it [04W33]

> Like all Roma girls: [I wanted] to get married, have a husband, children, a family... Now I really regret it, because well, it's a much better future… with your studies you have more opportunities for things. [16W23]

Community support may compensate for the cost of resisting a doxic logic of aspiration, but disconnection from the institutional STWT track can make young people socially and economically more vulnerable in a constantly changing economic structure. Interviews highlight that youth in vulnerable conditions often pay a high emotional cost for investing in doxic-logic-driven aspirations.

4.2.3. Misaligned and insecure aspirations

Dilemmas also appeared regarding the extent to which aspirations corresponded to expectations (hopes vs. possibilities) (González Ferrer et al., 2015), and how professional goals matched educational and training goals (Furlong & Biggart, 1999; Perry et al., 2016; Sabates et al., 2011). In several interviews young people reported to having transitioned from having high aspirations to adopting peer groups' non-training-driven job plans. Such originally high but often insecure aspirations are easily challenged by emerging opportunities: a lucrative job, family or peer-group activities, a pressing need, or a romantic relationship.

> [after dropping out of school and spending a year neither in school nor in work]
> Well, I looked at getting a VET to be an electrician... I had never been in a VET
> like this... So, I did not study anything, anything, anything [08M17]

These interviewees' immediate environment did not provide enough evidence that training would increase the possibility of success in life. In these conditions, failure comes at a relatively high cost: it often serves to justify mistrust in school and training institutions, and reinforces self-blaming, too.

> Do you know what I would love? …now, just for my own sake. I would like to
> take the entrance exam to go to university. Even if it's just to get there. [27W34]

Misaligned desires such as projecting in big leaps rather than gradual advances can lead to negative experiences that lead to the entire system being called into question, rather than just being understood as a current phase or a concrete situation. We observed

this phenomenon particularly among women, who, recognizing the disadvantage of having dropped out of school, saw reengagement as an impossible challenge. Their discourses often reflected a mix of high and self-limiting aspirations, conditioned by their reproductive roles in their ethnic community.

4.2.4. Misrecognised aspirations

Interviews also reveal the emergence of non-habituated, unusual aspirations that are controlled, challenged, questioned, and frustrated by school agents, and also by family or community members. The reasons most often mentioned were that individuals had defined for themselves "unrealistic" goals. In the community, some professions such as children's free-time supervisor or social worker had become fashionable due to success stories, easy access to the labour market, or because the work profile is compatible with community roles. Other more academically oriented aspirations, or those that involve travel, trips away from the family, etc. can generate mistrust and resistance. As for teachers, they tend to consider VET rather than an academic track to be a more practical choice for young people from socioeconomically vulnerable conditions, sometimes against the latter's own conviction, in some cases with a hidden agenda in mind to fill available places of VET courses run by the same centre.

> [my tutor told me] "if you continue in a VET, you will get a secondary degree", but my grandmother [...] wanted me to do the baccalaureate... [31M36]

Some interviewees were invited to begin a VET programme at the same centre at which they had completed lower secondary education. Although there may be pedagogical explanations for this, it did not always coincide with students' aspirations.

> They offered that I could do the VET at the same school centre, but I wanted to do vehicle electromechanics at another school... [30M20]

> The counsellor at the centre didn't guide me very well, and I was confused and I didn't understand much of what she was saying either, but come on, she told me to do the VET in nursing… but I had told her that I didn't like blood [so] I didn't find it very appropriate guidance. [31M36]

Similarly, a young woman who aspired to do photography was guided away from it by her counsellor on the grounds that "photography had no future".

4.2.5. Interrupted aspirations

In some trajectories, training- and occupational aspirations were frustrated by unforeseen events. Due to pressure from the ethnic community or economic necessity, hopes are often abandoned. Gender roles play an important role here. Also, inflexible institutional procedures not only hamper but may also definitely limit young people's further training ambitions who enjoy little or no family and community support, and who lack experience in overcoming these "minor" administrative challenges.

Consistent with findings from an earlier research project on Roma educational expectations (Hellgren & Gabrielli, 2021), discrimination, a hostile school climate, and misrecognized aspirations were other interrupting factors in interviewees' trajectories. The financial crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic and other structural challenges had put great

pressure on families' livelihoods and the educational system, ultimately leading to a high drop-out rate at the minimum school-leaving age, or from post-compulsory courses.

4.2.6. Postponed Aspirations

Unforeseen interruptions and thus abandoned aspirations often become projected onto subsequent generations (Allen, 2014). This had happened to some of the interviewees, but mainly to their parents:

> [my mom] always says: "I would have liked to continue studying", she says, "now that you can, thank God, you have to study". [30M20]

Also, in several cases the aspirations did not produce immediate results at moments of change, but rather later. Interviews reveal less linear but more often interrupted educational trajectories than those of their non-Roma peers, which may have resulted in subsequent reengagement, or alternative training paths. Delays, however, can also play a strategic role in managing possible frustrations. For example, the practice of not finishing the last year of compulsory lower secondary education but instead engaging in professionalizing programmes (PFI), or preparatory courses (CAM) for VET programmes undoubtedly reduces pressure and eases the management of potential conflict with the community and institutional environment with respect to training or work aspirations.

> I have been calling schools, but with this COVID-19, I have not had access... I would like to use that money [from the guaranteed income scheme] so that later I can say: "I no longer need the GI because I have a job through studying and the training" [03M25]

However, in these cases, higher aspirations are not abandoned, but rather postponed. Even months or years without studying have been shown to be useful for maturing hopes and consolidating interpretation frameworks (of resources, and short-, medium- and long-term benefits) or adjusting ideas about training pathways to bring individuals closer to the aspired professional careers.

5. Discussion and concluding remarks. Navigating resources and negotiating meanings

The school-to-work transition of Spanish Roma young people is a central issue in understanding the social and economic inequalities of Spanish society perpetuated by the education system and the segmented labour market. Roma youth are the ethnic group most likely to drop out of school and experience educational failure in Spain (Hellgren & Gabrielli, 2021). Studying their STWT-related *aspiration dilemmas* can shed light on some aspects of the interplay among structural-historical, societal, institutional, and community-level factors that condition their "capacity to navigate" (Appadurai, 2004) and negotiate. This article focuses on community/family and school agents' influence on aspiration dilemmas. Turning our attention to aspiration dilemmas, this not only contributes to unpacking the emotional price of contradictions between these community forces and societal pressure, but it also highlights the diversity of navigation and negotiation efforts of individuals within the minority group.

The Roma community under scrutiny share stories of both success and failure in STWT, providing material that adds to the collective pool of experiences that shape habituated aspirations. In our interviews, almost all the Roma people reported to having some positive, motivating relationships with teachers in primary school, which coincided with parents' dispositions, but also to having encountered discrimination or antigypsyism, which reinforced parents' fears. In lower secondary school, dilemmas and conflicting messages from a diversity of agents intensify, and multiple pressures accumulate. Interviews show that at this crucial age when important decisions must be made, aspirations are shaped in response to institutional, community, and peer expectations.

Roma young people recognise the most important cultural differences between the messages received from school and their ethnic community with respect to studies and work. Interviews suggest that at decisive moments they rely on community support, most often following a habituated logic which seems to involve more secure, less conflicting decisions – even those that go against their parents' will. While mainstream doxic logic is discursively supported by the community, habituated logic remains mostly misrecognised by institutional agents. Parents' discursive support of a mainstream, market-centred, competitive logic is often expressed in abstract terms due to their limited stock of experience about the relationship between educational investment and harvesting this on the labour market. In contrast, Roma people perceive that teachers and schools offer little or no support regarding the habituated logic of aspiration due to their weak knowledge of "community cultural wealth" (Yosso, 2005) and their poor preparation for drawing from communal *funds of knowledge* (Foley, 1997). The responsibility for negotiation between conflicting logics is put on Roma young people's shoulders and is often expressed by them in terms of self-blaming and self-criticism, which we identify as other costs of aspiration dilemmas.

Just as the community pool of experience associated with efforts and outcomes and its cultural representation continuously change, so do individual trajectories. We observed important shifts in school and work aspirations throughout individuals' life-courses that involved adjusting them to opportunities and constraints. In some cases, insecure aspirations or insufficient univocal support slows down trajectories. In other cases, dilemmas may interrupt navigation and negotiation processes regarding aspirations for a different future. Furthermore, the cost of navigating among sources of aspiration is high for young people in a vulnerable condition.

We can apply Appadurai's metaphor of the "map of aspirations" for analysing Roma youth's navigation process among aspiration dilemmas. In this sense, a larger pool of experience of the relationship between aspirations and outcomes should increment "map literacy", the capacity to read and interpret maps of aspirations. Applying it to our case, these skills allow Roma young people to identify not only more subtle nodes (studies, programmes, workplaces) positioned around larger ones, but also multiple pathways for reaching them (studies, training, apprenticeships, secondment, career guidance, activism, alliances, etc.). Collective use of these skills and corresponding tools increases consciousness about scopes, scales, and speed in relation to the collective horizons. However, the interviews show non-linear aspiration development that often does not coincide with the key turning points of mainstream STWT trajectories. Also, instead of a "map reading" we can acknowledge in the interviews an experimental strategy to

approaching subtle nodes, the pathways to which are irregular and difficult to navigate due to the dilemmas, multiple influences, and negotiation processes associated with satisfying emerging aspirations.

Beyond navigation, young Roma people are also active agents in negotiating acknowledgement or legitimation of their hopes within a "hierarchy of aspirations" (Allen, 2014, p. 768). The described aspiration dilemmas most often weaken young Roma people's position in the institutional or the mainstream labour market context, and lead to them assuming the meanings that teachers, NGO workers, or, alternatively, their ethnic communities contribute to their plans and hopes for the future, which involves designating them "un/realistic", "mis/aligned", un/acceptable aspirations. However, in all cases Roma people negotiate these constraints and set the conditions for the further elaboration of their STWT aspirations in their own terms. Escaping from the dichotomy of accommodation or resistance to those multiple demands and constraints, interviewees narrate their agency through a changing attitude of "resistance within accommodation" (Gillborn 1997), aiming to take control of the meanings, scope, and pace of their hopes and plans: this occurs through dropping out, trying out precarious jobs, reengagement in training, doing apprenticeships, and in the meanwhile elaborating and maturing aspirations. They "invent adulthood" (Thomson et al., 2004) while constantly evaluating subjective needs and multiple external demands and opportunities, combining them into a more or less "coherent learning biography" (Pohl & Walther, 2007) associated with more or less coherent aspirations.

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