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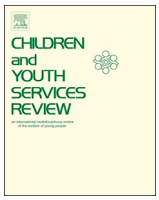

Spatial inequality and aspirations for economic inclusion among Latin American youth

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ABSTRACT

Youths' aspirations formation is typically analysed in its association with individual, family and school characteristics. This paper adopts a wider perspective and uses descriptive and econometric analysis to investigate the relationship between aspirations for economic inclusion of Latin American youths and the population size of the town where they live, as a proxy for development levels, in a context of high spatial inequality. Results indicate a significant relationship of population size with young people's aspirations for economic inclusion: youths living in smaller towns attribute significantly higher importance to work, and significantly lower importance to wealth and success, compared to their peers living in larger towns. Youths living in towns of intermediate size resemble their peers living in smaller towns with respect to work-related aspirations, and youths living in larger towns in aspirations for wealth and success. We observe no differences between young men and women in the importance attributed to employment, while aspirations for wealth and success are consistently lower among young women. The importance of population size is stronger for youths than for adults. This significant relationship between spatial inequality and aspirations suggests that public policy should invest not only in people-based but also in place-based interventions for young people to be able to develop their potential, taking gender differences into account.

1. Introduction

Despite improvements over the last decades, particularly since the 2000s, Latin America continues to experience severe vertical and horizontal inequalities. Among them, spatial inequalities, most notably between urban and rural areas, are high and persistent, and have pervasive consequences on people's wellbeing and opportunities (see, for instance, Bebbington, Escobal, Soloaga, & Tomaselli, 2017; Berdegué, Carriazo, Jara, Modrego, & Soloaga, 2015). Meanwhile, generational inequalities are multifaceted: young people are in better health and have higher levels of education compared to older generations, but still face significant challenges in terms of opportunities and of their freedom to choose the lives that they have reason to value (Sen, 1999, p. 74). Youths are more vulnerable to poverty, and are more likely to be neither studying nor holding paid jobs; when they do participate in the labor force, they experience higher unemployment rates, receive lower wages and are more likely to be employed in the informal sector compared to older people (CEPAL Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe, 2016).

The distribution of opportunities among youths in the region is also highly unequal, not only by income level, sex, and ethnicity, but also by region of residence: despite heterogeneities across countries, young people's rates of enrollment and graduation, quality of education, and labor force participation are systematically lower in rural areas, while rates of adolescent maternity and poverty are higher (Bebbington et al., 2017; Dirven, 2016; Espejo, 2017; Fares et al., 2006; Guiskin, 2019; Rimisp, 2014).

Policy makers recognize both the importance of young people for development, especially in rural areas in the context of ongoing structural transformations, and the challenges that youths face in the process of economic and social inclusion. However, public policies targeting young people tend to have little resources and an urban bias, with no explicit focus on the specific challenges and opportunities facing rural youths (CEPAL Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe, 2016; Espejo & Espíndola, 2015; IFAD, 2016). Meanwhile, studies of Latin American youth tend to focus on urban settings (for example,

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Gómez-Urrutia & Royo Urrizola, 2016; Góngora & Castro Solano, 2014), or on rural youths in the context of migration (among others, Azaola, 2012; Crivello, 2011, 2015; Punch, 2015), with Rees, Tonon, Mikkelsen, and Rodriguez de la Vega (2017) as one of few exceptions.

This paper contributes to the literature by exploring the intersection of generational and spatial inequalities and investigating empirically the determinants of people's aspirations for economic inclusion, and how they vary between youths and adults, and across areas with different levels of development, in seven Latin American countries. We define economic inclusion as the ability to participate in the economic life of a country and to generate income (Fernández, 2014), and aspirations as a person's desire to achieve something. Aspirations are socially constructed, future-oriented, require a certain degree of effort, and are an important determinant of people's behavior, decisions and transitions across the life course, especially with respect to education, employment and migration decisions (among others, Ames, 2013; Azaola, 2012; Beaman, Duflo, Pande, & Topalova, 2012; Carneiro, Galasso, & Ginja, 2019; Crivello, 2011; Gairal-Casadó, Garcia-Yeste, Novo-Molinero, & Salvadó-Belarta, 2019; Gómez-Urrutia & Royo Urrizola, 2016; Lybbert & Wydick, 2018).

Young people's aspirations formation is typically analyzed in its association with individual, family and school characteristics (see, for example, Ames, 2013; Beaman et al., 2012; Garg, Melanson, & Levin, 2007; Hong, Hong, & Choi, 2020; Lee & Byun, 2019; Lv et al., 2018; Pasquier-Doumer & Risso Brandon, 2015; Wu, Hou, Wang, & Yu, 2018), while the evidence on the role of the broader context, such as the characteristics of the town where youths live, is scarce.

No secondary data comparable across countries exist that ask young people directly about their aspirations for economic inclusion. As an empirical approximation, we use the sixth wave of the World Values Survey (WVS), which asks people direct questions about the importance they attribute to certain dimensions of life that are related with economic inclusion: employment, wealth, and success. The underlying assumption is that the importance attributed to these dimensions implicitly indicates people's desire to achieve them. We compare these indicators of aspirations for economic inclusion among young people who live in towns with different population sizes, as a proxy for the local level of development, and between young people and adults, also exploring gender differences, in Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, and Uruguay. We use town as a general term indicating a human settlement. Our focus is not the specific content of aspirations, but rather the relative importance of individual characteristics and of their residential context in aspirations formation. Our results indicate significant differences in aspirations among towns with different population sizes, suggesting the existence of a significant relationship between spatial inequality and aspirations, especially for young people.

The rest of the paper proceeds as follows: Section 2 presents the conceptual framework, and Section 3 describes the methods and data used. Section 4 summarizes the findings of the analysis, and Section 5 discusses their implications for the design of public policies. Section 6 concludes.

2. Residential context and aspirations formation

Aspirations, defined as the desire or ambition to achieve something, require the ability to visualize a future goal that a person considers valuable and possible to accomplish. Aspirations may be about a variety of dimensions of life, including desired standard of living, material wealth, emotional wellbeing, education and employment goals, and social recognition. There is growing evidence that aspirations play a decisive role in people's behaviors, choices and outcomes, for example, with regard to decisions about education and employment (Agger, Meece, & Byun, 2018; Beaman et al., 2012; Bernard, Dercon, Orkin, & Taffesse, 2014; Hartung & Hillmert, 2019; Karachiwalla, 2019; Lee & Byun, 2019; Lybbert & Wydick, 2018; Sharp, Seaman, Tucker, Van Gundy, & Rebellon, 2020). The formation of aspirations depends in part on individual factors but is an eminently social construct (Appadurai, 2004).

Individual factors that influence the formation of aspirations are mainly related to the ways in which one's experiences influence one's self-perception of agency. Understood as the possibility of establishing and pursuing significant personal goals, where subjects act as protagonists of their own existence, the capacity for agency plays an important role in a person's participation in economic, social and political actions (Sen, 1999). The concepts of "self-efficacy" and "*locus* of control" are key determinants of people's self-perception of capacity for agency (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy refers to a person's beliefs about her ability to carry out a task or achieve a goal (Burger, Mortimer, & Johnson, 2020). The *locus* of control indicates the extent to which people believe they can control events in their lives—that is, whether a person believes that what happens in life is mainly determined by him- or herself (internal *locus* of control) or rather by external forces, such as fate, luck or people in a situation of power (external *locus* of control) (Caliendo, Cobb-Clark, Hennecke, & Uhlendorff, 2019). To form aspirations, one must be convinced that he or she has the ability to achieve them and a certain degree of control over one's life (Ray, 2006).

The place where a person lives may influence aspirations formation in various ways. First, a person's environment beyond her home defines a significant part of her interests, preferences, and ideas about life, whether by peer contagion, collective socialization, or local institutional environment (Garg et al., 2007; Karachiwalla, 2019; Lei, 2018; Wu et al., 2018). The circulation of normative discourses of aspirations in policy, media and through institutions have an everyday effect on what people can aspire to. The unconscious incorporation of social norms, which Bourdieu (1990) calls *habitus*, influences one's key decisions about life: the range of options that a person contemplates and considers attainable is largely determined by what the person observes among her peers or role models, that is, by her aspirations window (Ray, 2006). For example, people will be less likely to consider the possibility of going to university when they see no one around them and similar to themselves who has done so (Hartung & Hillmert, 2019).

Second, the residential context in which one lives influences self-perception of agency, because it is the second environment, after the home, where a person develops skills and talents, sets goals and challenges, and tests her ability to achieve them. The characteristics of the context in which one lives offer the structure of opportunities that delimit the possibilities for testing oneself and updating one's self-perception of agency based on concrete results (Furlong, Biggart, & Cartmel, 1996; Irvin, Meece, Byun, Farmer, & Hutchins, 2011; Nie, Pang, Wang, Rozelle, & Sylvia, 2020; Tate, 2008; Tenjo, 1990). Appadurai (2004) argues that people who live in contexts where poverty levels are high have fewer opportunities to expand their talents, opportunities and goals, and that this may lead to pessimistic attitudes and risk aversion and to a weaker capacity to form aspirations. Evidence consistent with this argument is provided, among others, by Atkinson and Kintrea (2001) and Stewart, Stewart, and Simons (2007). Meanwhile, Kintrea, St Clair, and Houston (2015) find that aspirations are not necessarily lower in disadvantaged areas, but rather the pattern of aspirations and their change over time are qualitatively different across places (see also Flouri, Tsivrikos, Akhtar, & Midouhas, 2015), and recent evidence indicates notable variations among groups in deprived context (Frostick, Phillips, Renton, & Moore, 2016).

In this study, we define "residential context" as the town where a person lives. We argue that the town where young people live can influence their aspirations both directly and indirectly (Cazzuffi & López-Moreno, 2018). First, it offers the most immediate structure of constraints and opportunities with which people interact. For instance, a town where the only source of employment is forestry may offer limited options and incentives for a young person to invest in higher education or different kinds of training. Second, and although new technologies now facilitate the identification of peers and role models who are physically removed from the place where one lives (for example, Bruni

& Stanca, 2006; Sabatini & Sarracino, 2017), we consider that the geographic space in which a person is immersed is where most interactions and experiences occur that are key for the formation of one's self-perception of agency and aspirations window, especially for younger people (Childress, 2004; MacLeod, 2009).

3. Data and methods

We use the sixth wave (2010–2014) of the World Values Survey (WVS6), a representative survey of the population over age 18, conducted in 57 countries around the world, and collecting data on a range of indicators of subjective wellbeing, expectations, values and perceptions. We analyze a sample of 8,283 individuals from seven Latin American countries (Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, and Uruguay) with complete information on age, population size of the town where they live, and indicators of aspirations for economic inclusion. In this section we describe the measurement of key variables and the quantitative methodology used.

3.1. Definition of youth

Conceptually, youth can be defined as a social category shaped by political and economic forces, and by the social norms and expectations that exist in specific localities (Hardgrove, Pells, Boyden, & Dornan, 2014). Empirically, and particularly in studies for Latin America, youth is defined as the population between ages 15 and 29 (Kaztman et al., 2000; Trucco & Ullman, 2015). Our empirical definition of youth is limited by the fact that the WVS is applied only to people over age 18, and we thus focus on the cohort between ages 18 and 29, which represents 33% of the sample.

3.2. Measurement of aspirations for economic inclusion

Aspirations, like all attitudes, are not directly observable. The literature suggests two alternative approaches for indirect measurement (Bernard & Taffesse, 2012). The first is to use data about people's observed decisions, based on a series of assumptions about the relationship between individual characteristics, contextual characteristics, aspirations, and decisions. The second option is to ask people directly about their aspirations. Our strategy is closer to the second approach but is limited by the lack of cross-country data from direct surveys of aspirations of rural youths. The WVS data allow an initial empirical approximation, by asking direct questions about the importance respondents attribute to three dimensions of life related to economic inclusion, and which implicitly indicate the desire to achieve them: work, wealth, and success. Table 1 reports the wording and original response scale of the questions, and the recoded response scale we used to facilitate interpretation of the results, in which a higher value always implies that more importance is attributed to each dimension.

3.3. Measurement of self-perception of agency

Specific instruments have been developed to measure self-efficacy (Bandura, 2006) and *locus* of control (Rotter, 1966). The WVS does not incorporate those instruments, but it does include two questions that are strongly related to *locus* of control and which, in similar formulations, have been used in the literature about aspirations as indicators of the degree of freedom of choice and control that people feel they have over their lives (Bernard, Dercon, & Taffesse, 2011; Kosec & Mo, 2017). Table 1 reports the two questions and their response scales. We combined these two questions into an index of self-perception of agency using a variant of factor analysis designed specifically for ordinal and continuous variables (Kolenikov & Angeles, 2009). A higher index value indicates a greater degree of self-perception of agency.[1]

3.4. Residential context

There are several possible ways in which one could define the residential context where a person lives. The WVS does not indicate the name of the place where respondents live, which would allow us to characterize contextual effects in detail; nor do we have information allowing us to move beyond an administrative definition of area of residence. The only information that the WVS provides about respondents' residential location is the population size of the town where they live, divided into eight categories: < 2,000 inhabitants, 2,000 to 5,000 inhabitants, 5,000 to 10,000, 10,000 to 20,000, 20,000 to 50,000, 50,000 to 100,000, 100,000 to 500,000, and more than 500,000 inhabitants.

Evidence for Latin America shows that, despite differences among countries, systematic correlations exist between the population size of a community and a series of variables that measure its level of development. Rimisp (2018) shows that the subnational areas municipalities that lag farthest behind in Latin America are predominantly rural, with < 15 thousand inhabitants. Modrego and Berdegué (2015) find that levels of household income and consumption increase with locality size. More recently, Cazzuffi, López, and del Valle (2020), Fergusson, Hiller, and Ibáñez (2019), Soloaga (2019), and Cummings, García, Sánchez, Cartagena, and Aguilar (2019) use similar methodologies based on Berdegué et al. (2019) and find that in Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and El Salvador, functional areas with < 20 thousand inhabitants show systematically higher levels of poverty and inequality, lower levels of economic dynamism, human capital, and endowments of public goods and services, and a less diversified production structure, compared with areas with a larger population. Meanwhile, intermediate functional areas between 20 thousand and 300 thousand inhabitants (approximately) present some heterogeneity among themselves but also some systematically distinctive characteristics from both smaller and larger cities: their levels of economic dynamism and social inclusion, as well as human capital, female labour market participation, employment formality, and endowments of public goods and services are lower compared to cities with a larger population size, but significantly higher compared to areas with a smaller population.

Following this literature, we use the population size of the town where a person lives as a proxy of the local level of development and its associated distinct structure of opportunities. Maintaining the eight categories provided by the WVS leads to sample sizes that are too small to allow meaningful comparisons among youths living in towns with different population size. We therefore follow Berdegué et al. (2019) as closely as the data permit[2], and group towns into five population sizes: smaller than 20 thousand; between 20 thousand and 50 thousand;

[1] Fig. 1 in the Appendix reports the frequency distribution of the index of self-perception of agency for the entire sample.

[2] Berdegué et al. (2019) define the following categories of functional territory: metropolitan, urban, rural–urban (divided into large, medium, and small), and rural. The precise thresholds differ among Chile, Mexico, and Colombia, as follows. Rural territories have a population smaller than 18 thousand in Chile and smaller than 15 thousand in Colombia and Mexico; small rural–urban territories between 18 thousand and 50 thousand in Chile, and between 15 thousand and 60 thousand in Colombia and Mexico; medium rural–urban territories between 50 thousand and 100 thousand in Chile, between 60 thousand and 120 thousand in Colombia, and between 60 thousand and 115 thousand in Mexico; large rural–urban territories between 100 thousand and 300 thousand in Chile, between 120 thousand and 400 thousand in Colombia, and between 115 thousand and 380 thousand in Mexico; urban territories between 300 thousand and 5 million in Chile, between 400 and 600 thousand in Colombia, and between 380 thousand and 1 million in Mexico; and metropolitan territories larger than 5 million in Chile, larger than 600 thousand in Colombia, and larger than 1 million in Mexico.

Table 1
Variable definitions and construction.

WVS question	Original response scale	Recoding of response scale
Indicators of aspirations for economic inclusion		
1) For each of the following, indicate how important it is in your life: - Work	1. Very important 2. Rather important 3. Not very important 4. Not at all important	From 1 = Not at all to 4 = Very
2) Using this card, would you please indicate for each description whether that person is very much like you, like you, somewhat like you, not like you, or not at all like you? It is important to this person… - To be rich; to have a lot of money and expensive things	1. Very much like me 2. Like me 3. Somewhat like me 4. A little like me 5. Not like me 6. Not at all like	From 1 = Not at all like to 6 = Very much like
3) Using this card, would you please indicate for each description whether that person is very much like you, like you, somewhat like you, not like you, or not at all like you? It is important to this person… - To be very successful, to have people recognize one's achievements	1. Very much like me 2. Like me 3. Somewhat like me 4. A little like me 5. Not like me 6. Not at all like me	From 1 = Not at all like to 6 = Very much like
Indicators of self-perception of agency		
Some people feel they have completely free choice and control over their lives, while other people feel that what they do has no real effect on what happens to them. Please use this scale where 1 means "no choice at all" and 10 means "a great deal of choice" to indicate how much freedom of choice and control you feel you have over the way your life turns out.	From 1 to 10, where 1 = no choice and 10 = a great deal	
Degree of agreement with two statements: (a) In the long run, hard work generally brings a better life. (b) (b) Hard work doesn't generally bring success—it's more a matter of luck and connections.	Scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means the person agrees completely with statement (a), and 10 means the person agrees completely with statement (b). To construct the index, we recoded the scale to make it consistent with the preceding question.	
Education		
What is the highest educational level you have attained or the level you expect to complete?	Categories vary by country	Categorical variable: 0 = no formal education or incomplete primary education 1 = primary education or incomplete secondary education 2 = secondary education or incomplete university 3 = university education
Vulnerability		
In the last 12 months, how often have you and your family …? (a) Gone without food (b) Gone without medicine or medical treatment that you needed (c) Gone without a cash income	Responses from 1 (often) to 4 (never)	We recoded the responses from lowest to highest: 1 = never; 4 = frequently. We created an index of vulnerability constructed with factor analysis, using the Kolenikov and Angeles (2009) variant. A higher index value indicates a greater degree of vulnerability.
Employment status		
Are you employed now or not?		Dichotomous variable: Currently employed = 1 Unemployed or inactive = 0
Sex		Dichotomous variable: Female = 1 Male = 0

Source: Authors' elaboration using the WVS6 questionnaire.

between 50 thousand and 100 thousand; between 100 thousand and 500 thousand; and more than 500 thousand. About half of the sample lives in towns larger than 100 thousand inhabitants; over one fourth lives in towns smaller than 20 thousand inhabitants; and the remaining share is divided almost equally between towns with 20 thousand to 50 thousand inhabitants, and towns with 50 thousand and 100 thousand inhabitants.[3] Table 2 shows the distribution by country and population size of the town of residence for the entire sample and for the subgroup of young people. Table 3 shows mean sample characteristics by population size of the town of residence and confirms that a significant association exists between size of the population and variables related to level of development and structure of opportunities. People living in smaller towns are significantly more likely to go without food, medications, or cash income, compared to people living in larger towns. They are less likely to engage in paid work and, when they are, are more likely to perform mainly manual tasks compared to people living in larger towns. They are also significantly less likely to use a personal computer.

3.5. Statistical and econometric analysis

As a first step in the analysis, we test for significant differences in the mean importance attributed to work, wealth and success by different subgroups: (a) young people versus adults; (b) young people living in towns with different population sizes; (c) young people versus adults living in towns with < 20 thousand inhabitants; and (d) young women versus young men, by population size of the town where they live.

[3] The data do not provide information on whether people living in smaller towns have made any successful or unsuccessful attempt to migrate to a larger town.

Table 2
Sample distribution by country and population size.

Total sample	< 20k	20–50k	50–100k	100–500k	> 500k
Brazil	20.53	10.80	10.22	19.54	38.91
Chile	5.00	2.50	2.88	37.63	52.00
Colombia	12.97	14.28	11.45	23.86	37.45
Ecuador	5.60	4.52	20.07	53.01	16.81
Mexico	54.02	13.57	6.71	7.27	18.43
Peru	45.29	5.14	8.18	39.11	2.28
Uruguay	31.61	7.10	7.10	0.16	54.03
Total	27.42	9.36	9.83	25.02	28.38
Youths	**< 20 k**	**20–50 k**	**50–100 k**	**100–500 k**	**> 500 k**
Brazil	19.45	13.37	12.16	20.67	34.35
Chile	2.05	1.54	3.59	37.95	54.87
Colombia	14.53	14.32	12.36	25.38	33.41
Ecuador	6.39	5.41	22.60	51.35	14.25
Mexico	54.13	12.92	6.46	7.36	19.12
Peru	43.75	5.43	7.61	40.76	2.45
Uruguay	32.34	6.59	4.79	0.60	55.69
Total	29.43	9.85	10.44	25.03	25.25

Source: Authors' elaboration with data from WVS6.

Table 3
Characteristics of towns with different population sizes.

	< 20k	20k–50k	50k–100k	100k–500k	> 500k	Chi2
Sometimes or often went without food	0.222	0.200	0.172	0.184	0.155	16.820
Sometimes or often went without medications	0.365	0.308	0.283	0.241	0.245	67.287
Sometimes or often went without cash income	0.311	0.243	0.233	0.219	0.254	30.846
Has paid work	0.557	0.511	0.588	0.585	0.586	13.270
Works performing mostly manual tasks	0.745	0.772	0.700	0.714	0.667	26.496
Regularly uses a computer	0.258	0.270	0.337	0.402	0.448	155.890

Note: Reported chi2 statistic from a Kruskal-Wallis non-parametric test of n-sample differences in mean characteristics. * p < 0.10, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01. Source: Authors' elaboration with data from WVS6.

Second, we use regression methods to determine whether population size correlates significantly with young people's aspirations for economic inclusion, after controlling for other potentially relevant characteristics. In Section 4, we report the results of the estimation of ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions. Given the ordinal nature of the dependent variables, we also report the results of the estimation of an ordinal logit model as a robustness check.[4]

We estimate variations of the following equation:

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 T_i + \beta_2 A_i + \beta_3 \boldsymbol{Z}_i + \varepsilon_i \quad (1)$$

where T_i is the categorical variable that indicates the population size of the town where the person lives; A_i is the index of self-perception of agency; $\boldsymbol{Z}_i$ is a vector of controls; and ε_i is the error term. Vector $\boldsymbol{Z}_i$ includes sex, education, employment status, and self-perceived degree of socioeconomic vulnerability experienced in the past year. Table 1 reports the WVS questions and the calculation used to construct the dependent and explanatory variables. We estimate Eq. (1) separately for the subgroups of young people and adults. We also estimate a restricted version of Eq. (1), disaggregating the youth sub-sample by population size of the town where they live. Because the sample size is relatively small in some subgroups, we are unable to estimate the model separately by country.

[4] We do not use sampling weights in the estimation, because detailed information about sampling method and units is not publicly available for all countries under study.

Table 4
Characteristics of young people and adults.

	Youths		Adults		
	Mean	St. Dev.	Mean	St. Dev.	t-stat
Agency	0.068	0.996	0.022	1.029	−1.951**
No formal education	0.041	0.199	0.180	0.384	21.620***
Primary education	0.265	0.442	0.319	0.466	5.068***
Secondary education	0.578	0.494	0.371	0.483	−18.033***
University	0.115	0.319	0.131	0.337	2.028**
Employed	0.516	0.500	0.597	0.490	6.971***
Vulnerability	−0.038	1.200	−0.026	1.222	0.407
Women	0.505	0.500	0.518	0.500	1.102

Note: Reported t-statistic from two-sample test of differences in mean characteristics. * p < 0.10, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01. Source: Authors' elaboration with data from WVS6.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive analysis of sample characteristics

Table 4 summarizes differences in mean characteristics of young people and adults. The two subgroups differ significantly in most of their characteristics. Young people, on average, consider they have a greater capacity for agency than adults. As would be expected, the proportion of people without formal education, or who only completed primary education, is significantly lower among young people, who also are more likely than adults to have completed secondary education. In contrast, the proportion of people who have completed university is slightly lower among young people than among adults, but this finding may be due to young people still being in university education. Finally, slightly more than half of young people are employed, compared to 60% of adults. There are no statistically significant differences between the two groups in the degree of their perceived socioeconomic vulnerability or in the sample's breakdown by sex.

When the analysis is limited to the subgroup of young people and their characteristics are compared across towns of different sizes, we find a smaller number of statistically significant differences, as Table 5 shows. The main difference is in the degree of perceived vulnerability, which is significantly greater among youths living in towns with < 20 thousand inhabitants than the rest of the sample. A small difference also appears in the last level of formal education completed: young people living in smaller towns are more likely to complete only secondary education compared to their peers living in the largest towns, although this probability does not appear to decrease linearly across categories of population size.

The differences between young people and adults in education and employment, observed in the full sample, are confirmed when we focus on the population living in towns with < 20 thousand inhabitants,

Table 5
Characteristics of young people by population size.

	< 20k	20k–50k	50k–100k	100k–500k	> 500k	sig
Agency	0.082	0.176	0.057	0.039	0.045	6.193
No formal education	0.039	0.068	0.050	0.019	0.051	1.818
Primary education	0.273	0.259	0.270	0.226	0.296	5.212
Secondary education	0.589	0.545	0.535	0.641	0.535	14.339**
University	0.099	0.128	0.145	0.114	0.117	1.508
Employed	0.509	0.500	0.553	0.510	0.521	1.583
Vulnerability	0.156	−0.042	−0.093	−0.032	−0.246	39.112***
Women	0.509	0.511	0.511	0.500	0.500	0.207

Note: Reported chi^2 from Kruskal-Wallis equality of populations rank test.
* p < 0.10, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01.
Source: Authors' elaboration with data from WVS6.

Table 6
Characteristics of young men and women by population size.

	< 20k			20k–50k			50k–100k			100k–500k			> 500k		
	Women	Men	t-stat	Women	Men	t-stat	Women	Men	t-stat	Women	Men	t-stat	Women	Men	t-stat
Agency	0.059	0.106	0.628	0.232	0.117	−1.001	0.003	0.113	0.953	−0.059	0.137	2.722	−0.034	0.124	2.072
No formal education	0.042	0.036	−0.443	0.074	0.062	−0.389	0.056	0.043	−0.466	0.015	0.024	0.839	0.056	0.047	−0.520
Primary education	0.291	0.254	−1.187	0.235	0.285	0.914	0.271	0.268	−0.051	0.237	0.216	−0.643	0.328	0.264	−1.847
Secondary education	0.590	0.587	−0.084	0.574	0.515	−0.950	0.521	0.551	0.502	0.639	0.642	0.080	0.513	0.557	1.151
University	0.077	0.123	2.188	0.118	0.138	0.506	0.153	0.138	−0.359	0.109	0.118	0.363	0.103	0.132	1.189
Employed	0.393	0.631	6.907	0.375	0.631	4.298	0.424	0.688	4.628	0.388	0.633	6.578	0.425	0.616	5.068
Vulnerability	0.182	0.129	−0.596	0.049	−0.137	−1.316	−0.000	−0.189	−1.370	0.072	−0.135	−2.277	−0.130	−0.363	−2.704

Note: Reported t-statistic from two-sample test of differences in mean characteristics. * p < 0.10, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01. Source: Authors' elaboration with data from WVS6.

while self-perception of agency does not appear to differ significantly here between youths and adults.[5] Meanwhile, when the sample of young people is broken down by sex and population size of the place of residence (Table 6), some important differences emerge. First, across towns of different population sizes, young women are always less likely than young men to be in paid employment. Second, in towns with < 20 thousand inhabitants, young women are also significantly less likely than young men to have completed university. Third, young women in towns with more than 100 thousand inhabitants have a significantly weaker perception of their capacity for agency and a significantly greater degree of vulnerability than young men, while these gaps are not observed in smaller towns.

Overall, young people living in smaller towns have attained higher levels of schooling but are also less likely to have a job compared to adults. Compared to their peers living in larger towns, however, youths living in the smallest towns continue to have lower levels of schooling, and experience greater socio-economic vulnerability. Among youths, young women tend to have lower levels of education and employment and, in larger towns, significantly greater levels of vulnerability and lower levels of perceived agency.

4.2. Descriptive analysis of aspirations for economic inclusion

Table 7 reports the results of tests for statistically significant differences between groups in indicators of aspirations for economic inclusion. Adults on average attribute slightly more importance to work than young people. Meanwhile, young people tend to attribute greater importance to wealth and success compared to adults. In towns with < 20 thousand inhabitants, young people tend to attribute less importance to work and greater importance to wealth compared to adults, while the two groups show no statistically significant difference in the importance placed on success. Significant differences exist among young people, depending on the size of the town where they live. Work is significantly more important for youths living in towns smaller than 100 thousand inhabitants, compared to their peers living in larger towns. Meanwhile, youths living in towns with < 20 thousand inhabitants place significantly less importance on wealth and success compared to the rest of the young population. The main difference between young men and women, across towns of different sizes, is that women attribute less importance to wealth. Young women's aspirations for wealth and success are significantly lower in towns with < 20 thousand inhabitants. In contrast, the importance attributed to work by young women is not significantly different compared to young men, and it does not vary across towns of different sizes.

These initial descriptive results suggest that the differential context of population size, with different associated development levels, is a significant factor in aspirations for economic inclusion, beyond age and gender differences. Nevertheless, as seen in the previous section, individual characteristics that are correlated with aspirations also vary by population size of the town of residence. The following section uses regression analysis to examine whether population size continues to play a significant role in aspirations after controlling for individual characteristics.

4.3. Econometric analysis

Table 8 shows the results of an OLS regression for each indicator of aspirations for economic inclusion for the sub-sample of young people and the sub-sample of adults. As a robustness check, Table 9 reports the results of estimations using an ordinal logit model. The main results remain unchanged in terms of sign, significance, and relative magnitude of the coefficients.

Regression results are consistent with the previous descriptive analysis and suggest that the population size of the town where a person lives has a significant influence on aspirations for economic inclusion, for both young people and adults, even after controlling for self-perception of agency and other control variables.

The aspirations for economic inclusion of youths living in the

[5] Results not shown but available upon request.

Table 7
Indicators of aspirations of economic inclusion.

	Youths		Adults		
	Mean	St. Dev.	Mean	St. Dev.	t-stat
Work	3.674	0.587	3.714	0.584	2.916***
Wealth	2.617	1.469	2.418	1.423	−5.830***
Success	4.284	1.459	4.052	1.560	−6.621***
Sub-sample living in towns with population smaller than 20,000					
	Youths		Adults		
	Mean	St. Dev.	Mean	St. Dev.	t-stat
Work	3.717	0.582	3.767	0.528	2.013**
Wealth	2.394	1.425	2.285	1.394	−1.755*
Success	4.091	1.575	4.110	1.583	0.276

Youths by population size

	< 20k	20k–50k	50k–100k	100k–500k	> 500k	sig
Work	3.717	3.733	3.720	3.642	3.613	14.230***
Wealth	2.394	2.470	2.681	2.825	2.702	39.524***
Success	4.091	4.244	4.450	4.442	4.298	16.857***

Youths by sex and population size

	< 20k			20k–50k			50k–100k			100k–500k			> 500k		
	Women	Men	t-stat	Women	Men	t-stat	Women	Men	t-stat	Women	Men	t-stat	Women	Men	t-stat
Work	3.719	3.715	−0.076	3.728	3.738	0.167	3.701	3.739	0.606	3.630	3.654	0.502	3.607	3.619	0.250
Wealth	2.272	2.521	2.472***	2.324	2.623	1.732*	2.500	2.870	2.008**	2.731	2.920	1.657*	2.469	2.935	4.250***
Success	4.000	4.185	1.655*	4.176	4.315	0.741	4.313	4.594	1.739*	4.402	4.482	0.781	4.194	4.402	1.908**

Note: For the comparisons between youths and adults, both for the full sample and for the rural sample, and between women and men by population size, we report t-statistic from two-sample test of differences in mean characteristics. For the comparison among youths by population size, we report chi2 statistic from Kruskal-Wallis equality of populations rank test. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Source: Authors' elaboration using data from WVS6.

smallest towns are always significantly different from those of their peers living in towns with larger population, with the former attributing significantly more importance to work, and significantly less importance to wealth and success. Youths living in towns between 20 thousand and 100 thousand inhabitants appear to be similar to youths living in the smallest towns with respect to the importance attributed to work, while they are more similar to youths living in larger towns with respect to the importance attributed to success and, to a lesser degree, wealth. Across towns with different population sizes, and especially in the smallest ones, the importance attributed to work is similar between young people and adults. Meanwhile, population size appears to have a different influence on aspirations for wealth and success of young people and adults. Compared to larger towns, living in smaller towns is associated with much lower aspirations for wealth among young people than among adults. In contrast, while youths living in smaller towns have significantly lower aspirations for success than their peers living in larger towns, the importance attributed to success is significantly higher among adults living in the smallest towns compared to their counterparts living in larger ones.

Overall, young people's aspirations for economic inclusion vary significantly depending on the population size of the place where they live. Young people living in smaller tows attribute significantly higher importance to work, and their aspirations for wealth and success are significantly lower, compared to their peers living in larger towns. Population size also seems to have a different and stronger influence on aspirations for wealth and success among young people than among adults.

Table 10 reports regression results for the sub-sample of young people only, disaggregated by population size of their town, to analyze whether individual characteristics play a different role in aspirations for economic inclusion depending on the context of population size. Table 11 reports ordinal logit regression results as a robustness check. Results show some important heterogeneities among youths depending on the population size of the town where they live. First, self-perception of agency has a significant influence in the aspirations for economic inclusion of youths living in towns with more than 500 thousand inhabitants and, to a lesser extent, in towns larger than 100 thousand inhabitants. Among youths living in towns between 50 and 100 thousand inhabitants, self-perception of agency only seems to influence aspirations about work. In contrast, we find no evidence of a significant influence of self-perception of agency on aspirations for economic inclusion among youths living in towns with < 50 thousand inhabitants. Second, a higher level of education increases aspirations for wealth and success much more strongly among young people living in towns smaller than 50 thousand inhabitants, compared to the rest of the sample. Third, no gender differences appear in employment-related aspirations, but women's aspirations for wealth are systematically lower than those of young men, regardless of the population size of the town where they live.

5. Discussion

The paper explored the intersection of generational and spatial inequalities and investigated empirically the determinants of people's aspirations for economic inclusion, and how they vary between youths and adults, and across towns with different population sizes, in seven Latin American countries. Youths' aspirations formation is typically analyzed in its association with individual, family and school characteristics. In this paper, we adopt a wider perspective and show that the population size of the town where young people live, as a proxy for the local level of development and associated structure of opportunities, has a significant relationship with their aspirations for economic

Table 8
OLS regression results.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Work		Wealth		Success	
	Youths	Adults	Youths	Adults	Youths	Adults
dev = = < 20k	0.098***	0.100***	−0.302***	−0.112**	−0.212***	0.196***
	(0.031)	(0.021)	(0.075)	(0.050)	(0.077)	(0.057)
dev = =20–50k	0.115***	0.088***	−0.224**	−0.190***	−0.068	0.204**
	(0.039)	(0.029)	(0.102)	(0.070)	(0.107)	(0.081)
dev = =50–100k	0.102***	0.111***	−0.024	0.094	0.148	0.072
	(0.039)	(0.027)	(0.106)	(0.072)	(0.096)	(0.077)
dev = =100–500k	0.027	0.008	0.110	0.153***	0.114	0.287***
	(0.033)	(0.022)	(0.080)	(0.052)	(0.075)	(0.055)
Agency	0.048***	0.049***	−0.073**	−0.118***	0.088***	0.105***
	(0.011)	(0.008)	(0.029)	(0.019)	(0.029)	(0.021)
No formal education	−0.049	−0.098***	−0.039	−0.095*	−0.107	−0.054
	(0.064)	(0.025)	(0.157)	(0.056)	(0.171)	(0.063)
Secondary education	−0.003	0.001	0.123*	0.028	0.306***	0.046
	(0.026)	(0.018)	(0.066)	(0.046)	(0.067)	(0.050)
University	−0.052	−0.027	0.367***	0.118*	0.468***	0.039
	(0.042)	(0.026)	(0.097)	(0.062)	(0.094)	(0.070)
Employed	0.110***	0.143***	−0.091	0.156***	−0.164***	0.059
	(0.024)	(0.018)	(0.058)	(0.041)	(0.057)	(0.046)
Vulnerability	0.011	0.020***	−0.007	0.015	−0.019	0.048***
	(0.010)	(0.007)	(0.024)	(0.016)	(0.024)	(0.017)
Women	0.015	0.000	−0.324***	−0.152***	−0.182***	−0.145***
	(0.023)	(0.016)	(0.058)	(0.039)	(0.057)	(0.043)
Constant	3.559***	3.602***	2.807***	2.398***	4.252***	3.929***
	(0.035)	(0.026)	(0.089)	(0.057)	(0.085)	(0.064)
Observations	2701	5582	2701	5582	2701	5582
R^2	0.022	0.035	0.033	0.025	0.034	0.016

Robust standard errors in parentheses; * p < 0.10, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01. Source: Authors' elaboration using data from WVS6.
* $p < 0.10$.
** $p < 0.05$.
*** $p < 0.01$.

Table 9
Ordinal logit model regression results.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Work		Wealth		Success	
	Youths	Adults	Youths	Adults	Youths	Adults
main						
dev = = < 20k	1.604***	1.582***	0.656***	0.840***	0.800**	1.266***
	(0.189)	(0.140)	(0.062)	(0.055)	(0.077)	(0.083)
dev = =20–50k	1.557***	1.508***	0.752**	0.754***	0.940	1.272**
	(0.256)	(0.187)	(0.092)	(0.070)	(0.129)	(0.120)
dev = =50–100k	1.479**	1.713***	0.920	1.087	1.198	1.062
	(0.234)	(0.215)	(0.120)	(0.098)	(0.145)	(0.091)
dev = =100–500k	1.141	1.070	1.127	1.212***	1.122	1.344***
	(0.132)	(0.089)	(0.106)	(0.077)	(0.105)	(0.085)
Agency	1.222***	1.231***	0.908***	0.849***	1.119***	1.143***
	(0.051)	(0.038)	(0.033)	(0.021)	(0.042)	(0.028)
No formal education	0.893	0.665***	0.878	0.896	0.939	0.950
	(0.202)	(0.063)	(0.175)	(0.066)	(0.202)	(0.067)
Secondary education	0.997	0.935	1.202**	1.085	1.440***	1.045
	(0.101)	(0.074)	(0.101)	(0.065)	(0.119)	(0.060)
University	0.869	0.874	1.659***	1.249***	1.716***	1.048
	(0.135)	(0.095)	(0.195)	(0.096)	(0.204)	(0.085)
Employed	1.441***	1.601***	0.895	1.230***	0.788***	1.060
	(0.129)	(0.111)	(0.064)	(0.065)	(0.056)	(0.055)
Vulnerability	1.059	1.100***	0.996	1.009	0.988	1.052**
	(0.040)	(0.030)	(0.030)	(0.021)	(0.029)	(0.021)
Women	1.091	0.933	0.655***	0.846***	0.788***	0.851***
	(0.098)	(0.064)	(0.047)	(0.043)	(0.056)	(0.042)
Observations	2701	5582	2701	5582	2701	5582

Coefficients are odds ratios; robust standard errors in parentheses; * p < 0.10, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01. Source: Authors' elaboration using data from WVS6.
*$p < 0.10$.
** $p < 0.05$.
*** $p < 0.01$.

Table 10
OLS regression results, youths by population size.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)
	< 20k			20k–50k			50k–100k			100k–500k			> 500k		
	Work	Wealth	Success	Work	Wealth	Success	Work	Wealth	Success	Work	Wealth	Success	Work	Wealth	Success
Agency	0.006	−0.051	−0.015	−0.007	0.092	0.003	0.092***	−0.128	0.110	0.057**	−0.101	0.146**	0.086***	−0.118**	0.174***
	(0.016)	(0.051)	(0.054)	(0.034)	(0.094)	(0.108)	(0.030)	(0.100)	(0.082)	(0.026)	(0.062)	(0.058)	(0.025)	(0.056)	(0.057)
No formal education	0.066	0.383	−0.273	−0.259	0.099	0.006	−0.183	−0.211	0.139	−0.164	−0.045	−0.320	0.102	−0.365	0.076
	(0.095)	(0.318)	(0.354)	(0.204)	(0.450)	(0.466)	(0.244)	(0.431)	(0.433)	(0.176)	(0.487)	(0.405)	(0.088)	(0.237)	(0.299)
Secondary education	0.007	0.116	0.393***	0.063	0.316	0.431*	0.022	0.361*	0.479**	−0.089*	0.072	0.080	0.061	−0.003	0.314**
	(0.047)	(0.116)	(0.131)	(0.076)	(0.194)	(0.234)	(0.071)	(0.218)	(0.199)	(0.052)	(0.139)	(0.125)	(0.055)	(0.133)	(0.130)
University	−0.040	0.599***	0.827***	0.055	0.649**	0.799**	0.063	0.543*	0.527**	−0.263***	0.219	−0.024	0.044	0.064	0.425**
	(0.084)	(0.184)	(0.174)	(0.108)	(0.307)	(0.317)	(0.091)	(0.283)	(0.257)	(0.092)	(0.205)	(0.193)	(0.084)	(0.182)	(0.181)
Employed	0.107**	−0.083	−0.173	0.059	0.055	−0.342*	0.022	0.087	−0.177	0.175***	−0.224*	−0.058	0.088*	−0.111	−0.223**
	(0.043)	(0.104)	(0.114)	(0.064)	(0.184)	(0.186)	(0.067)	(0.204)	(0.167)	(0.050)	(0.120)	(0.108)	(0.048)	(0.111)	(0.111)
Vulnerability	−0.012	−0.051	−0.088*	0.008	−0.135**	0.025	−0.027	0.013	−0.058	−0.003	0.052	0.028	0.070***	0.049	0.017
	(0.017)	(0.042)	(0.045)	(0.029)	(0.068)	(0.083)	(0.028)	(0.085)	(0.069)	(0.020)	(0.050)	(0.043)	(0.021)	(0.048)	(0.050)
Women	0.027	−0.243**	−0.183	0.004	−0.277	−0.240	−0.015	−0.358*	−0.301*	0.027	−0.273**	−0.074	0.005	−0.512***	−0.202*
	(0.043)	(0.105)	(0.114)	(0.065)	(0.183)	(0.188)	(0.064)	(0.202)	(0.165)	(0.049)	(0.120)	(0.109)	(0.047)	(0.110)	(0.110)
Constant	3.647***	2.430***	3.984***	3.679***	2.300***	4.201***	3.696***	2.563***	4.350***	3.627***	3.012***	4.462***	3.535***	3.046***	4.289***
	(0.055)	(0.133)	(0.140)	(0.085)	(0.220)	(0.233)	(0.078)	(0.256)	(0.221)	(0.061)	(0.158)	(0.147)	(0.057)	(0.142)	(0.134)
Observations	795	795	795	266	266	266	282	282	282	676	676	676	682	682	682
R^2	0.009	0.025	0.040	0.029	0.056	0.041	0.047	0.041	0.049	0.039	0.016	0.015	0.042	0.039	0.040

Robust standard errors in parentheses; * p < 0.10, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01. Source: Authors' elaboration using data from WVS6.

* $p < 0.10$.
** $p < 0.05$.
*** $p < 0.01$.

Table 11
Ordinal logit model regression results, youths by population size.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)
	< 20k			20k–50k			50k–100k			100k–500k		> 500k			
	Work	Wealth	Success	Work	Wealth	Success	Work	Wealth	Success	Work	Wealth	Success	Work	Wealth	Success
Agency	1.059	0.945	0.976	1.022	1.066	0.994	1.512***	0.837	1.217*	1.237**	0.880*	1.223**	1.363***	0.851**	1.250***
	(0.074)	(0.061)	(0.064)	(0.160)	(0.132)	(0.127)	(0.204)	(0.099)	(0.130)	(0.115)	(0.066)	(0.101)	(0.117)	(0.061)	(0.092)
No formal education	1.337	1.466	0.768	0.474	0.815	1.028	0.802	0.831	1.284	0.547	0.812	0.647	1.337	0.671	1.245
	(0.637)	(0.615)	(0.351)	(0.284)	(0.538)	(0.613)	(0.619)	(0.365)	(0.647)	(0.324)	(0.467)	(0.308)	(0.531)	(0.227)	(0.437)
Secondary education	1.097	1.187	1.584***	1.196	1.670*	1.622*	1.121	1.639*	1.801**	0.699	1.099	1.140	1.244	1.022	1.486**
	(0.211)	(0.180)	(0.234)	(0.417)	(0.482)	(0.458)	(0.366)	(0.437)	(0.460)	(0.154)	(0.189)	(0.198)	(0.238)	(0.173)	(0.251)
University	0.981	2.208***	2.348***	1.261	2.418**	2.658**	1.262	2.068**	1.914*	0.405***	1.329	1.024	1.228	1.181	1.661**
	(0.319)	(0.497)	(0.503)	(0.655)	(1.020)	(1.132)	(0.601)	(0.683)	(0.686)	(0.127)	(0.327)	(0.259)	(0.371)	(0.259)	(0.383)
Employed	1.435**	0.910	0.813	1.176	0.984	0.691*	1.092	1.071	0.712	1.863***	0.775*	0.891	1.303	0.910	0.705**
	(0.253)	(0.121)	(0.107)	(0.362)	(0.232)	(0.155)	(0.327)	(0.265)	(0.162)	(0.332)	(0.111)	(0.130)	(0.220)	(0.128)	(0.101)
Vulnerability	0.972	0.950	0.922	1.027	0.825*	1.006	0.891	1.008	0.927	1.016	1.054	1.042	1.319***	1.082	1.046
	(0.066)	(0.052)	(0.048)	(0.139)	(0.082)	(0.102)	(0.106)	(0.101)	(0.083)	(0.074)	(0.064)	(0.063)	(0.105)	(0.064)	(0.067)
Women	1.212	0.689***	0.804*	1.037	0.717	0.684	0.923	0.659*	0.653*	1.154	0.706**	0.941	1.008	0.531***	0.765*
	(0.216)	(0.093)	(0.105)	(0.323)	(0.171)	(0.159)	(0.272)	(0.163)	(0.148)	(0.206)	(0.101)	(0.140)	(0.171)	(0.075)	(0.108)
Observations	795	795	795	266	266	266	282	282	282	676	676	676	682	682	682

Coefficients are odds ratios; robust standard errors in parentheses; * p < 0.10, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01. Source: Authors' elaboration using data from WVS6.
* $p < 0.10$.
** $p < 0.05$.
*** $p < 0.01$.

inclusion. The literature on the role of contextual characteristics youth's outcomes is fairly developed for higher income countries, but it is scarce for Latin America. Yet, the region is characterized by high and persistent spatial inequalities which have pervasive consequences on people's wellbeing and opportunities. This paper contributes to the literature by exploring one of such consequences, youths' aspiration formation, which has potential implications for young people's future decisions and transitions across the life course.

Our results show that young people living in smaller towns attribute greater importance to employment, and less importance to wealth and success, than their peers living in larger towns. Young people living in towns of intermediate size according to our categorization, between 20 thousand and 500 thousand inhabitants, are similar to their peers living in the smallest towns regarding the importance placed on employment, but they resemble more closely their peers living in towns larger than 500 thousands with respect to their aspirations for wealth and success.

The differential context of population size, with different associated development levels, appears to contribute more than self-perception of agency to young people's aspirations for wealth and success, while the opposite pattern is observed among adults. This weaker average connection between aspirations and capacity for agency among young people, however, hides important heterogeneities across communities of different sizes: self-perception of agency does contribute to the configuration of aspirations of young people living in towns larger than 50 thousand and, in particular, in those larger than 500 thousand inhabitants, while its influence on the aspirations of youths living in the smallest towns appears insignificant. This finding deserves further investigation, but is, a priori, concerning, since it suggests that the weight of limited opportunities in places with smaller population sizes is inducing young people to believe that their efforts are not enough to overcome barriers to their economic inclusion.

Significant gender differences appear in certain dimensions of aspirations for economic inclusion, but not in others. No differences appear between young men and young women in the importance attributed to employment: regardless of their individual employment status, employment has an important place among young women's life aspirations, possibly related to the regional trend toward women's greater participation in the labor market. Aspirations for wealth and success, however, are significantly lower among young women than among young men, regardless of the population size of the town where they live. This may reflect some degree of internalization by young women of the persistent barriers to employment opportunities and of the wide gender gaps in pay and quality of employment, leading to lower aspirations. Women's opportunities for economic autonomy are distributed unevenly across space and appear to be related with local differences in production structure, formal and informal institutions, and collective agency. Our results indicate that young women living in the smallest population towns are in a more disadvantaged situation, in terms of education, economic inclusion, and vulnerability, compared to their peers living in larger towns. Local economic and social institutions influence women's access to economic inclusion: approximately one third of young women living in small population centers and rural areas are engaged in paid work, compared to over 70% of young men, and they concentrate in more precarious and less paid jobs (Boyd, 2019; Hernández Asensio, 2012). Meanwhile, more than one third of young women are engaged in unpaid domestic, agricultural, and care work (Amarante & Rossel, 2018; Braunstein, Gammage, & Seguino, 2014). Young rural women appear to face persistent "gender traps" (Boyd, 2019; Hernández Asensio, 2012,) stemming from local formal and informal institutions as well as the norms, discourses and social practices that influence their aspirations.

Our findings are consistent with the view that the local structure of opportunities feeds back into aspirations (Agger et al., 2018; Frostick et al., 2016; Hartung & Hillmert, 2019; MacLeod, 2009). Moreover, the strength of the relationship between population size and aspirations seems to be greater among youths than among adults, especially with respect to wealth and success, consistent with Childress (2004). We do not make any normative judgements on the desirability of a specific aspiration. Rather, what we consider important is that, in spite of the increasing connections across space that are afforded by communication technologies, the local context where young people live has a significant influence on their aspirations for economic inclusion. The lower level of development and opportunities available to young people living in smaller towns affects not only their present situation, but also the formation of their aspirations for economic inclusion in the future. Future research in youth studies should expand on the analysis of inequalities among young people (Frostick et al., 2016; Miranda & Arancibia, 2017; Salas & de Oliveira, 2014; Saraví, 2014), and especially on understanding how structural conditions shape the reflexive identity of rural young people and their life trajectories (Farrugia et al.,

2014a, 2014b), and how this changes over time.

Our analysis relies on the literature that documents the existence of a positive correlation between the relative size of a locality and its level of development, opportunities, and wellbeing, in several Latin American countries, despite their heterogeneities, as indicated in Bebbington et al. (2017) for Chile, Peru, and Mexico; Otero-Bahamón (2020) for Colombia; and Souza, Azzoni, and Nogueira (2010) and Moser and Theis (2014) for Brazil. In Uruguay, Méndez (2020) finds that the growth of university education beyond Montevideo has increased the overall access to university in smaller towns, but more so among higher income groups, thus increasing inequality in smaller communities. Overall, Otero-Bahamon (2019) indicates that, in Latin America, the subnational area where a person lives may be as important as race or class to determine a person's access to opportunities and wellbeing. Finding that youth aspirations are shaped by their context regardless of countries specificities suggests that social policies targeted to young people should consider contextual characteristics in a much more systematic and explicit way. However, the importance of specific dimensions and channels of influence of the environment where people live may vary across countries, and further research should explore such differences among countries. In turn, knowing the name of the place where people live, and ideally also of the place where they work, would allow exploring in more depth which aspects of development are more relevant for aspirations formation, including (but not limited to) local human capital, production structure, poverty and inequality, and institutions.

Finally, our data do not allow us to appropriately capture class as a third category along which we may observe differences in aspirations and in their formation, but its persistent relevance in the literature (Farrugia, Smyth, & Harrison, 2014b; Frostick et al., 2016) suggests it would be important for future research to include it in the analysis.

6. Conclusions

This paper contributes to the literature on aspirations and spatial inequalities, focusing on Latin American youths and on their aspirations for economic inclusion. It offers a quantitative, cross-country analysis of aspirations related to employment, wealth, and success, and how they vary among towns of different population sizes. Our findings suggest that living in a smaller town is associated with lower aspirations, and that the population size of the town where people live has a stronger connection with aspirations among youths than among adults. These results demonstrate not only the importance of contextual and gender dimensions to understand social change and development processes in a globalized world, but also highlights the relationship between aspirations and spatial inequality, one of the many dimensions of structural inequalities that characterize Latin America.

Findings indicate a few key areas for future research. First, it is important to develop a more in-depth understanding of the mechanisms that explain the importance of population size in the formation of young people's aspirations: what aspects of the local level of development are most important for the configuration of aspirations, and how do they interact with individual and family characteristics? Second, how do aspirations of economic inclusion influence young people's education and employment decisions and outcomes? Third, what kinds of people- and place-based interventions are most effective for simultaneously removing external barriers to young people's economic inclusion, and raise their aspirations?

These results have practical policy implications. A combination of policies to increase people's assets and human capital, and of place-based policies fostering territorial development, including through the provision of public goods and services, and the promotion of productive diversification, seem necessary for young people to be able to form aspirations without being severely limited by the context of the place where they live. Moreover, gender differences in aspirations should also be considered by any policy aimed either at young people's economic inclusion or at gender equity. Particularly relevant in this respect would be policies promoting a redistribution of unpaid domestic and care work, both within households, and by shifting at least part of this responsibility from households towards society. Policies that support young women's education and employment would also be helpful to promote women's economic inclusion, especially if they reduce gendered sectoral and occupational segregation (Borrowman & Klasen, 2020). In addition, it is necessary to remove the formal and informal institutions that have tended to limit women's access to assets, such as land, and their political participation as agents of change in their communities.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Chiara Cazzuffi: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing. **Vivián Díaz:** Conceptualization, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing. **Juan Fernández:** Project administration, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing. **Cristian Leyton:** Conceptualization, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Appendix A

See Fig. 1.

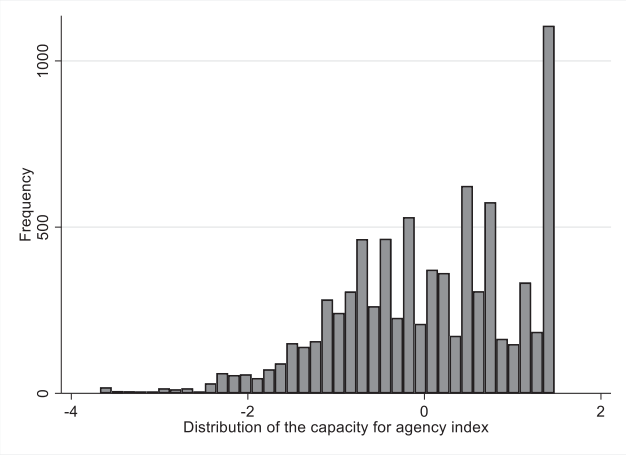

Fig. 1. Distribution of capacity for agency index. Source: authors' elaboration using data from WVS6.

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