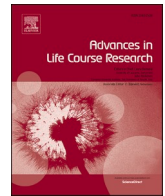




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Changes in young people's discourses about leaving home in Spain after the economic crisis

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ABSTRACT

The increasing complexity of young adults' leaving-home trajectories, combined with the effects of the economic recession, has led to an upturn in academic interest in this question. Nevertheless, the impact of the economic recession on young adults' housing imaginary has yet to be extensively addressed. This article analyses the way social discourses on leaving home evolved before and after the economic downturn. Using a diachronic, qualitative design to compare discussion groups from 2007 and 2014 in Spain, a relevant change can be observed: flexible patterns of leaving home appear that were previously rejected or only mentioned by upper-middle class young. Our findings highlight the way that expectations, values and norms about leaving home have altered, opening the debate about how Spanish young people will approach this transition in the future, but also how they did in the past.

1. Introduction

The mid-1970s represented a turning point in the evolution of advanced societies. Since then, changes have affected systems of production, markets, States' regulatory roles, and the public services that make up the Welfare State. But these transformations have left a deep influence on the culture and the life paths of citizens and, especially, on young people's transitions to adulthood (Furlong, 2015). All the changes that used to denote the rites of passage to adulthood (first house, forming a couple, finding a job) have grown more complex, and follow guiding logics that are independent of one another, so that the linearity of the transition to adulthood, typical of the earlier period, has been lost (Furlong, 2013; Pollock, 2008). With the increasing de-standardization of the life course together with the societal changes (Brückner & Mayer, 2005), living arrangements such as living apart together (Levin and Trost, 1999), rental options (Lennartz et al., 2015), sharing accommodation (Bobek et al., 2020) became more prominent as housing choices among young adults starting their residential career.

The economic recession of 2007–2008 brought even more vulnerability and disruption to the life of young adults' that were already living in this context. The unemployment rate among these age groups rose to more than 60% on the national level and was close to 80% in the most

disadvantaged regions (Fuster, 2020). In Europe, recent studies have shown that during the crisis, young adults were postponing the leaving home transition, as well returning to the parental home i.e. the boomerang kids (Stone et al., 2014). Surprisingly, patterns of leaving home in Spain did not change during the economic downturn as expected (Moreno, 2016; Namkee & Sánchez-Marcos, 2017; Serracant, 2015). The Spanish youth did not follow the strategy of young adults in Europe, despite the soaring unemployment rates, the worsening job security, diminished access to mortgage credit and increasing rental options. Instead, their decision to leave the parental home was not affected and they maintained their traditional pattern to transition late. This pattern was explained by the preference to leave only when young adults were able to meet their residential expectations and desires (Albertini, 2010; Fuster et al., 2020).

The aim of this paper is to understand this tension, looking into the way in which young people conceive and face the transition to adulthood, and how the transformations in the economic and social contexts have affected young people's discourses about leaving the parental home. Using a diachronic, qualitative analysis, we compare the findings of discussion groups undertaken in Andalusia, in the context of the economic boom (2007) as well as the recession (2014).

With this approach, we are able to explore how the intense hardships

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of the economic crisis prompted young people to readapt their social representations of what it means to become an adult. Our hypothesis is that adjusted de-standardized understandings of adulthood were actually running underground when the crisis started. Thus, young people not only adapted to the crisis, but also to the new demands of deregulated capitalism. Such transformations have consequences for public policies, which, like youth trajectories, must be more flexible in adapting to new socio-economic realities. Moreover, at the academic level, our research strongly complements existing quantitative approaches on the theme, which have been much more frequent. It further encourages us to be attentive to subsequent developments, such as the current pandemic crisis of the early 2020s and its consequences once it has been overcome.

In this article, we will first frame the transition to adulthood within the context of de-standardization of the life courses trajectories. Secondly, we focus on the leaving home transition in Spain. We highlight the main patterns and social imaginaries linked to this transition before the crisis and show the main changes that occurred during the period of study. In the methods' section, we explain the qualitative strategy that we followed to analyse and interpret the narratives and discourses. In our findings, we look at the dominant discourses that emerged from the discussion groups, show evidence on how these discourses changed over time and along social position of young adults and their families. Lastly, we discuss our findings in the context of existing literature and we open the debate to reflect more broadly on the relationship between social imaginaries about the transition to adulthood and the changes in the historical time where these discourses emerge, grow, generalize and, eventually, gain stability or change again.

2. The transition to adulthood in a context of the de-standardization of life course trajectories

To understand life course trajectories and life course transitions, such as leaving the parental home, they need to be framed in the context of the historical time (specific economic, institutional and cultural features) in which these events occur, since this context entails specific limitations and opportunities (Elder et al., 2003; Kok, 2007). As the life course approach has shown, life experience is embedded in this social context and it adopts different paths and meanings depending on where and when people live (Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011; Settersten, 2018).

During the first half of the 20th century, the transition to adulthood was compressed into a relatively short period of time, where a series of events took place more or less simultaneously or very close in time – finishing formal education, entering the labour market, leaving the parental home, getting married or even having a child (Furlong, 2013; Mayer, 2004). In industrialized societies, modernity brought linearity and time regularity to life trajectories, and it contributed to a standardization of the life course (Mayer, 2004) at residential, family formation or professional levels. However, since the last two decades of 20th century, industrialized societies have passed through major structural and cultural changes. Particularly, the profound changes wrought by the development of the current neo-capitalist system have left a de-standardization of people's life courses in their wake (Brückner & Mayer, 2005).

Furlong et al. (2006) find that the non-linear nature of the trajectories of the young in recent decades has most likely been exaggerated in the literature, coinciding with an inclination towards a more individual-centred sociology. Nevertheless, the authors also highlighted that these transitions appear to be connected to the increase in precarious, non-standardised employment. The current labour market situation is much more turbulent, with high rates of job turnover (Harvey, 2005), and jobs being less secure and less stable throughout people's careers. Currently, young people's labour contexts are very different to those of industrial and modern societies (Standing, 2011).

In this context of globalization, labor market flexibility, labour precariousness and increasing individualization (Beck, 1992), young

people's transitions are also more individualized, more diverse and less defined, altering the social meanings given to the passage to adulthood and also changing the point at which these transitions occur (Chisholm & Bois-Reymond, 1993). As Kubala and Horení Samec (2021) has observed, de-standardization comes together with a de-synchronization of life spheres. On their path to adulthood, young people may experience a specific sequence of roles, different timing and different turning points in their life course (Kok, 2007).

Returning to the idea that began this section, the association between the historical time and life experience is as much structurally as culturally based. According to Ortega y Gasset (1923), those who are born in a similar period of time – a generation – as contemporaries share similar social imaginaries, values and norms. Moreover, from the same point of view, Mannheim (1928) argues that the experience of certain significant historical events (such as an economic crisis, war or other significant changes) predisposes individuals to think in a certain way. Generations have different cultural frameworks and thus, different subjectivities (ways of living, feeling and thinking about the life course and life ideals).

As (Sennett, 1998) points out, living in a neo-liberal capitalism, comes with a series of 'moral imperatives' that are not only limited to the work sphere but also affect societal imaginaries and individual subjectivities. While perseverance, routine and predictivity were valued in the industrial era, in post-modern societies, these values have been replaced by others that better complement the new flexible rhythm, where the imperative of 'nothing is long-term' requires a new set of skills, such as being open to change, being adaptable, improvising and taking risks.

The literature on leaving the parental home as a transition to adulthood shows that this nomadic standard can certainly be found in the residential behaviour and discourses of young adult generations (Furlong et al., 2006). New housing trends, like sharing a rental accommodation (Bobek et al., 2020) or living apart together (Levin and Trost, 1999) are examples of some post-modern residential realities that are increasingly accepted as the starting point of a young adult's residential autonomy.

The 2008 economic crisis has drawn the attention of many researchers, since it has affected the trajectories of young people all around Europe, de-standardizing them further still (Arundel & Ronald, 2016; Lennartz et al., 2015; Serracant, 2015). For example, the average age for leaving the parental home has increased (Lennartz et al., 2015), and the phenomenon of 'boomerang kids' returning to the family home has become more common (Bobek et al., 2020; Stone et al., 2014). Young people seem to be even more pressured to produce adaptative discourses regarding housing preferences (Fuster et al., 2019).

However, researchers from different spatial contexts also highlight the fact that the reality is much more complex. The residential expectations and housing desires of young people are not always consistent with new realities, but follow pre-existing imaginaries and views. In a recent study, Kubala and Horení Samec (2021) showed that young generations from the Czech Republic share the housing perspective of 'the good life', which is linked to homeownership, with older generations. Similar results were also found in Great Britain (Hoolachan & Mckee, 2019) and Spain (Fuster et al., 2019) with regard to the coexistence of new and old aspirations, although a successful transition to adulthood is still linked to achieving homeownership.

For these researchers, the main difference is tied to the possibility of building a solid narrative connecting expectations and limitations, which is unequally distributed regarding the social position of individuals. The most privileged groups are more likely to adopt de-standardized views and have the resources to achieve their plans, even if they still hold on to their dreams of homeownership. Therefore, their capability to develop habitus and narratives consistent with the historical time is less problematic (Kubala & Horení Samec, 2021). For young people in the most vulnerable social circumstances, the non-linear path seems to be forced upon them as a free choice of new subjectivities

(Furlong et al., 2006). Moreover, as a consequence of increasing labour and economic precariousness, they are more likely to adopt a 'cleft habitus' (Hoolachan & Mckee, 2019), described as 'the condition in which the subjective worldviews, expectations, and aspirations are inconsistent with the material conditions' (Kubala & Horení Samec, 2021:199).

3. Leaving the parental home in Spain before and after the economic recession: new realities, new discourses?

One of the characteristics related to when young people leave home in Spain is the late age at which this occurs, in comparison to other contexts in continental and north Europe (Aassve et al., 2013; Albertini, 2010). According to Eurostat (2021), the average age at which the Spanish left the parental home in 2020 was 29.8, more than three years greater than in the European Union as a whole (where the average age was 26,4). This is not, however, a new feature. It has been this way for many years, certainly from before the economic crisis started. Until the real estate bubble burst, leaving home was mainly postponed in order to save up for a property, as a consequence of a culture that valued home-ownership and disparaged renting (Fuster et al., 2019; Gil-Calvo, 2002). Those with the greatest urgency to leave the parental home were the most likely to rent, but the housing ideal was to buy a property, an objective to be reached by postponing the 'flight' from the family nest (Fuster et al., 2020).

According to this 'late leaving home' culture, other factors such as an unfavourable housing market, characterized by high home purchase prices (Echaves, 2017); the difficulty involved in accessing credit to take out a mortgage (Requena, 2002); the shortage of housing available for rent (Gil-Calvo, 2002); and fewer institutional public policies focused on helping young people to achieve residential independence (Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011; Gaviria, 2007; Requena, 2002) have also been identified as key in understanding the delay in residential transitions.

However, in line with the rise of the neo-capitalist system and values discussed earlier, most of the research highlights the unstable labour situation of young Spanish people as the main factor preventing them from leaving home until they reach some level of financial independence (Holdsworth, 2000; Requena, 2002). As Aassve et al. (2013) have observed, since the last decade of the 20th century, indicators of labour precariousness – i.e. unemployment rates, the proportion of temporary work – have severely impacted the youth generation in the Mediterranean countries. Moreover, while socially created aspirations regarding the home-leaving process did not change, the ability to achieve the 'ideal standard' declined drastically.

During the economic recession period (between 2007 and 2013), the vulnerability of the young generations grown until new limits. In example, unemployment rate for young people in the 20–29 age groups rose from 9% to 30% (Fuster, 2020). Given the relevance of the increasing economic difficulties for young Spanish, it would have been expected that living at parental home would become even more widespread than before the crisis. Nevertheless, the changes in the age for moving out are not as expected: the decrease in the rate of young people living independently of their parents came much later than 2008 and less intensively (Fig. 1¹). During the last years of the economic recession, the rate declined first in the younger and then in the older age brackets. But in the early years of the crisis, the increasing rate of young people living independently, appeared to hold.

The evolution is even more surprising if we consider only Spanish-born young people, excluding immigrants from abroad (Fig. 2). In this

case, in the 20–29 age group, we find that between 2008 and 2013 – the most severe years of the crisis –, the rate of young Spanish people who lived independently remained at around 25%. Thus, the decline observed in the rate for all young people living in Spain (shown in Fig. 1) can be attributed to other phenomenon: the reduction of immigration (from abroad) experienced during this period. With fewer young immigrants, the percentage of foreigners living independently has also fallen. The most striking part is that, for those born in Spain, this percentage began to fall modestly as of 2014, when the economic situation started to improve. However, in 2020, with the CoVID-19 pandemic, the rate dropped sharply once again. While this is a question outside the scope of this paper, the experiences of the 2008–2014 crisis period may once again become acutely relevant following the aftermath of CoVID-19.

The economic recession has, therefore, affected Spanish young adults' life courses, but their leaving home patterns have not changed as might have been expected, despite the circumstances. Other research done on young Spanish people has found similar results. Serracant (2015) and Moreno (2016) describe visible changes in both the professional and educational spheres, although they did not find any changes in the temporality of the home-leaving transition, with only a very small increase in the overall percentage of young people still living in the parental home during the first years of the crisis (Moreno, 2017; Namkee & Sánchez-Marcos, 2017). This clashes with findings from other countries where the proportion of young adults living with their parents had risen, such as the Netherlands, Switzerland and Italy (Lennartz et al., 2015), and even in the USA (Lee & Painter, 2013).

One of the keys to understanding this paradox appears to lie in the fact that renting and cession are becoming majority options (Fuster et al., 2019), albeit not only in Spain (Lennartz et al., 2015), and that non-traditional forms of cohabitation, such as sharing a house with friends or acquaintances, are occurring more frequently (Gil-Solsona, 2022). In 2007, the proportion of young people who were homeowners (fully paid/paying a mortgage) was close to 60%. By 2015, the proportion had decreased to below 30% (see also: Moreno, 2016; Módenes, 2019). However, in line with Moreno (2016), Fuster et al. (2019) and Aramburu (2015), understanding this paradox requires a clarification of how these forms of housing are interconnected with the changes occurring in the collective imaginary of young people regarding their home-leaving processes.

This article presents data on this issue from an examination of how narratives and discourses have changed, from the year that the real estate bubble in Spain burst to the economic recession that followed in the country. Within the broad context of the de-standardization of life courses detailed in the last section, the article's hypothesis is that the predominant cultural norms themselves are undergoing a crisis, in accordance with Furlong (2015) observation that the economic recession may not have created new discourses, but it has accelerated changes that predate the recession, since 'recessions are temporary, but they frequently represent turning points at which emergent pre-recession trends start to shape the new reality' (Furlong, 2015: 532).

4. Materials and methods

This article is based on a diachronic, qualitative research comparing the findings of two studies from two key moments: the first at the time of the pre-crisis, economic bonanza (2007), and the second at the end of the toughest phase of the crisis (2014), just as a new phase of growth was beginning. Both studies, undertaken via discussion groups, were designed, carried out, and interpreted following the 'Sociological Discourse Analysis' developed by the Madrid Qualitative School (Conde, 2009). While our diachronic perspective is unusual in qualitative studies, it enables variations in social discourses over time to be tracked/seen. Even more so in fields, such as the studies on youth residential transitions, where qualitative studies remain scarce (Mann-Feder et al., 2017; McKee et al., 2020; to cite two recent ones).

¹ In Figs. 1 and 2 we built a rate of young people living independently from their parents. The statistical information was drawn from the annual 'Labour Force Survey' ('Encuesta de Población Activa'). The LFS offers a large data series that begins well before the 2008 crisis and it also includes a great presence of immigrants.

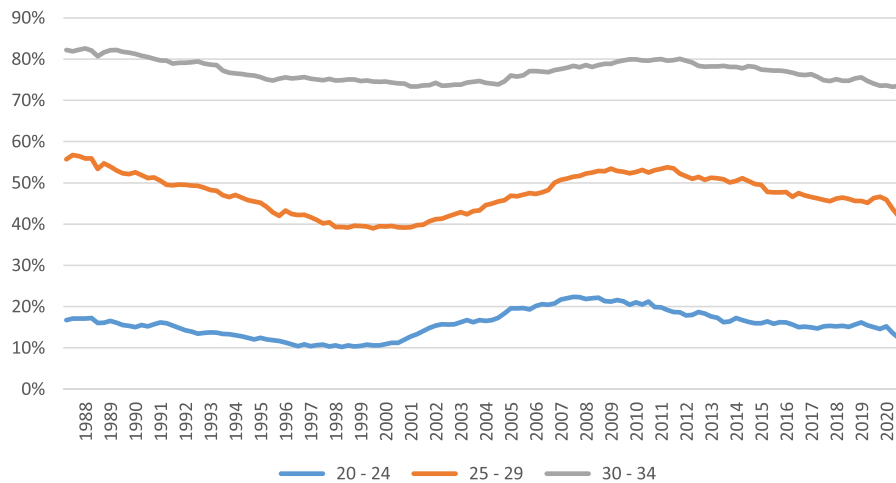


Fig. 1. Trends in the rates of young people living independently of their parents, by age groups. Source: authors' own design, based on the 'Labour Force Survey' - INE.

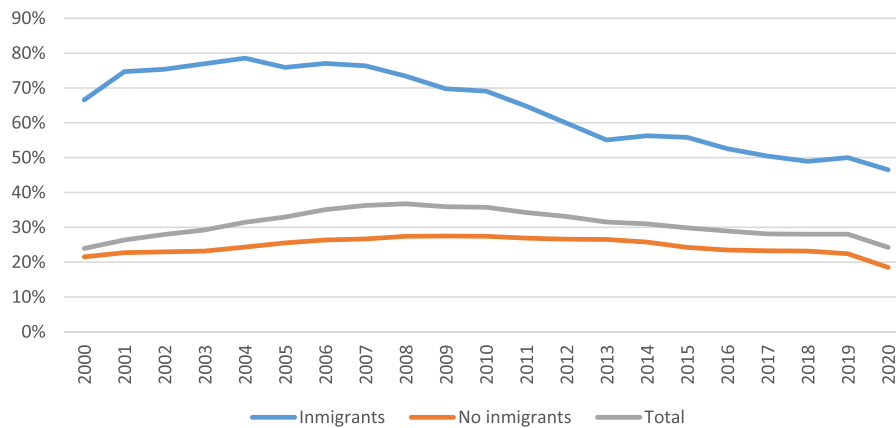


Fig. 2. Evolution of the rates of young people between 20 and 29 years old living independently of their parents, by place of birth. Source: authors' own design, based on the 'Labour Force Survey' - INE.

Both studies aimed to delve into housing discourses among urban residents in Andalusia, conducted by different co-authors of this paper. A completely new analysis of the original transcripts has been made for the focus groups conducted in 2007, although a first analysis of the results was published as a technical report (Hernández and Susino, 2008). The design of the more recent research (2014) seeks to enable comparison with the previous study. The design criteria for both sample were: age, socio-economic status (based on the family of origin, distinguishing between lower-manual/low-skilled workers, lower-middle/administrative workers, and upper-middle/professionals and technicians) and housing situation (living independently or with parents). In the focus groups conducted in 2014 with those living independently from their parents, we verified that the participants had moved out during the crisis (between 2008 and 2014). Some of the 2007 groups were differentiated by sex, although this was not the case in 2014 when all were mixed. Among other objectives that we do not consider in this paper, the 2014 focus groups also considered the place of residence within the urban area. ((Table 1)).

The sample design was structural, created to represent the different social positions around the object of study (Conde, 2009). To guarantee comfortability, the groups from both periods repeated the same basic position criteria in the social structure, with greater explanatory power with respect to the object of study and the objectives of the research. Furthermore, other groups started with the same initial question: the groups were asked to talk about youth, leaving home and housing. Thus,

Table 1
Design of the discussion groups (2007 and 2014).

Group	Ages	Housing situation	Socio-economic status	Participants	Year
G01	23–34	Independent	Lower	7	2007
G02	25–34	Independent	Lower	8	2007
G03	21–29	Living at home	Lower-middle	7	2007
G04	20–28	Living at home	Lower-middle	6	2007
G05	25–28	Living at home	Upper-middle	6	2007
G06	26–32	Independent	Upper-middle	6	2007
G07	21–29	Living at home	Lower-middle	8	2014
G08	20–25	Living at home	Upper-middle	7	2014
G09	25–30	Independent	Upper-middle	8	2014
G10	24–30	Independent	Lower-middle	6	2014
G11	20–29	Independent	Lower	7	2014

Source: authors' own design

two discussion groups with the same composition and same initial impulse, discussing the same subject, would have a comparable discourse (Conde, 2019; Ibáñez, 1979). In this respect, a change in only the context in which the groups were conducted would explain any differences between the discourse that appeared.

In addition to the recruitment process, in an attempt to find some amount of intragroup heterogeneity in each of the groups, as recommended by Ibáñez (1979), participants with different professional circumstances, studies and types of living arrangements where

intentionally sought out. To avoid biases, individuals were chosen who did not know each other and also did not know the group moderator. Moreover, the participants did not know the topic of the group discussion beforehand, in order to obtain a spontaneous discourse. The group conversations lasted between one hour and one and a half hours, and in all cases were recorded and transcribed.

For the analysis, the theoretical-practical line of the Sociological Discourse Analysis was followed (Ruiz, 2018), and it was ideal for the objectives of this study. Its basic premises are, on the one hand, that discourses are social and that participants in groups reproduce them according to the social position from which they are speaking. Therefore, discourses cannot be understood without looking at the context of their production (both the social position of the group and the historical context). The context translates into a mental model, with origins that are both cognitive and social. These models regulate the discursive production and reception. Moreover, this occurs flexibly, based on the interaction between the participants (van Dijk, 2008), but always in relation to the social position held by the participants. Additionally, all discourse forms part of a system of discourse; in other words, one argument always corresponds to another, even if this is not explicit in the conversation (Conde, 2009). To avoid losing this totality, the school recommends that the text not be segmented or any content analysis (statistical or thematic) be performed. For that reason, the texts were not codified, as is common in other currents like grounded theory, and attention was paid to all the details, not only to what was said, but also to what was implicit in the conversation (Ruiz, 2014), the naturalness with which something was said, and the way that the group as a whole accepted this discourse (Ibáñez, 1979).

Specifically, the analysis done in this paper concentrates on narrative configurations (Conde, 2009). This consists of looking for and identifying the tensions, oppositions or conflicts in all the texts, in order to find and represent the types of basic social discourses in the subject being researched and to represent them with a figure or diagram that can order them in their entirety and connect these discourses to the context where they are produced and to the object of the study (Conde, 2009). To that end, and bearing in mind the aims of the study and the context (historically, but also the group profile), all the texts were analysed together, not the groups separately.

5. Findings

5.1. The dominant discourse: young people's employment problems

The link between leaving the family home and labour market problems was apparent from the very start of the 2014 discussion groups. The first and most spontaneous responses revealed that a steady job is perceived necessary for moving out of the parental home. Thus, the dominant discourse was to blame the economic crisis, job instability and unemployment. These constrictions meant that finding a job and leaving the family home appeared to be hopeless illusions for most of the participants.

What is noteworthy about the 2007 groups, carried out just before the start of the crisis, is that the dominant discourse at the outset was practically the same. Young peoples' experiences of the job market were responsible for the later age at which they moved out of home; they wanted to leave, but they could not do so at that time due to job insecurity and the cost of owning a property. The only difference was in unemployment; there was a general sense that the problem was not the lack of work, but the conditions of the job and/or the low salaries.

Ultimately, on both occasions the discussion was the same: young people were not leaving home because, simply, they could not afford to do so financially. Nevertheless, analysing their words carefully, we find two very different realities: an employment situation that in 2007 did not enable them to move out had, by 2014, become a desirable option which would allow them to leave the parental home. In the following two quotations, young people from both contexts discuss the minimum

wage they would need in order to live independently:

-Look, I have a steady job and I earn 1100 euros and I live at home because I can't afford to rent on my own. If I find somewhere to rent, I don't want to share, I want a place to myself and I can't afford that and I can't afford a mortgage either. It's just impossible [...]. Unless they raise salaries and start paying me 2000 euros, there's no way I can move out right now, and I've got a steady job. It doesn't matter whether you've got one or not....

(G04, living at home, lower-middle class, 2007)

-If I were paid a thousand euros [a month] and could afford to pay the rent, food, electricity and water, I wouldn't be living at home with my folks.

-And you don't need a thousand euros, 700 would be fine.

-Well, 1000 or whatever... enough to live on with dignity and in good conditions.

-That's right, to have enough to cover the basics.

(G08, living at home, upper-middle class, 2014)

The amounts they mention are striking; however, the most important thing to note is that when these young people talk about salaries, they are referring to the standard of living that they would expect, either explicitly ('enough to live on with dignity') or implicitly ('I want a place to myself'). In other words, the parameters of what is needed to live independently is the issue in these discourses – parameters that the crisis appears to have shifted.

In Fig. 3 we illustrate these parameters and how they have changed, drawing a continuum of circumstances that would facilitate leaving the family home: from the worst possible situation (unemployment) to the 'dream' job in terms of salary, stability and field of work. The differences in acceptable conditions, varied between both economic contexts and also varied as a function of the socio-economic class to which the young people belonged. However, though among all classes, they have eased these conditions since the economic recession.

This change in labour expectations is not trivial, since it illustrates that the late age of home-leaving both before and after the crisis cannot only be explained by labour and housing market difficulties. Indeed, even before the crisis, when labour conditions were better, young people still left home at a later age, since they had higher expectations with regard to work, among other things. This change in the necessary employment conditions for leaving home is linked to a more profound shift in what leaving home itself means (which we will explore presently), and in the different experiences between young people from different socioeconomic positions (following next section).

5.2. The evolution in understanding leaving home: from rupture to process

When the young people were arguing about leaving home, they were not only referring to freedom from a certain dependence on their parents, but were pointing at something broader: the idea they had of what it was to be an adult, and what it would take to reach that point (adulthood).

In the 2007 groups, the link between moving out and reaching adulthood was immediate. Leaving the family home was seen as the result of life events such starting a family. It was something that happened at a certain moment in one's life, and from which there was no turning back. Leaving the parental home meant having reached 'adult life'. In the 2014 discourses, given that the economic crisis did not allow long-term planning as before, the idea that one would definitely reach independence, faded. Leaving the parental home no longer represented a break with one's life as a young person, but was becoming understood as part of the transition to adulthood. What is interesting about the change of vision, from rupture to process, is that it goes hand-in-hand with changes in the imaginaries about the requirements of the post-

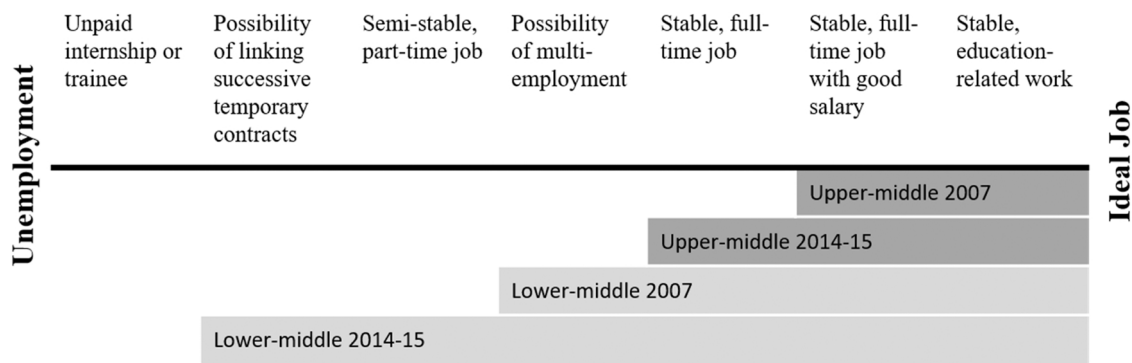


Fig. 3. Continuum of employment situations that would enable young people to leave home. Source: authors' own design.

leaving home phase.

Table 2 synthesises the requirements of both imaginaries: the *full package*, where leaving home meant a rupture, the dominant discourse in the 2007 groups; and the *flexible package*, in which moving out was seen as a process, dominant in 2014.

In 2007, when moving out was perceived as a break, given that it was a definitive step, the material and personal circumstances demanded to leave the family home, were greater: those of a 'real adult'. Those who left the family home aspired to what we call the *full package*, that is, a series of life conditions that were thought of as intrinsic to adult life (i.e.: living with a partner; being a property-holder).² Given that one of the requirements for adulthood was to start a family, they mentioned housing with several rooms for future children and the advantages of living in the suburbs of the city.

If they were unable to achieve that *full package* (saving up for a deposit and finding a partner), it made more sense to remain at home with the family, delaying the age for moving out. Intermediate or temporary situations as flat-sharing seemed unreasonable or illogical. For example, in the following quotations, we see that moving out without the *full package* made no sense, to the extent that young people would remain at home until a new property was fully furnished, turning down the option of sharing or other temporary tenancy. These arguments for staying at home encountered little opposition.

- As I was saying, I wasn't able to move out until pretty recently, two months ago. I've bought myself a flat, but I didn't have the money to even furnish it, and that's why I've only just left home.

(G02, independent, lower class, 2007)

Table 2
Idealised discourses on leaving home: from the full to the flexible package.

	Dominant in 2007	Dominant in 2014
Leaving home	Rupture: <i>full package</i>	Process: <i>flexible package</i>
Main objective	To start a family	To become independent
With whom	Partner	Flatmates/partner/solo
Tenancy	Home-ownership	Rent
Size	2/3 rooms (children)	Flat or room
Location	Suburbs	Centre
Seeking	Stability/security	Flexibility/adventure
Move again?	Not desirable	Desirable

Source: authors' own design

² The term 'full package' refers to all the requirements that are socially expected for leaving home (Table 2). Although other concepts can be used that synthesize this idea, such as 'all included' and 'full equip', 'full package' is used as it is a literal translation of the term used by the young people in the groups.

-[The group was discussing what the maximum monthly amount for a mortgage should be] ... that you can afford it. If you earn 1000 euros, then 400, 500 at most. Why? Because you might get married, you might want to treat yourself to something, a car – that's not a luxury, it's a necessity. And if you want to live in dignified conditions, you'd at least want a house, and not a box-room somewhere, or to be living with your parents.

(G03, living at home, lower-middle class, 2007)

In 2014, the vision of leaving home had evolved from being a dichotomous, 'all-or-nothing' situation, to a continuous, dynamic process that allowed for comings and goings. It was no longer conceived of as a consequence of other events, but assumed its own value. Living independently, even for a few months, would help them to grow and mature, a necessary experience. In other words, the leaving home transition was seen as an intermediate phase between being young and dependent, and a 'real adult'. Separating out leaving the family home from adulthood enabled the young people to lower the conditions necessary to take the leap. In the 2014 groups, what we have called the *flexible package* appeared, where situations that were unacceptable in 2007 had become acceptable by 2014, such as renting, living somewhere on a temporary basis, or sharing a flat.

-For me it was because of that, because I had more responsibilities. I knew that there was never going to be a 'right' moment, as it were, to move out. Cos lots of people said to me, like, 'hey, you've got no money, where are you going to go'? And I was like, 'I'm not gonna have much more in four years than I do now'. For me it wasn't... that, if I had to go back to my parents', I'd go – I'm lucky that they still support me if I need them to, not everyone is that lucky, it's true; but still, I didn't move out with the mentality that 'I'm leaving, I'll give it a try and I'll come home'. It was simply, 'I'm off, and once I've gone, I'll make my own way'. I needed that, to fend for myself.

(G10: independent, lower-middle class, 2014)

This quotation exemplifies this new way of understanding the leaving home process: feasible (without radical attitudes or maximalisms); geared to a more distant objective (full adult life); as a new, intermediate step (leaving and assuming responsibilities); not definite (allowing people to come and go); and, therefore, flexible. Aspiring to the *full package* appeared in the discourses as something old-fashioned, that made no sense; being an adult had become something different, achievable without fulfilling all the requirements of the *full package*. However, the discourse was also paradox, since we found the remnants of some of the earlier imaginary: feelings of longing for the *full package*, and envy of those who have achieved it.

[Speaking of a friend who had moved out]

-Well I don't know, I see it like this... when you have your own flat, your girlfriend also has a steady job, the two of you have a... I see there the life my parents have always had, and it's what I was saying, that cos it seems so far off, it feels strange. Not strange, but it's like... what did he do to get there? I don't know. It's like... there's some healthy envy there, I do envy him a bit, my friend who has his... his house... and a steady job, if I'm honest. It's enviable these days, why kid ourselves?

[Several participants] -Yes.

(G07, living at home, lower-middle class, 2014)

Even if the dominant discourse was based on flexibility, the expectation of the *full package* persisted. It remained latent, on the horizon but postponed for as long as possible, principally among the lower-middle class groups. This is the reason for the envy felt towards those who did manage to make it, especially in view of how unattainable such a goal seemed overall. Alonso et al. (2017) also found this paradox in the discourses, when they pointed out that 'the "conventional" past is at once idyllic and out of reach'.

The longing for the *full package* has not disappeared from the imaginary, but has become impossible to attain, so that young people redefine its value. We observe a strategic change, in which young people adapt their discourses and expectations to the new circumstances (Martín-Criado, 2014). If moving out represents a definitive break, the possibility of its going wrong and having to return home is felt as a failure in social terms. But if it is a process and an objective in its own right, the social pressure to achieve the *full package* and the sense of failure (going home is simply the end of an adventure) are reduced.

-So I don't know, I guess there are many ways of leaving home and it's not necessary to pin down a 'definitive' one, because I had to tell my parents, "I'm moving out", you know? And what you need to do is be clear about things, right? It's not, 'I'm off, I'm turning my back on you forever', you know? And it's not forever, but... look, 'I'm going to go and live for a while with my friends', yeah? Or... in my case, and I'm not saying I'll never come back, no... you've don't have to think that returning home is a failure, although it's hard, and parents don't have to either.

(G07: living at home, lower-middle class, 2014)

The economic crisis appeared to have made the requirements for leaving home more flexible, by disconnecting it from adulthood. Thus, an intermediate stage emerged, that not only allowed employment requirements to be eased, but also other conditions such as housing tenancy, sharing options, location choices, etc. – at least at the first step of the residential career. This change may explain why, in a more difficult economic context, the evolution in the rate of people living independently, showed (portrayed) in Fig. 2, did not decrease as expected.

5.3. The importance of family expectations in the socioeconomic structure

In all the groups, without exception, the young people agreed that they felt little social or family pressure to move out (it was only mentioned by those around 30 years old who were still at home). They were comfortable living at home and referred to what Gaviria (2007) called 'retention strategies', where parents pressure their children to remain at the family home to avoid the loss of social status:

-You say to them [parents], 'I'm moving out'. And they go, 'What do you mean?' And then, 'Don't you know how good you have it here?' [Everyone laughs].

(G04: living at home, lower-middle class, 2007)

However, the concerns and pressures that the young people felt, varied by social class. In this sense, young people's expectations about leaving home were shaped and affected by their family's expectations.

What young people expected of their future was mediated, to a great extent, by what their social environment expected of them. This had to do with different perceptions of the 'normal' age to fly the nest, but also about the way, form and conditions in which this departure should occur.

In Fig. 4, we summarise the evolution of the discourses by social classes. The axes represent the reference system of the discourses. The horizontal axis shows the distinction between the *full* and the *flexible package* ideals. The vertical axis represents the main pressures in the young people's social environment: to embrace a *professional career* or *start a family*, a distinction that Hernández and Susino (2008) already highlighted as key to understanding young adults' discourses.

If we look at the vertical axis, the discourses of young people from the lower-middle class are situated in the lower half of the figure, given that the social pressure they felt was to fulfil a life project consisting in financial independence and starting a family. In their discourses, one normally finds references to their parents' desires, so that they want to 'give them grandchildren', for example. Though the economic crisis appeared to have reduced this pressure, they still referred to the importance of 'fending for themselves' or 'winning their bread' – that is, realising an independent life project.

In the upper-middle class groups, situated in the upper half of Fig. 4, the most recurrent emerging theme had to do with social pressures from family or peers to embrace a satisfying professional career. This recurrence was not coincidence, since it was symptomatic of the position of those young people in terms of their life expectations.

-But it always happens with us, it's like... take my dad, he would say something like, 'Right, I've finished work', and my colleagues were talking about grades and what their daughters had to do, and I was ashamed to mention you because you failed some subject or other', you know? Or 'I'm ashamed because their kids have a career now and you're still in vocational training'. And I was like, 'But, what are you on about?'

-You're always being compared with others...

-With whoever's gone furthest.

-You're always compared with the most successful one.

(G08: living at home, upper-middle class, 2014)

The horizontal axis, which represents the *full* and *flexible package* ideals, reflects the evolution of the discourses over time. Young people from all socioeconomic positions have shifted to the right, becoming more distant from the *full package*. However, this does not mean that young people only had a single discourse about the *flexible package*, nor that the *full package* has disappeared completely from their discourses. In this sense, different life expectations introduced nuances for understanding the complexity of trajectories of young people from different social classes.

In 2007, among the upper-middle class groups, professional development was compatible with aspiring to the *full* leaving-home package, in work circumstances that may not have been perfect but that enabled long-term planning. Nevertheless, at that time, some young from the same groups (dashed box) had the opposite discourse. In 2007, those with a higher level of education had a vision closer to the *flexible package* and perceived the leaving home transition as a/the first step in a process. Renting or living alone had advantages for one's professional career, since it enabled job mobility and a different lifestyle.

-My own boyfriend believes I'm mad for thinking like this. He reckons that when I start working, both of us will save up to buy a house. Well, he's got another think coming. I've got better things to do with my life than feeling bitter and saving up like an idiot.

(G05: living at home, upper-middle class, 2007)

By 2014, among the upper-middle class groups, the idea of the *full*

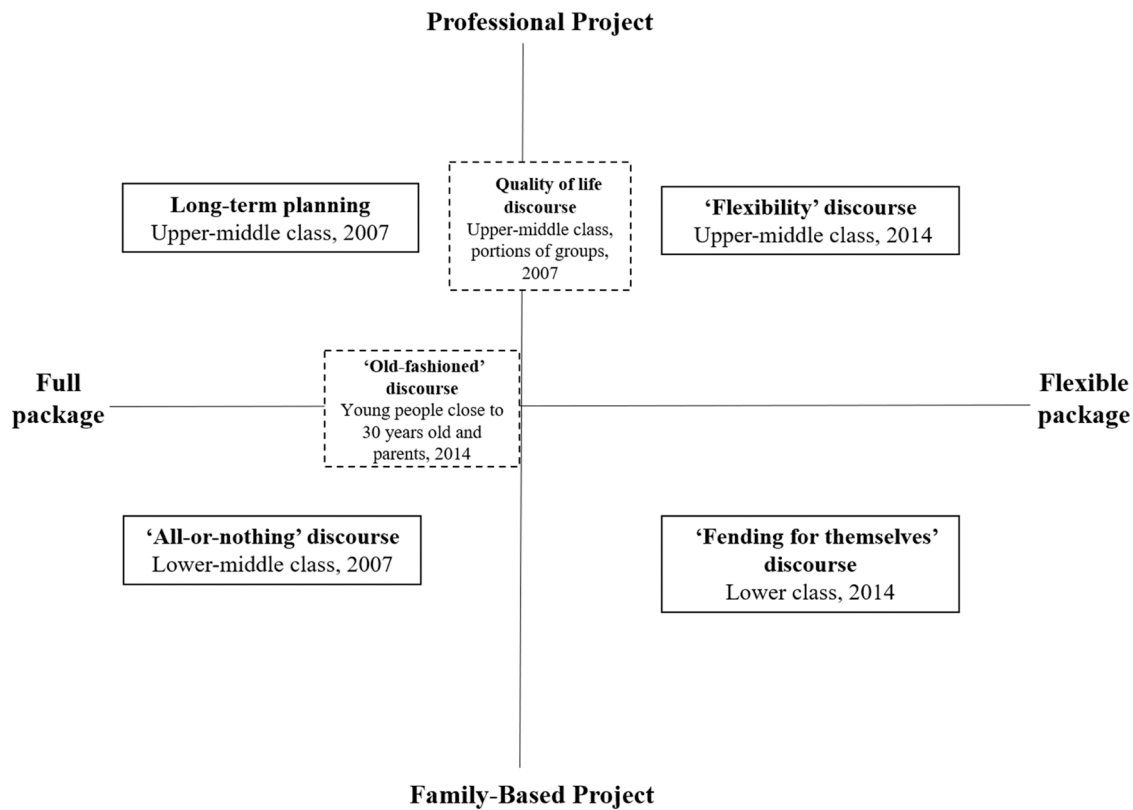


Fig. 4. The strategic space of young people’s discourses about leaving home. Source: authors’ own design.

package had been completely abandoned. It was only seen as an option for a second stage in life, linked to starting a family but disconnected from the leaving home transition.

Among the lower classes in 2007, there was no question about the *full package*: it was ‘all or nothing’. Among these groups, this discourse assumed greater force: without one’s own home, a partner and the aim of starting a family, moving out made no sense. In 2014, although the idea of starting a family had not been abandoned (since the link between leaving home and having a partner was more relevant for lower classes), the *flexible package* was the preferred option. Since the *flexible package* takes account of the new job market situation, their discourse was similar to that of the upper classes. However, for lower classes participants, this preference for the *flexible package* was not related to professional career development, but to: (i) the inability to attain the *full package* ideal; and (ii) the greater social pressure they felt to become fully independent.

However, in 2014, the idea of waiting until achieved the *full package* was still present in conversations. It appears as the ‘old-fashioned’ view of their parents and older siblings and not as an aspiration. Moreover, it aroused envy in these groups, as seen above. This contradiction with the dominant discourse reveals that there are no strict lines between the discourses; in fact, it is weaker in the social imaginary of the lower classes (Martín-Criado, 2014).

6. Discussion and conclusions

The objective of this study was to understand why home-leaving patterns in Spain have not changed as might have been expected after the economic recession. To address this contradiction, a diachronic qualitative study was conducted with discussion groups to compare the discourses of young people in 2007 and 2014. The results show a change in the discourses about leaving home and the expectations of young people. Before the financial crisis, young Spaniards leaving home

aspired to the ‘full package’: a good job and salary, to live with a partner and home ownership. After the crisis, the discourse became much more flexible and the expectations lower; they accepted leaving with a worse job, sharing an apartment and renting.

These results raise questions about whether the evolution of the discourses about home-leaving was a mere tactical and defensive strategy in the face of the financial crisis or represented a more profound and long-term change in the social imaginary about leaving home. Our position is that the Great Recession acted as a catalyst for cultural processes that were already underway and were reinforced, in some way, by the financial crisis. This has also been observed in other spheres (Castells et al., 2012). Ortega y Gasset (1923) argued that there are periods in which thinking evolves with the development of ideas that germinated earlier. The crisis fostered changes in the social imaginary of young people that were already taking shape; it seems to have scattered the values of the new capitalism (Sennett, 1998) among all the social classes.

However, a discourse of flexibility was already emerging among the upper-middle classes, those with higher education levels, before the crisis. Nonetheless, at that time they were only minority counter-discourses and they created tension and division in the groups (Martín-Criado, 1997). Most Spanish young people before the crisis seemed to resist accepting unstable, flexible and changing ways of life, clinging to the stability of the couple and of home ownership. In other words, this was an emerging discourse that highlighted new trends that in some cases were groundbreaking, an expression of social change (Conde, 2019). These emerging discourses, coming from the children of professionals with higher education, were the prelude to a cultural change that gradually extended to the other social classes, as occurs with many social behaviours – like consumer trends (Veblen, 1934) and fertility rates (Mooyaart et al., 2022) – that begin in the uppermost classes and then tend to become more widespread in the classes immediately below them.

In fact, it is surprising that before 2007, young Spaniards maintained

expectations about their residential transitions that did not tally with the restructuring of capitalism in recent decades. Expectations were higher, in part because the economic situation was better and they felt they could afford it (Hernández & Susino, 2008). In that sense, their discourses appealed to a practical rationality that suited the context of the housing boom and the rise in prices, easy credit and the euphoria of an apparently unstoppable economic growth (Castells et al., 2012). In this context, putting off leaving home and saving up to buy a house seemed the most sensible option (Fuster et al., 2019). By suddenly altering that context and not allowing them to carry out stable transitions, the crisis forced young people to be different, to assume subjectivities that they had tried to fight until 2007. This suggests that greater emphasis should be placed on normative and cultural factors, as opposed to strictly economic ones, when interpreting what took place in the period before the crisis. Thus, our results confirm the strong cultural and social component of the home-leaving trajectories highlighted by other authors (Casal et al., 2006; Comas, 2015; Moreno, 2016).

In other words, the financial crisis accelerated this process of cultural change, which is reflected in the discourse of flexibility, which was a minority discourse in 2007, and spread to all the social classes, becoming the new dominant discourse in 2014. This discursive change, in our opinion, explains the contradiction between what was expected to happen with the residential patterns of young Spaniards – delaying their departure from the family home – and what did actually happen – young people did not change the timing, but the leaving conditions (Moreno, 2016; Serracant, 2015). If they had adopted the flexible package before the crisis, they could have left home earlier. With the economic recession, young people experienced more economic difficulties. However, they did not apply the same logic in the new circumstances, but revised it to adapt to the changes. This is why the data on home-leaving age were contrary to what would have been expected if the logic had not changed, which would have led to young Spaniards delaying their home-leaving even more.

What we saw was a strategic mutation in the discourse (Martín-Criado, 2014), where young people were abandoning the classical cultural model of leaving home (Moreno, 2017) to move towards a flexible process, with lower expectations that facilitate moving out. With the ‘flexible package’, they developed fresh strategies, such as choosing to rent instead of buying (Lennartz et al., 2015; Moreno, 2016) and flat-sharing instead of living alone (Gil-Solsona, 2022). But they also redefined the meanings of leaving home, putting greater value on both ‘flexibility’ and ‘risk-taking’, and rejecting the previous ‘old-fashioned’ definition of the leaving home transition, which was seen as obsolete.

Therefore, what this analysis shows is a strategic (and flexible) response to adapt discourses to a specific situation in a context of change in two different timescales. One change was more structural and long-term (and largely affected the upper-middle classes), while the other was more situational (within the new discourses spreading to the lower classes). Since the lower classes appear to be even more amenable to unstable processes of transition, we may ask ourselves if they have discovered advantages to flexibility that they had not explored before, or whether it is more a question of a resigned attitude vis-à-vis the precariousness of employment and of life, similar to what other authors (Fuster et al., 2019; Hoolachan & Mckee, 2019; Kubala & Horení Samec, 2021) have observed in the disproportion between expectations and the real possibilities of meeting them. The existence of ‘nostalgia’ and envy in the discourses of the lower class groups in 2014 support the second option. It is possible that, as they have not been able to construct a solid narrative for their transitions (Kubala & Horení Samec, 2021), they have been forced to reduce their expectations so that their narratives make sense.

Two questions, then, remain open for further research. The first is related to the earlier dominant discourse, that of the ‘full package’, which still exists, in the background, but present. The second explores whether recovering from the Great Recession might entail a return to the previous situation in the dominant discourses, in other words, in the

ways that young Spaniards understand, experience and interpret their social world (not as it is objectively).

Moreover, our analysis focuses on the dominant discourses about leaving home, without going into other possible fundamental aspects, such as the changes in intergenerational relationships, or the role of family support in the transition. From this perspective, attention should clearly be paid to gender discourses, which is beyond the purview of this article. On the other hand, we must also look at geographical limitations, given that the analysis concentrates on urban Andalusia, with special reference to the metropolitan area of Granada. There are strong reasons to believe that the conclusions are valid for other urban contexts in Spain, chief among which is the widespread nature of the culture of property among young people prior to the crisis (Aramburu, 2015).

Our findings in the Spanish case have significant applications for the study of the transitions of young people and life courses in general. Economic transformations do not only produce situational or reactionary changes in the behaviours of individuals, but also produce cultural changes. Moreover, individuals do not always act according to the same logic, but can modify it to adapt to new situations. Regarding financial implications, they alone are not sufficient to explain the life trajectories of young people. Therefore, to be able to understand life courses in different contexts – historical and geographical – it is necessary to focus more on these norms, including in the period before the Great Recession. Cultural norms, after all, are not fixed, but are also subject to processes of social change.

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Conflict of interest

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