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Agency and Structure Revisited with Youth Responses to Gendered (Spatial) Mobilities in the EU

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Abstract

Young people involved in geographical mobility face diverse gendered mobility settings and gender inequalities. How do the youth involved in diverse mobility types deal with adverse circumstances caused by gender beliefs and gender prejudices? To answer this question, problem-centred interviews with young people (18-29) are analysed using Grounded Theory. These young people are European citizens, and they are involved in five mobility types: higher education, employment, voluntary work, vocational education and training, and entrepreneurship. We apply Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) categories (iterational, projective and practical-evaluative) to the analysis of gendered mobility narratives as unequal gender perceptions reveal themselves in the context of different types of youth mobility. The analysis allows to see the ways young people reflect on their actions: refusal of gender beliefs, acceptance or rejection of gendered prejudices, individual vs. collective solutions, demand for equality in numbers, comparison of gendered workplaces and assumption of leadership in initiating mobility. At the same time, we observe how geographical mobilities can increase the critical sensibility of youth towards gender inequalities, contributing to a new conceptualisation of agentic responses to structural constraints.

Keywords: *youth mobility; gender roles; beliefs; agency; structure; gendered mobility.*

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Introduction

There is an urgent need to focus on the spatial mobility of young people within the EU with a narrowed attention on gendered mobilities and how young people interpret these gendered contexts. Within this ambit, we define youth mobility as "spatial mobility" of young people (King et al., 2016). Previous work has not sufficiently focussed on the responses of young people to gendered (spatial) mobility experiences in the light of agency and structure theories in sociology. Our aim is to fill this theoretical and empirical gap where the interplay of youth, gender and spatial mobility is explained within the agency debate of Emirbayer and Mische (1998), an endeavour that has not been attempted before.

What is implied by the term gendered mobility? For the purpose of this paper, the setting and mobility are defined as gendered, when the spatial mobility is situated in contexts and settings where gender roles and/or beliefs might have a negative effect on the young people's capacities, perceptions and achievements as well as their mobility chances. The aim of this paper is, therefore, to understand how young people think and act when they counter these gender-biased circumstances before and during their mobilities. How do young people deal with adverse circumstances considering imposed gender differences in their mobility experiences?

To be more specific, "youth mobility" can also be defined as "the capacity of young people to move between different places in their home country and outside of it, with the purpose of achieving personal development goals, autonomy, for the purposes of volunteering and youth work, of education systems and programmes, of expert training, of employment and career goals, of housing opportunities and free time activities" (National Youth Council of Slovenia, 2011: 3). It is important to note that we emphasise the concept of mobility (rather than migration) within the EU[12]. King (2018: 5-6) depicts the distinction saying that despite the fact that the boundary between migration and mobility is blurred, and despite having overlapping qualities, migration implies staying somewhere for longer periods whilst mobility implies return and could include trips, tourism, travel and visiting friends. The interviewees cited in this paper have all benefited from the freedom of movement for EU citizens. Considering the ease enjoyed in a borderless Schengen area, (spatial) mobility rather than migration is more of a correct term to use hereby.

Among the analysed obstacles to mobility, gendered inequalities are rarely addressed. In particular, there is a lack of action-theoretical approaches which start from individual perceptions and personal experiences of the young people entrapped in gendered mobilities. Therefore, our aim is to shed light on gender and youth mobility through the experiences of young mobile people in Europe. We do this on the grounds of the agency concept introduced by Emirbayer and Mische (1998), which until now has not been applied to youth mobilities in gendered settings. We are interested to see how agency and structure interrelate in these settings. Henceforth, in this paper, the agency of young people and structures of diverse types of mobilities are examined in a relational manner. They shape each other via negotiations and contestations leading to novel circumstances and responses (Lutz, 2015: 41).

We argue that spatial mobility within the EU can be a litmus test for young mobile people. The mobility experience can make them realise the inequalities inherent in cultures, societies,

[12] From legal and practical perspective, mobility fits to freedom of movement within the EU in comparison with "migration" where other legal and actual practices of bordering are implied.

workplaces and training places; or even the preconceptions and stereotypes ingrained in their own mind-sets. In response to inequalities, young people take agentic actions in different forms which are categorised in our paper into three responses: iterational, practical-evaluative, and projective aspects of agency demarcated as the "chordal triad of agency" borrowed from Emirbayer and Mische (1998). This agentic approach captures the temporal dimension as well as dynamism and change of agentic action.

To build our main arguments, we first present theoretical foundations and relevant, state-of-the-art research; second, we introduce our methodological approach; third, we analyse our cases and finally, we present our reflections and concluding thoughts.

Gendered Youth Mobility and Agency

In line with Hanson's view (2010: 8), the authors of this paper are aware that gender is used "both as a term that is constructed and also as a term that differentiates between sexes". We agree with her regarding the principle that the usage of terms such as *women* and *men*, signifies messy and heterogeneous categories, but at the same time have some meaning (Hanson, 2010: 8). These meanings become self-evident within social processes in which we are both subjects and objects in a relational, temporal and historical context (Rose, 2010). According to poststructuralist feminist theory, gender is something that is done, accomplished or performed rather than something that one is born with (Ahl, 2006: 597). Hence, gendered understandings vary in diverse circumstances and contexts, as they are socially and culturally constructed (Ahl, 2006: 609) and situated (West and Fenstermaker, 1995). As Simone de Beauvoir (1973) famously said: "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman." Both men and women face diverse types of discrimination based on their sex (Mcdowell, 2002: 41). Regarding the agency-structure relationship, Robeyns (2003: 86) emphasises: "coercive social processes restrict and mould us". From this perspective, in this section, we would like to provide a snapshot of the literature on gender and spatial mobility to demonstrate how these social processes can intermingle with geographical mobilities.

Research reveals that migration policies determine "who is needed and therefore who is welcome", in some cases confirming and reproducing gendered trajectories (Green, 2015: 13). As Sirkeci and Cohen (2011: 6) observe, "asymmetries can be gender-based and define where men and women can and cannot travel". Social and spatial mobility are related to each other for the fact that the latter can be realised with the presence of the former and vice versa (Kaufmann, Bergman and Joye, 2004). It is observed that mobilities reveal gendered power hierarchies (Uteng & Creswell, 2016: 2). Moreover, gendered mobilities are also a result of the fact that gender roles and gender beliefs still predominate diverse aspects of the lives of many (Nisic & Melzer, 2016; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). An impact of gender beliefs (Nisic & Melzer, 2016; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004) and restrictions of gendered mobilities (Dwyer, 2018; Uteng & Creswell, 2016; Andall, 2013; Green 2012; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2011; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2000; Metz-Göckel, Morokvasic, & Münst, 2008; Donato et al. 2006; Parreñas, 2005) in social relational contexts is observed in different areas of life.

It is worth mentioning that in some of the literary works of the 19th century, gendered mobilities can be observed in the evolution of some of the main characters in representative books. Jane Austen wrote about domestic relations because women did not travel as often as men did. Honoré de Balzac described Eugenia Grandet's drama as her cousin went to the Far East and she waited in vain for him to come back. Drawing a clearer frame, Woolf (1929) explains how and why women authors,

most of the time, describe domestic life in their works, whilst male authors describe their worldwide journeys and their adventurous encounters with the "wild" and the unknown.

Today, women are more mobile than ever and mobility has a new meaning for them (Metz-Göckel, Morokvasic & Münst, 2008: 17). In line with this argument, Morokvasic (2004) says that most of the women who migrated from Eastern to Western Europe after the collapse of the Soviet Union are "settled in mobility" via their transnational lives. Women have become leaders of migration processes by initiating migration as a family strategy (Ryan & Mulholland, 2014), finding jobs and motivating their partners to move, both within the EU and in global terms (Morokvasic, 1984). In line with these findings, there is also proof that mobile women are the planners and leading agents when it comes to thinking of the future, regarding savings and permanent settlement abroad (Pessar & Mahler, 2003: 826-827). Hence, geographical mobility can be seen as empowering for women (Hanson, 2010: 9).

There is also a darker side to mobilities: Gender inequalities might continue even after mobility takes place (Marchetti & Salih, 2017). As seen from De Regt's research (2010: 240) on Ethiopian women and their gendered mobilities, mobility can intersect with legal and illegal statuses. Though the considerations in the previous paragraph paint a very optimistic picture, mobility does not always bring equality or empower agentic actions (Stock 2012: 1585; Metz-Göckel, Morokvasic & Münst, 2008; Grieco 2003: 7). For instance, inequalities in the households regarding gendered distribution of income (Mcdowell, 2017) could survive despite mobility opportunities. Consequently, mobility does not lead to awareness in the minds of different genders in terms of liberation from gender roles embedded in one's cultural and social environment.

In some cases, women's economic status does not represent their skills, or their skills do not match their jobs in the host countries, as they are still seen and treated as dependents even in countries that have a long history of immigration (Man, 2004). Piper (2006: 141) emphasises that women enter into migration streams that used to be dominated by men. Some professional activities are gendered, for instance, entrepreneurship (Ahl, 2006: 597). It is only recently that researchers have started delving into high-skilled women's mobility (Gonzales & Bosch, 2013; Kofman 2012; Iredale, 2005; Ackers, 2004). All these academic works demonstrate that gendered geographies of power (Pessar & Mahler, 2003) need to be overcome both in reality and by researchers (Nowicka & Ryan, 2015).

A neglected area in the field of youth and spatial mobility research is how young people respond to gendered settings and gender biases. To respond to this lack of research in the field, dealing with specific social stigmas and constraints, the **chordal triad of agency** (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998: 971) can be a useful theoretical tool. Its three elements: *iterational, projective and practical-evaluative,* are defined as follows:

> **The iterational element:** "the selective reactivation by actors of past patterns of thought and action, as routinely incorporated in practical activity, thereby giving stability and order to social universes and helping to sustain identities, interactions, and institutions over time".
>
> **The projective element:** "the imaginative generation by actors of possible future trajectories of action, in which received structures of thought and action may be creatively reconfigured in relation to actors' hopes, fears, and desires for the future".

The practical-evaluative element: "the capacity of actors to make practical and normative judgments among alternative possible trajectories of action, in response to the emerging demands, dilemmas, and ambiguities of presently evolving situations".

In this context, we adopt Emirbayer and Mische's (1998: 970) definition of agency: "the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments—the temporal-relational contexts of action—which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgment, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations". Concerning our social actors and their retrospective, situational and prospective acts, we explore agency in young people's changing ideas on gender roles, beliefs and equality.

Mobility enables and forces individual young mobile people to encounter previous circumstances that they have not thought of before, happenstances that arise in the face of spatial and temporal change. The literature on gender and migration has considered many diverse aspects of gender inequality, e.g. transnational families, mobile mothers, household inequalities, gendered occupations, gendered labour agreements and workplaces, left-behind mothers, decision making as a couple and high-skilled women. However, it has not focussed sufficiently on the transformational character of gender perceptions of young people regarding geographical mobility.

Methodological Approach

To find an answer to the main research question, 'How does youth involved in diverse mobility types deal with adverse circumstances caused by gender beliefs and gender prejudices?', problem-centred interviews were carried out with young, mobile people (age range between 18 and 29). The methodological approach combined Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 2010; Charmaz et al., 1995), applied for the in-depth analysis of interviews, with Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) Agency theory, employed for the analysis and discussion of the findings on gendered mobility narratives, as detailed below.

Case Studies as Mobility Types and Countries

A total of 122 interviews were carried out with young mobile people: 70 women and 52 men, each of them being an incoming person to or outgoing person from Germany, Hungary, Luxembourg, Norway, Romania, or Spain. The selection was made through a negotiation with stakeholders, considering diverse situations amongst young people, in terms of time spent in the destination country, family origin and the number of mobilities[13]. The fieldwork was carried out in 2015 and 2016 and included five mobility types:

1) higher education degree,

2) volunteering,

3) entrepreneurship,

4) vocational education and training (VET),

5) employment.

[13] Regarding this aspect, workers and entrepreneurs had more concatenated mobility experiences.

Every mobility field was studied in-depth in two countries to gain a comparative contextual approach. The average interview lasted between one and three hours. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and those in different languages were translated into English. They were anonymised with regard to age, place of work and/or education, and story/specific personal characteristics.

Table 1. Initial sample of the interviews

Country	Type	Women Incoming	Women Outgoing	Men Incoming	Men Outgoing	Origin Countries	Destination Countries
Germany	VET		10	1	5		Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Lithuania, Malta, Norway, Spain and UK
Luxembourg	Employment	7	1	7	1	Belgium, Croatia, France, Greece, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania and UK	Germany
Luxembourg	Higher Education	2	9	1	7	Greece, Poland and Spain	Austria, Belgium, , France, Germany, the Netherlands and UK
Romania	Volunteers	1	11	1	4		Armenia[14] China, Denmark, France, Iceland, Malawi, Morocco, Portugal and Ukraine
Romania	Entrepreneurs	0	12	0	6		France, Germany, Italy, Norway, Spain and UK
Spain	VET	0	6	1	10	Germany	Belgium, France, Germany, , Italy, Malta and UK
Spain	Entrepreneurs	2	9	2	6	France, Lithuania	Germany, Italy and UK
Total		12	58	13	39		**122**

Out of the main sample, we chose ten interviews for this paper (from the samples from Luxembourg, Romania, Spain and Germany), using purposeful sampling. The 10 cases (2 male, 8 female) do not serve to prove representativeness of the sample. Their selection has been made based on the richness and depth of the biographical background and mobility (in)experiences among young European citizens. We carefully selected participants whose interviews had references to gendered settings and gendered norms with regard to mobility.

Problem-centred Interviews

In order to identify and explore gendered indicators within youth mobility, we opted for the problem centred interviews (PCI), where the interviewers have the opportunity to alter their positions from passive to intervening during the interview (Scheibelhofer, 2005; Witzel & Reiter, 2012). This method of interviewing allowed the interviewees and the interviewers the flexibility to

[14] Some of the countries are not placed in Europe but they are partner countries in the EU programmes.

concentrate on what was more central according to the context and direction of the conversation. Furthermore, this method allowed reconstructing each interviewee's biographical background by looking back into the past in more detail and evaluating the experience (Scheibelhofer, 2005: 26) from the present viewpoint.

The PCI provided both the interviewers and the interviewees with space to freely explore what might be considered a problem, in our case: gender biases, gender roles, gendered mobility experiences. Not all the questions were pre-defined, and the interviewers could, therefore, delve into the themes that had not been considered before conducting the interviews.

Through the PCI we were able to trace strategies developed by young people with respect to their motivations for and the barriers to their mobility.

Analysis

Due to the complexity of the case studies, and use of different languages in interviews, it was decided to use Grounded Theory Method (Glaser & Strauss, 2010; Charmaz et al., 1995) to systematise the analysis and comparisons between countries (Altissimo, Bartels, Herz & Schröer, 2017). The data analysis followed three major steps. Firstly, initial coding assigned parts of material to codes and topics. Secondly, the analysis focused on coding single topics and sequences, allowing for an in-depth analysis. Coding enabled us to observe divergences and convergences between diverse interviewees regarding the theme of gender. This inductive method also favoured the emergence of issues not considered in the beginning. Gender inequality in youth mobility was not a central research topic, but emerged in the interviews.

As Charmaz (1995: 30) underlines "the researcher seeks to learn how they [the participants in the research] construct their experience through their actions, intentions, beliefs and feelings." Here, in this paper, actions, intentions and beliefs of the participants were examined, with a special focus on gender perspectives after the mobility experience. For the purpose of our paper, in-depth analysis was carried out with the gender-centred topics: internalised gender inequality, gender beliefs and roles, gendered labour markets, mixed groups in diverse mobility types, gendered training contexts, and decision-making in heterogeneous couples.

Applying the agency theory from Emirbayer and Mische (1998) we looked at gendered mobilities and respective youth responses. We employed, therefore, iterational, projective and practical-evaluative elements inherent in the definition of Emirbayer and Mische (1998), as we found five patterns emanating from Grounded Theory: 1) Refusal of gender beliefs, 2) Acceptance or rejection of gendered prejudices, 3) Individual vs. collective solutions, 4) Demand for equality in numbers, 5) Comparison of gendered labour markets and leadership in mobility initiation. Conforming with Emirbayer and Mische's understanding, we acknowledge, on the one hand, that all human action is influenced synchronously by the past, future and present, and on the other hand, that in each concrete situation, one of these dimensions dominates individual agency. Thus, when applying the different dimensions to the cases, these allocations are not to be understood as absolute and exclusive.

In all the ten interviews analysed in-depth in this study, gender emerged as an issue, or as a problem, to different degrees. However, the way in which young people coped with it differed from one individual to another, and the interviewees revealed diverse patterns of coping with these issues, both explicit and hidden. Since the context in which the patterns evolved was also a matter of

concern, in what follows, we present some biographical aspects and narrative elements related to the patterns of response to gendered mobilities.

Research Results: Youth Responses to Gendered Mobility Experiences

In the following sub-sections, we investigate gendered mobilities within the context of the European mobility schemes, aiming at a differentiated perspective on individual perceptions of young mobile people.

Refusal of Gender Beliefs in the face of Societal Constraints

The experience that gendered roles are extended to mobility contexts is one that is seldom consciously reflected on by our interviewees. Rather, they appear as implicit thoughts in the context of perceived mobility options. The following considerations are based on one interviewee, a woman from Greece named Bea within the **higher education mobility type**. In the face of the economic crisis and difficulty finding a suitable job, she decided to leave Greece for further higher education studies in Luxembourg. Before the crisis, she had not considered leaving her home country. Bea is a so-called free-mover. Not being a part of any program for students from abroad, she sorganised her stay herself.

Gender was addressed in a twofold manner in the interview: (1) as a stereotypical notion of women's roles and freedoms in the country of origin, and (2) through linkage to women's personal security. In this particular case, gender is not seen as a hindering factor of being mobile. However, the narrative revealed that perceived gender roles may still have an influence on how freely a woman can choose to move, both from her own perspective and from the perspective of her family and the surrounding society. The freedom of movement, hereby, relates to movements between countries as well as to movements within the country of origin.

Although Bea did not encounter any restrictions from her family in terms of education or moving to another city to study, she emphasised the mentality in the Greek community in which she lived. She refers to the "reality" around her: women of her age already being married and having children, which indicates that her chosen path – studying for higher degrees and studying in another country – is not a common phenomenon in her surroundings. She articulates the perceived role for women in society as such:

> "And this is why we still keep this tradition in our mind, like girls should… it's better not to study, because why do they need to study? Their purpose is to raise families, from as young an age as they can, so that they are healthy, they raise kids who are good, and OK".

She also makes a point that it is becoming more common for girls to study, but parents insist that they stay in their home city for this purpose. In contrast, the interviewee studied for her bachelor's degree in a different city from the one where her parents lived, though still in the same country. Her parents made no objections. However, they encountered a reaction from their community:

> "All my parents' friends and neighbours were like: 'Why do you let your daughter move so far away? How can you let her? (…) Aren't you afraid for her? After all, she is a girl, she is a woman'".

Bea refers to the fact that her parents were supposed to feel afraid to let her move and be on her own, as she is "a girl, she is a woman": This implies that freedom to move, within the country

or abroad, is culturally not intended for girls. Girls' spatial mobility is overshadowed by fear, with the community highlighting the negative aspects. Although her parents do not represent this set of beliefs, this common specific attitude is present in their behaviour, too. The interviewee had to convince her parents to study abroad:

> "It was, you know, I had to make them be OK with the idea of me traveling, even abroad. And to support me… To ask for their support (…) they supported me [laugh] in that"

In Bea´s case, a woman's movement is associated with anxiety, which in the end may lead to a settled way of life, or may at least involve more effort to move. Family and reasons for non-mobility are in some cases connected (Cohen & Sirkeci, 2011). Bea´s case proves that restrictions implied by societal gender roles do not always prevent one from becoming mobile; however, her mobility decisions are nevertheless influenced by the described anxiety. She reflects the lack of personal safety for women in her hometown:

> "In my hometown, yeah, I feel very unsafe. And although the police station is some meters away from my building where I live (…) it's quite scary for me (...) in the winter, when it gets dark really early, you are very unsafe as women to walk in the street after eight o'clock. In fact, I walk and I don't look in front of me, I look behind me all the time".

This insecurity is translated into the choice of the study place that must be secure. Even the mode of going abroad is linked to the desire to feel safe. Bea does not want to go abroad as an employee, but decides to go abroad as a student, because she perceives it as a safe way of going to a new country:

> "So, the safe solution, let's say, the safe way was to go to the university. (…) So, I believe that coming as a student, it is really easy to be a part of a team. And the way the mentality of university works is to make people come closer together, to get students to co-operate in different projects in the very first semester. And that makes us forge more spersonalised relationships".

The fact that women are thought to be unsafe in certain places, be it villages, cities, or countries, is not the only cultural reason to frown upon spatial mobility of women. Another negative connotation to women's movement is that the "traditional place for a woman is home, where she is safe and protected". On the other hand, personal security prompts some women to leave for another, more secure place (criterion of low criminality), with a secure mode of going abroad (in Bea´s case as a student and not as a worker). In her decision, Bea iterationally reflects gender roles but makes a projective choice (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998) in response to them (Nisic & Melzer, 2016; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). She reconfigures and finds a way to be mobile despite the fact that the home community reaffirms the prejudiced idea that women are less secure than men as they travel. At the same time, this solution is possible as her parents are not categorically against her mobility and support her future plans.

Acceptance vs. Rejection in the Face of Gender Prejudices

An interviewee from Romania within **entrepreneurship mobility** relates to a case where gender and disability intersect: Paula believes that "naturally" the male is psychologically stronger and better prepared for difficulties that arise from mobilities. Paula's case is quite different from

Bea's as Bea finds her own solution to the societal pressures on women, whilst Paula internalises them:

> "There was another colleague in Romania who was also disabled; in fact, they could not decide whether or not to approve him or me, and they asked to approve both and it was how I would have been accepted. He stayed there until the end. Being a boy… you know how boys are… no matter what, they resist better and want to finish".

We can assign the case of Paula to the iterational perspective (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998) where she assumes that the "boy is more resilient than the girl", repeating traditional gendered roles and beliefs (Nisic & Melzer, 2016; Uteng & Creswell, 2016; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). This iterational perspective might cause young people to narrow down their possibilities for action.

The next interview, in contrast to Paula, demonstrates how a new perspective on gender is gained via openness in forced or non-forced togetherness; the more time one spends with "others", the less significant the differences between predefined gender roles become. Luminita, who is also from Romania, says about her co-travellers: "Of course, not having much money, we stayed together at a hostel where we were 6 in the room, that is, girls and boys, but it did not matter because we did not sleep too much or stayed [sic] too long in the room, of course [laughs], we were going to visit [city in Germany]". This interview reflects an effect mentioned by most respondents where mobility leads to increased flexibility regarding gender norms, such as separate accommodation. Luminita, hereby, makes a practical-evaluative choice (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998) as she adapts to evolving situations.

The experience of mobility and meeting someone different can make a difference in terms of widening one's approach to interpersonal equality. A case of a young volunteer male from Romania, Valentin, exemplifies the fact that he overcame stereotypical gendered ascriptions during his mobility experience. In the cited example, Valentin defended the sexual orientation of homosexual men against homophobic colleagues back home:

> "All project coordinators were gay [laughing] that was a shock to me, because when I went to Spain I was very homophobic. But I came back very open-minded, yes, right? It changes you… Change of mind-set [laughs], yes, accept, yes, and see things differently, after six to seven months, I started accepting people; that is, we have this trend anyway. There are some who don't go along with this, who try to provoke us. But they have no business ... they [meaning coordinators] do not judge people at all. I take people as they are and do not judge them at all".

This interview demonstrates that in a mobility scheme, to spend some time with people of diverse perceptions on gender ascription can help overcome prejudices entrenched within one's previous perspective. Valentin's case can be assigned as a shift from iterational to practical-evaluative elements (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998) for the reason that he weighs the possible actions in this gendered trajectory (Green, 2015) and in consequence of his experience with people different from those at home, rejects stereotypical gender ascriptions.

Individual vs Collective Solutions in the face of Gendered Mobilities

Among Romanian interviewees were young entrepreneurs working abroad as well as returnees who have opened their own businesses in Romania as a result of previous experience(s) of mobility. One relevant issue mentioned by both male and female respondents is related to financing the

entrepreneurial endeavour, which forced mobile entrepreneurs to be creative in findings sponsors (including relatives) or programs to support them. In some cases, associations and networks help them with paperwork or accommodation; in others, they find internal resources to combat the fear of the unknown(s) of entrepreneurship.

Within this setting, gender inequalities were not underlined as a barrier for most of the female entrepreneurs. A Romanian woman, Anca, running a business in the UK, said:

> "I never felt discriminated against, neither as an entrepreneur nor as a woman. It all depends on one's attitude, on what is transmitted, and as long as one treats people from a position of equality, you don't allow them to underestimate you or put you in a different position".

While Anca denies her own discrimination experiences in her mobility experiences, her statement does not lead to the conclusion that there is no inequality or discrimination. On the contrary, her formulation that being discriminated against or not "depends on one's attitude" implies an expectation of inequalities. Her approach can be seen as iterational (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Moreover, in estimating that she will be treated equally as long as she is treating others alike, she presents gender roles and beliefs as collectively constructed (Ahl, 2006). Her case represents gender practices following the stream of "doing gender" (West & Zimmermann, 1987: 40): "a person's gender is not simply an aspect of what one is, but more fundamentally, something that one does, and does recurrently, in interaction with others".

Collective mobility decisions also reveal a gender impact when people move to another country as a couple, as in Sonia's case. When Sonia moved to Germany from Spain first, as she was offered a good position in her career, her husband followed her. During their stay in Germany, Sonia wished to go back to Spain to be **self-employed**, but her husband wanted to remain in Germany, prioritising his position in the labour market. After negotiations they worked out a strategy:

> "So... it has changed that my partner doesn't want to go back: he's in love with [city in Germany] and he wants to stay longer. He likes his job, he likes [city in Germany], he feels at ease with [city in Germany], so we reached an agreement that I will stay here for longer, and he supports me in my business project [back in Spain]. That is something I have always wanted to do because I have worked for others and it's like you don't dare, and so I'm still here".

Within a gendered mobility experience, Sonia makes projective choices (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998), where she negotiates with her husband on the consideration of better career opportunities and preferences. Their plans are transformed via both actors' mobility experiences, wishes, and perceptions. This confirms that decisions can be reversed depending on the context of who decides and how roles change, as temporariness, permanence and return become more dynamic and fluid (Green, 2015).

The example below is in contrast to previous examples. Maria is a young female **entrepreneur** from Spain and lives in Germany. She has a baby. Her biography resonates with her strategies of navigating a new place and in a way that she highlights the solidarity networks amongst her acquaintances – women who are in the same situation as her:

> "We meet each other at the ...at the... at the ante-natal group, then all of us we will have our babies spaced about a month apart, and the truth is that we supported each other a lot,

> it's really important. We meet each other once or twice a week for brunch or something, and then well, I'm going for a walk, is anyone around in [city district in Germany]?"

The interviewed self-employed women affirm that being an entrepreneur is not the type of occupation to keep for many years as they find it difficult to balance family life within the pace of work. These cases confirm that circumstances around entrepreneurship favour men more than women (Ahl, 2006). Maria acts in a practical-evaluative way (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998) as she experiences that meeting and socialising with other women in the same situation as she represents mechanisms of support and solidarity during their mobility experience.

Demand for Equality in Numbers in the face of Gendered Training

An aspect of gendered mobilities that has not been mentioned yet is that of inequality in mobility participation, as mentioned in the case of Simon, a male German apprentice who went to Norway within **vocational educational training (VET) mobility**:

> "Well, I would have wished for a more heterogeneous group, surely, a purely male group is tiring after three weeks (…) I would have appreciated (…) including women for example in the group; in order to support this, yes, like a quota or something like that, I would have happily resigned of my own place in favour of including a woman in the group, but it was, I don't know, why this was not possible".

As Simon was very keen on taking part in the program, offering to give up his place has to be seen as a sacrifice, and it reflects the value he places on gender balance. Hinting to negative group dynamics in homogeneous groups, he highlights the potential of gender-mixed groups. He attributes the low rates of female mobilities in this field to the generally low engagement of women in crafts, as well as to the potentially uncomfortable situation of women in male-dominated groups:

> "Well I believe, in the last 25 years in [city in Germany], two women have undergone carpentry training […]; with the electricians, there are mostly men. I can well imagine that it is off-putting for women in the first place to travel with such a male group. So, it needs to be well-balanced, I believe".

He demands that we should "appreciate that women work in crafts, too, to simply promote this [that more women work in crafts] also as an outward signal towards Norway - there were, I believe, only men [in the craft training places]". Thus, he would like to see Germany as a European promoter of a better gender balance in crafts-based VET, and related mobilities. Simon's case represents a practical-evaluative dimension (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998) where he proposes alternative options for dilemmas of unequal participation in different educational tracks (Dwyer, 2018; Uteng & Creswell, 2016; Andall, 2013; Metz-Göckel, Morokvasic, & Münst, 2007).

Comparing Gendered Workplaces in the face of Gendered Labour Market(s)

Mobility chances are also influenced by gender inequalities on national labour markets. In the two examples coming from the **employment mobility** sample, mobility appears as a transitory phenomenon for young people. The first young woman, Maité, is from Luxembourg and had gone to study in Germany over nine years ago. During this time, she had various jobs alongside her studies, and she completed many internships and traineeships related to her studies. Maité went to Germany as she wanted to experience "something different". Now, being back in Luxembourg, she

indicates that her mobility made her aware of gender- and age-related imbalances in her area of work across countries:

> "…And here it's different to fit in sometimes. But at the [publishing house A in Luxembourg], there are also many men working there, which was clearly different at [publishing house B in Germany] and so I'm one of the youngest there at [publishing house A in Luxembourg] and there are many men, and so it's, yeah, you always have to prove yourself. So that's, that's a difference actually".

When emphasising that she has to "prove herself", she underlines the perceived differentiation between men and women, and younger and more experienced workers, in her work environment. Maité engages in a practical-evaluative way (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998) in asserting herself in a male-dominated work sphere, after experiencing a more balanced atmosphere during her mobility.

Another interviewee within the **employment mobility type** is Eva, a young woman who came from Poland to work in Luxembourg. In her case, we observe gender negotiations in the family context. Eva decided to move with her partner as her mother already worked and lived in Luxembourg:

> "(…) we did not follow a procedure with that: we just decided to come here. We packed our things, we stopped renting our apartment in [city in Poland] and we said, okay, let's try somewhere else. … We have nothing here, so we don't lose anything… Maybe we can get something in Luxembourg, we'll gain experience, or, if it doesn't work, because it was easy for us because we had an apartment, we don't have to pay, we didn't have to pay for rent [in Luxembourg]".

Eva's case represents a projective attitude (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998), where she plans to leave Poland to benefit from better employment opportunities in Luxembourg. She actually leads the mobility process in the confident feeling of not being a dependent migrant (Green, 2015; Ryan & Mulholland, 2014).

Table 2: Categorisation of Respondents in their Agentic Actions

Chordal Triad of Agency	Interviewees	Acts
Iterational (Confirms previous thoughts)	Anca, Paula, Bea	Referring to predefined gender roles and beliefs; referring to or repeating proven solutions
Projective (Reconfigures)	Bea, Sonia, Eva	Critical questioning, leading mobility process within opportunity windows, focussing on future opportunities
Practical-evaluative (Finds practicable solutions)	Maria, Luminita, Maité, Valentin, Simon	Finding compromise and solidarity, making comparisons, finding alternatives, suggesting solutions

Discussion

The empirical results presented above reflect the variety, dynamism and transformative capacity of agentic responses of young mobile people in the face of different mobility structures shaped by types of mobility and the situation in the countries of origin and destination.

The analysis of the interviews has shown continuous renegotiation of and resistance to gender inequalities and gendered mobility experiences by young people. With reference to Emirbayer & Mische´s agency concept (1998), we demonstrate that youth's actions and reactions to gendered mobilities represent a complex and time-related process as they rely on constant reinterpretations of past experiences, future hopes and fears as well as present opportunities and limitations. Their changing perceptions are based on entrenched gender beliefs in their hometowns, on numbers regarding certain mobility schemes, on gendered workplaces and sectors, on negotiations of family roles and on perceptions of solidarity with other women in public spaces. Hence, mobilities give reason to self-actualisation, self-transformation and self-flourishing, but at the same time serve as litmus test regarding the nature of gender inequalities.

The interviewed mobile people display diverse and creative responses to gendered trajectories of work, study, training, entrepreneurship and volunteering mobility, such as the refusal of or acceptance of gender beliefs, finding individual or collective solutions, demand for equality in numbers, comparative evaluations of gendered labour market and leadership in the initiation of mobility.

Experiences and expressions of gender inequalities within mobility are constantly pointed out by women, both in explicit and implicit ways.

Anca: Anca's iterational perceptions include denial as well as unconscious awareness of discrimination, and refer to gender roles as collective achievement rather than personal characteristic.

Paula: In her case we see well how gender aligns with other factors that create intersection of inequalities, such as disabilities. Paula perceives herself to be weaker than her male friend who is in a similar situation. In an iterational way, she repeats societal gender beliefs that might narrow her benefits from the mobility experience.

Bea: Young people transfer gender understandings based on traditional societal roles onto their mobility experiences. Bea iterationally takes into account limiting attributions to female mobility as "unsafe". While these attributions do not change her decision to move, they make her choose "study" as a "safer" way of becoming mobile than "employment". At the same time, her orientation is projective as she moves to another country on her own.

Sonia: Starting a family during mobility can reinforce gender roles. Nonetheless, Sonia negotiates with her husband and makes projective choices on the basis of changing preferences and opportunities.

Eva: In many cases like Eva´s, females are co-decision makers or leaders, rather than dependents in the mobility process. Eva´s move to Luxembourg with her partner, where her mother is already working, is a projective strategy, based on the back-up of family resources.

Maria: When gender roles are imbalanced as a family is established abroad, networks based on solidarity and friendship are approached in a practical-evaluative manner, cushioning adverse circumstances of self-employment. However, this does not mean that adverse structures are challenged. In the case of Sonia and Maria, finding temporary solutions to gendered settings weigh heavier.

Luminita: Gender beliefs might lose their strict bias when young people spend time together during a mobility experience. Luminita decides that during mobility, sharing spaces with others can alter the way one thinks of gender differences.

Maité: Gendered labour markets co-determine mobility chances of young women and men. After her mobility experience in Germany, Maité makes comparisons regarding gender imbalances in certain her working field.

Men are also aware of different gender-related perspectives and opportunities leading towards inequalities: in Simon's case concerning a gender disequilibrium in crafts-related VET, while in Valentin's case concerning prejudices based on sexual orientations.

Valentin and Simon: The mobility processes tackle gendered prejudices that young people like Valentin learn in their hometowns, and can result in critical questioning, and revision of gendered understandings. Gender disparity in VET tracks is reproduced in respective mobility fields and can result in a preference for a balance in numbers, as we have seen in the case of Simon.

Concluding Thoughts

This paper tackled the question of how mobile young people perceive, and respond to, gendered mobilities. The in-depth analysis of qualitative interviews provides rich perspectives on mobility experiences in five different mobility schemes: higher education, volunteering, entrepreneurship, VET and labour market mobility. It reveals diverse and dynamic agentic strategies that are characterised by iterational, projective and practical-evaluative elements following the agency perspective from Emirbayer and Mische (1998). In iterational responses, gender perceptions based on society-ascribed gender roles as well as past experiences are transferred to mobility experiences and lead to acceptance, but also to negating, of mobility-related legal and social inequalities. In projective responses, mobility plans are made on the basis of negotiations with family members, or are adapted to overcome gender-related barriers. They follow a vision different form proven solutions. In practical-evaluative responses, the past and the wishes for the future are negotiated from the present perspective. In this case, mobility experiences can lead to an awareness of gender inequalities and can change the attitudes of young people as well as their perception of gender-related norms. Moreover, young people deal with adverse circumstances of current mobilities by approaching supportive networks, or by increased efforts to stand one´s ground in one-gender-dominated workspaces.

Mobility trajectories of young people in Europe call for action on the policy level. They raise questions on how different institutions and policies can support young people in their efforts to overcome gender-related barriers, and, more provocatively, how youth mobility policies can be ameliorated so that they do not reinforce rigid gender roles and beliefs. Not least, the discussed results are of value for the on-going agency debate and, likewise the debate on the value of mobility: They present mobile people not just as respondents to gendered mobilities, but as agents that

contribute to changing societal perceptions and prejudices on gender roles. Here, further research on diverse types of mobilities in diverse national contexts is needed on how mobility can be utilised as an instrument that challenges socially predefined gendered understandings.

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