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Migration aspirations and preferences to stay in a Brazilian frontier town: tranquility, hope and relative endowment

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Abstract

What happens to migration when a town undergoes economic decline? Do residents migrate or do they stay? And what motivates this decision? This article answers these questions by analyzing the life and migration aspirations of young people – 17-39 age group – in Caracaraí, a large frontier Brazilian town on the edge of the Amazon forest that has experienced economic decline and stagnation since its heyday in the 1970s-80s. The analysis relies on 41 in-depth interviews (17-91 age group) and a survey with 267 respondents in the 17-39 age-group – who are frequently children of migrants who arrived during the economic boom. The article examines their view of the town, their life aspirations and prospects, and their aspirations to stay or to leave Caracaraí. While we observe 'conditional' migration aspirations, many young people show a preference to stay. Three interconnected factors shape this preference: life aspirations, the meaning of a 'good life', and hope in local development. Life aspirations often entail the pursuit of education within Brazil to take up public sector employment in Caracaraí. A 'good life' frequently involves closeness to family, the town's natural environment and its peacefulness. Many young people also hold hope for the town's development in the future. This article introduces the concept of relative endowment to describe how young people in Caracaraì feel privileged in relation to their parents' upbringing and to people in more peripheral areas, in big Brazilian cities and abroad, thus in relation to diverse reference groups. Moreover, relative endowment can be shaped by non-economic factors, such as what is a 'good life' and perceptions of development. This might explain why, even in times of economic decline, many young people may prefer to stay, despite the financial gains that migration could provide.

Keywords:

migration aspirations, preference to stay, relative endowment, economic decline, internal migration, frontier migration, hope, public employment, role of the state

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1. Introduction

This article examines the aspirations to migrate and the preference to stay among young people living in Caracaraí, a Brazilian town that has been undergoing economic stagnation since its heyday in the 1960s-1980s. The article examines how young people experience their town and how these experiences shape their aspirations and behavior towards migration. In doing so, it explores the complexity of migration decisions beyond rational economic explanations (Aslany et al. 2021; Carling and Talleraas 2016; De Jong 2000).

Caracaraí is a town on the edge of the Amazon forest in the state of Roraima, northern Brazil. From the 1960s to the late 1980s, Caracaraí attracted large numbers of internal migrants, many of whom are parents to today's young residents. Since the late 1980s, however, the local economy has provided few work opportunities other than in retail and the public sector. Neoclassical and human capital theories suggest that this setting would engender high migration as residents have much to gain financially from going to places where employment is secure and wages are higher (Harris and Todaro 1970). This would hold particularly true for young people for whom migration, which is an investment in human capital, can generate high long-term returns (Sjaastad 1962). Moreover, since many families have existing networks in other Brazilian states, we would expect migration to be facilitated (De Jong 2000; Massey 1990). Yet, migration has not been a major phenomenon in the last decades. What might keep young people in a place that seems to offer such limited economic opportunities?

An immediate explanation might be that young people in Caracaraí are *involuntarily immobile*, meaning that they aspire to migrate, but they lack the capabilities to do so (Carling 2002; de Haas 2021). Alternatively, young people could be *voluntarily immobile*. Young people may be committed to the town's development (Carling and Schewel 2018: 954; Schewel 2015), they might give importance to family over their personal career, and, in addition, migration might not be highly valued in their community (De Jong 2000). Some research has shown that people who experience well-being and life satisfaction are less inclined to migrate (Chindarkar 2014; Ivlevs 2015) and that a sense of hope might encourage people to courageously 'wait out' a difficult period, an action that can be worn as a badge of honor (Hage 2009). Conversely, the lack of hope toward future opportunities can motivate decisions to migrate (Kleist and Jansen 2016; Pine 2014; Vigh 2009). Other scholars have stressed that people's interpretations of social phenomena, such as environmental, economic and socio-political problems, are often filtered through a cultural lens that shapes people's decisions to migrate or to stay (Bal and

Willems 2014; de Haas 2010). It may well be that while an outsider evaluates a place as stagnant and void of opportunities, local residents interpret the situation differently and find much value in what outsiders find of little value.

This article analyses specifically **how young people in Caracaraí perceive their town and its features, how they relate these perceptions to their personal values and life aspirations, and how all these perceptions, in combination, shape their perspectives on migration.** It reflects upon both what may be thought of as 'objective' social change and young people's subjective interpretations of such change, to explain how they experience the world and behave (Lvova et al. 2018). Through this approach, I seek to understand how local residents, and young people, interpret the local economy and shape their aspirations. If we assume that young people want a career and financial success, we quickly reach the conclusion that Caracaraí has little to offer its young residents. But are a career and financial success what young people – in Caracaraí and elsewhere – aspire to? Recent research encourages us to question this assumption (see Hoskins and Barker 2017; Preece 2018 for interesting accounts on alternative perspectives on work). This research sought to first understand what young people 'observed' and 'perceived' about the local context, then explored their values and life aspirations and finally analyzed how all these perceptions, in combination, shape their decisions to stay or to migrate. This article also introduces the notion of 'relative endowment', which takes its inspiration from the well-known concept of relative deprivation experienced by non-migrants in relation to the improved living conditions of migrants and their families (Smith and Huo 2014; Stark and Bloom 1985; Stark and Yitzhaki 1988). In contrast, relative endowment is a feeling of relative privilege and well-being experienced by non-migrants in relation to several reference groups, such as past and present migrant groups as well as non-migrants who are perceived to be worse off. This article explores the conditions and mechanisms that engender feelings of relative endowment among young people in Caracaraí.

This article is embedded in a historical research of Caracaraí's development, its history of internal migration and its current administrative and socio-economic situation. Three data sources underpin this study: administrative reports and documents accessed through archival research; 41 in-depth interviews (17-91 age group); and a survey with 267 respondents in the 17-39 age-group. While the study set out to understand aspirations for any form of migration, including international destinations, most migration considered by young people in Caracaraí is internal, either intra-municipal, intra-state or inter-state. There are some movements across nearby Venezuela and Guyana and to other South American countries, but migration was most

often considered to the state capital of Boa Vista, a couple of hours drive away, or other Brazilian states and cities like São Paulo. This study collected valuable data on perceptions of destinations, but this is not included as it goes beyond the scope of this article.

After introducing the theoretical framework and methodology, this article presents a sketch of Caracaraí's historical developments over the past 50 years. The next section presents young people's individual perceptions of the town's conditions, their ideas of a 'good life' and their life aspirations. I then turn my attention to exploring young people's views on migrating from and staying in Caracaraí. The subsequent analytical section reflects on the interplay of life aspirations, values and hope and how these contribute to feelings of relative endowment, which ultimately influence young people's preference to stay.

2. Understanding the intricate relation between economic downturns and decisions to migrate

Four strands of literature are relevant to analyze the case of Caracaraí: the relation between economic downturns and migration; personal values and life aspirations and their influence on migration; perception of place over time and its relation to preferences to migrate or stay; and relative deprivation and its proposed counterpart, 'relative endowment'.

Economic downturns and crises create conditions that may encourage migration, such as poor labour markets, low wages, high unemployment and a decrease in public services and overall quality of life. Economic stagnation and persistent economic sluggishness have been observed to fuel migration (Carling and Talleraas 2016; Vigh 2009). Faced with unfavorable prospects locally, people may seek ways to sustain themselves and their families by seeking employment elsewhere. Under unfavorable economic conditions, migration might seem like a particularly good investment for young people who are eager to start their life as financially independent adults and who can offset the short-term migration costs through their long-term employment earnings (Sjaastad 1962). In difficult economic conditions, migration is also a household strategy as family members can look for work elsewhere and send remittances to support the household (Stark and Bloom 1985). Yet, not all places experiencing economic downturns have high migration levels.

To start, economic downturns have various degrees of severity, geographical reach and duration, affecting economies from several months to several years and impacting society and migration in very different ways. The Irish Famine in the 1840s was associated with the migration of about 1 million Irish, while the 1973-75 oil shock triggered a very brief period of

emigration from Europe (Green and Winters 2010). More significant was the oil shock's re-routing of North African migrants from European towards destinations in the Gulf. When Ecuador experienced an economic crisis starting in 1995, there was a decline of real incomes, high unemployment and the growth of extreme poverty in rural areas (from 20 to 30 percent from 1997 to 1999), which led to the growth of emigration and engendered an entire new migration corridor to Europe (Jokisch and Pribilsky 2002). In Uruguay, however, the frequent economic crises of the second half of the twentieth century did not affect emigration, which remained low. Yet, the 1998-2002 crisis triggered the emigration of highly educated young Uruguayan men in search of better labour markets (Pellegrino and Vigorito 2005). This reminds us that economic crises may influence not only the volume but also who engages in migration. These cases caution us not to assume that economic downturns automatically result in large migrations.

The economic downturn in Caracaraí is related to the reality of many frontier towns in rural areas of North and Northeastern Brazil. Starting in the 1970s, new frontiers emerged from the deforestation of the Amazon to host large-scale agricultural projects. There, migrants attracted by agricultural jobs arrived from various parts of Brazil to form agricultural frontier towns. Many of these frontier communities experienced 'boom-and-bust development' (Rodrigues et al. 2009). Frequently, big agro-businesses in a process of capitalist consolidation displaced migrant farm workers who were obliged to find other newly opened agricultural land or relocate to urban communities (Caviglia-Harris, Sills and Mullan 2013; Findley 1984). Often these frontier towns were abandoned. In some cases, however, the state invested in roads, schools and clinics and proper urban communities emerged with a commercial sector and government offices (Caviglia-Harris, Sills and Mullan 2013; Diniz 2001; Rodrigues et al. 2009), giving rise to what Diniz (2001) called the 'urbanized frontier'. Some of these towns display dynamic migratory patterns. In the state of Rondônia, 30 percent of the population in urbanized frontier towns migrated onward, almost three quarters of them seeking work and study opportunities in nearby areas (Caviglia-Harris, Sills and Mullan 2013). In Ecuadorian Amazonian towns, 27 percent of the young adult children of migrants had left, mainly to other rural areas, but also towards urban areas within the region in search of non-farm work in the 1990-1999 period (Barbieri, Carr and Bilsborrow 2008). In Caracaraí, the population has been growing and official figures show some migration, particularly to study in the nearby state capital Boa Vista – a two-hour drive from Caracaraí. Nonetheless, in Caracaraí migration

remains a minor phenomenon despite the fact that the town's economy has been stagnating for over three decades.

One possible explanation is that young people in Caracaraí may in fact aspire to migrate, but they lack the capabilities – that is the financial, social and cultural resources – to meet the costs and face the risks and difficulties of migration (Carling and Schewel 2018; de Haas 2021). According to the aspirations-capability framework, if people's desire to improve their livelihood through migration cannot be satisfied, they become *involuntarily immobile* (Carling 2002; de Haas 2014). In a further elaboration of this framework, Schewel (2015; 2020) argued that low migration propensities can be associated with people having neither the capabilities nor the aspiration to migrate, leading to what Schewel calls *acquiescent immobility*. Low migration aspirations may be linked to the overall inability to think of an alternative life elsewhere, but they may also be explained as *adaptive preferences*, as people rationalize retrospectively their limited ability to migrate and accept this situation by adjusting their migration aspirations (Carling and Schewel 2018). The voluntary switch to a preference to stay hides a coping mechanism – an adaptation or possibly resignation – to migration constraints.

Migration scholars tend to give few considerations to the fact that, even in unfavorable socio-economic contexts, people might have no migration aspiration out of choice, rather than due to constraints or limited aspirations (see de Haas 2021; and Schewel 2020). Negative perceptions shroud the non-migrant: on one hand she is incapable to aspire for a better life while, on the other hand, if adaptive preferences are at play, this is tainted with a veil of resignation. Yet, research shows that adaptive preferences may be the (positive) result of experience and learning (Bruckner 2009), such as learning about the difficulties experienced by migrants, or re-evaluating one's local conditions and realizing that there might be more advantageous opportunities locally than previously believed. The tendency to think that migration aspirations are the default in difficult economic circumstances has created a negative perception of stayers with their low life aspirations, lowered expectations and resignation. This had reduced the ability to see that "place immobility [is] an active process rather than a by-product of lack of mobility" (Preece 2018: 1784). Evidence of this is the fact that the perception of immobility as a failure has a generational character: while once settling in a place with a stable job, a home and family were seen as the standard, young people today are perceived negatively if they are not seeking financial, social and residential mobility.

One promising avenue in researching preferences to stay is to explore what people value and what may be their life aspirations. Previous studies have shown that some people may give much importance to a career and others to staying close to family and a preference for one or the other may influence migration decisions (De Jong 2000). Research on British young adults' aspirations for career and social mobility found that young people sought jobs that made a social difference and could give feelings of satisfaction and happiness, rather than seeking professional accomplishments and financial prosperity (Hoskins and Barker 2017). In disadvantaged post-industrial English communities, Preece found that "work may not feature in active motivations for mobility because it has less importance in people's lives" (Preece 2018: 1785-6). Moreover, migration did not offer greater prospects of long-term security and it raised the risk of "becoming a stranger" in another urban area where they would face similar precarious work and low wages, but they would not have the social network necessary to cope in uncertain financial conditions (Preece 2018: 1971). As a result, local residents found other ways to fulfill their lives, such as by being a parent and having good relations in the community.

Values and life aspirations do not exist in social isolation; rather, they are an expression of what people want for their future, which has been influenced by society (Mo 2018). To start, parents' experiences influence adult children and their life aspirations: the choices of British youth often reproduced the parents' preferences rather than reflecting independent ambitions for social mobility (Hoskins and Barker 2017). Within the community, social values influence young people's life aspirations and their understanding of well-being. From this perspective, we begin to understand why places that may not seem to have much economic value, may be held in high esteem. These places may be economically disadvantaged, but they can fulfill a number of non-economic life aspirations such as being close to family or to a rich natural environment. In her study of places of industrial decline, Mah (2009) suggested that "it is difficult to separate the "devastation" from the "home". In fact, such places highlight "positive potentialities of place" which include the ability to endure and shape change in the community and "the ability to work together and support one another in the face of hardship" (Mah 2009: 307). Moreover, place attachment, which is the "affective bond between people and landscape", reminds us that a place becomes imbued with culture, memories and family and community histories, which can make staying a preferred option even in dire circumstances (Mah 2009: 291).

Not only do people interpret society and place, but they also adopt long-term perspectives. In fact, life aspirations and values are embedded in a long-term assessments of place, past

experiences and future expectations (Mo 2018). This past-present-future approach is not commonly used in the social sciences, but is an established field of study in social psychology, which explores how perceptions of place and society may fluctuate over the long-term (Senyk 2013). Table 1 presents possible ideal-typical combinations of how residents could assess a place's socio-economic conditions and the associated reasons to stay. When thinking of the past and the present, residents might have positive views on the community's socio-economic conditions or negative perceptions of its sluggishness and stagnation. When thinking of the future, residents might feel hope for positive improvements or negative expectations leading to loss of hope or despair. Such positive and negative assessments of the future are associated with people's perceptions of future possibilities of change (open system) or highly unlikely change (closed system) (Smith and Huo 2014). These positive or negative evaluations of past, present and future are very crude, as the examples below will illustrate, but they help to explain migration or stay decisions within a long-term perspective.

Table 1. *Combinations of positive-negative perceptions of past, present and future*[1]

CASE	**Past**	**Present**	**Future**	**Reasons to stay**
A	+ (dynamic)	+ (dynamic)	+ (hope)	Opportunities, currently and expected in the future
B	+	- (sluggish)	+	Waiting it out; hope for the future; commitment to development
C	+	-	- (despair)	Place attachment; desire to endure and shape change
D	- (sluggish)	-	-	Place attachment; desire to endure and shape change
E	-	+	+	Opportunities, currently and expected in the future
F	-	+	-	Commitment to development; waiting it out

Cases A and E are associated with positive socio-economic conditions at present and expected future local opportunities, which are generally associated with staying, although that is not always so. Case B suggests that while the current conditions are not satisfactory, there is hope that things will turn around in the future, leading to willingness to 'wait it out'. For some, a genuine commitment to place and a desire to support the place's development may play a role. Cases C and D are most commonly associated with emigration. Yet, even in these cases, people might find value in place and might be committed to its long-term development, as people

[1] It is essential to keep in mind that while this table captures perceptions at the community level, at the individual level, some people might have a sense of well-being and life satisfaction even if the situation is sluggish or they may feel unwell and dissatisfied despite the positive socio-economic conditions.

might focus on what Mah (2009) called "positive potentialities of place" (2009: 307). Case F is not generally associated with migration given the viable socio-economic condition at present; yet, negative outlooks for the future may encourage migration or may result in the willingness to 'wait out' the expected downturn.

We find empirical evidence to support this framework. In the case of the post-industrial English communities described by Preece (2018), the present conditions and expectations for the future were sluggish, but their perspectives for better working conditions with more security in other urban centres were just as negative, which meant that migration was mainly associated with the loss of their local social networks. For these individuals, as well as the people described in disadvantaged communities in the UK and the US by Mah (2009) the cost of migration far outweighed its economic gains, even if the future looked bleak. In her study of post-socialist countries in Eastern Europe, Pine (2014) found that migration was both backward looking and oriented towards the future. People were influenced by socialism although they had no personal memory of socialism but instead had "a post-memory received through their parents' and grandparents' accounts", while their imagined futures were based on references to "good" and "bad" of the socialist past (Pine 2014: S96-S97). Pine's study also shows that, in some cases, migration was seen as the result of despair: family members had to migrate to ensure the future of those who stayed at home. Thus, faced with despair (case C in Table 1), migration provided hope for the family and for the migrant upon return (Pine 2014).

In his research of migration from Bissau, Vigh (2009) noticed that young people connected the country's colonial past, the war and the protracted crisis with their inability of 'having a life' in the present and lack of hope for the future. In their views, their lack of ability to fulfill the socially-expected rites of passage in Bissau meant 'social death'. Young people were filled with hope to fulfill their life aspirations and embody their social roles by going 'elsewhere' (Vigh 2009). This case emphasizes the importance of historical processes, social ties and imagined places and space in explaining migration (Vigh 2009: 93). In a similar fashion, Hage (2009) suggested that migration represents going to a space where people can see their life 'going somewhere as opposed to nowhere'. That sense of 'going somewhere' in life is the essence of existential mobility (Hage 2009), but 'going somewhere' may not necessarily entail physical mobility when a place offers ways to fulfill personal values and one's expectations of a good life. Thus, while lack of hope has been associated with people's migration decisions (Kleist and Jansen 2016; Pine 2014), even in those circumstances some residents might prefer

to stay, because they can keep close to their personal values, fulfill their personal goals, may experience 'place attachment' or be committed to improving the community.

Experiencing unsatisfactory living conditions have been associated with feelings of relative deprivation, which specifically arise as prospective migrants seek to achieve the higher economic levels displayed by migrant families (Stark and Bloom 1985; Stark and Yitzhaki 1988). Feelings of relative deprivation have been noted in research on life satisfaction: people's perception of their income in relative terms shapes a sense of life satisfaction or, alternatively, dissatisfaction and migration (Ivlevs 2015). The concept of relative deprivation includes two aspect: (i) the lack of an 'object' that a person wants and the feasibility for this person to obtain such 'object'; and (ii) the perception that another person or persons who are part of your social group have that 'object' (Mo 2018). Both points raise questions. First, what is the 'object' that people feel deprived about? Researchers might assume that people from a specific environment, such as a disadvantaged community, feel financially deprived when they compare themselves to others in the community or in other economically-flourishing communities. However, the 'object' of comparison may not be financial or it may be only partially financial. Second, what reference groups do people consider? The reference group functions like an evaluation bar, below which a person feels relatively deprived and above the person feels good (Mo 2018: 8). Research has shown that "a person uses the experience of others that are in her zone of "similar" or "attainable" individuals, as well as her own past experiences as the yardstick for setting goals for themselves" (Mo 2018: 9). Indeed, people do not seem to even compare themselves to better positioned groups even when they are exposed to them regularly, if they do not think they are in a similar 'zone' (Smith and Huo 2014). When we combine the flexibility of 'object' and 'reference group', it is then feasible for people to know that they are worse off in relation to those financially better off in the community, but they may still feel better off, or *relatively endowed*, based on other characteristics that they value, such as their community, their social connections, the natural resources, or the type of life they enjoy. People living in economically disadvantaged British towns knew that they were worse off than others with urban jobs, but they were better off because they could access their social networks and a safety net which they valued (Mah 2009). A similar phenomenon was noted among Moroccans whose migration aspirations diminished as feelings of relative satisfaction emerged during the 2008 financial crisis, which hit many European destinations particularly hard (Jolivet 2015). While in the Moroccan case, potential migrants felt relatively endowed in relation to their potential migration destinations, which were very familiar due to longstanding migration

networks, people may feel relatively endowed in relation to other reference groups that span over space and time as we will see in the case of young people in Caracaraí.

The analysis of the life and aspirations to stay of young people in Caracaraí requires the combination of a macro-historical analysis of the town and an exploration of values and aspirations, leading to an analysis of their behavioral responses. This approach stems from the conviction that decisions to migrate or to stay are oriented towards the future, but also look backwards, through local narratives and personal experiences, and the present hopes and dreams of young people.

3. Methodology

This article is based on research that started in February 2019 with fieldwork in March-April 2019 and February-March 2020. In March-April 2019, the objective of fieldwork was to reconstruct the social and migration histories of the town of Caracaraí from the 1950s to the 1990s. The data collection included archival data of Caracaraí's population, public services and employment and 20 interviews of older residents of Caracaraí, between the ages of 45 and 91, who recalled the early days of the town, its phases of development and social change up to the 1990s.[2]

Having gained a good understanding of the social history of Caracaraí and the migration patterns up to the turn of the century, the fieldwork in February-March 2020[3] studied shifts in the living conditions in the last 20 years up to the present and the aspirations to stay and migrate among young people. The data collected included official demographic statistics, a survey and interviews. Given the absence of official statistics at the town and municipal level, I relied on population statistics from the national censuses of 1990, 2000 and 2010. We carried out a survey and collected a total of 281 questionnaires, among which 267 were completed by 17-39-year-old residents attending remedial primary school, high school, technical school or a vocational school for adults in Caracaraí.[4] Ultimately, we could use the data of 264 questionnaires. The respondents were physically located in Caracaraí's three secondary-level

[2] This phase of field research resulted in a Master thesis and a working paper written by Naiara Rodriguez-Pena (2019; 2020).

[3] The fieldwork took place as the COVID-19 pandemic started to become visible in the news, but it had not entered discussions concerning the future of local young people. It would be only a few weeks later when Manaus and its surrounding areas, including the state of Roraima, became a COVID-19 outbreak area and went into lockdown.

[4] I received the precious assistance of a highly engaged and tireless research assistant, Dexter Olympio, whose inter-relational skills enabled the rapid implementation of the research activities.

schools: (1) Escola Estadual Presidente Castelo Branco, (2) Escola Estadual José Vieira de Sales Guerra and (3) Escola Estadual João Rogélio Schuertz Militarizada.[5] The survey questionnaire asked for gender, family status, year and place of birth, place of birth and education of parents, home ownership, housing conditions, real estate ownership of family members, assessment of educational and health services and support for the poor in Caracarai and in Brazil and social media usage. Migration related questions included whether parents, siblings and other family members resided in other parts of Brazil and abroad and whether the respondents visited them. Table A1 in the Annex presents the main demographic and socio-economic data on the respondents and their parents. In the end, respondents were asked what they would do if, ideally, they were given the necessary papers and/or financial assistance to live and work elsewhere, to which they could answer 1. Stay here; 2. Moving within the municipality of Caracaraí; 3. Move to another town or city in Brazil, specify_____; 4. Move abroad, specify your preferred destination _____; 5. Other, please specify _____." Table A2 in the Annex presents a summary of the aspirations to stay and to migrate and the demographic characteristics of respondents and their parents.

Lastly, I conducted 21 interviews with young people, 19 of whom had also completed a survey questionnaire.[6] The interviews enquired further about perceptions of life in Caracaraí, educational, health and employment options, their perception of what is a 'good life' and what it means to be successful, their life aspirations and their migration aspirations. I had the interviewees' completed questionnaire at hand during the interview, which allowed me to ask for clarifications, particularly about their migration aspirations. This mixed approach was an effective way to interpret the survey data. In particular, interviews provided information about what young people value in life, how they perceive their town and, most of all, a strong ambiguity felt by young people towards migration. Interviewees quoted in this article have been given pseudonyms to protect their identities.

Before continuing, a brief note on the survey data is necessary. The survey data was meant to gain clarity about migration aspirations among Caracaraí's young people and the personal characteristics that might be associated with decisions to stay and to migrate. However, the dataset had to be used with caution, specifically the data on migration aspirations, which did not allow the nuance necessary to describe 'conditional' migration aspirations that emerged as

[5] For students under the age of 18, we collected parents' written authorization before the survey.

[6] No questionnaires for Jackson (I34) and Giovanni (I35).

comments on some questionnaires and in the interviews. This finding confirms existing critiques on the collection of survey data on migration aspiration (Carling 2019; Carling and Schewel 2018) and points to the value of combining quantitative and qualitative methods when studying migration aspirations and migration decision-making processes. For a further elaboration on the collection, meaning and usage of this survey data, see Appendix A.

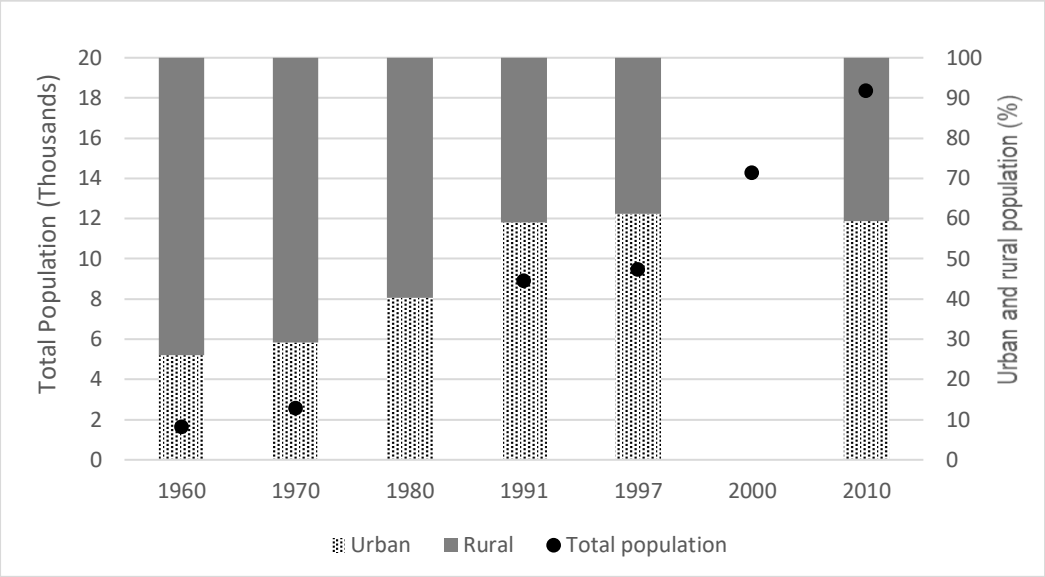
4. A brief social history of Caracaraí

In the early 1960s Caracaraí was a small community that counted about 17 houses, a telegraph and a health post (I2). The town's rapid growth was linked to its location on the *Rio Branco* (White River), its port in the town centre and the rapids at Bem Querer, about 30 kilometers northeast from today's town centre. The *Rio Branco* is a tributary of the *Rio Negro*, which flows into the Amazon river in Manaus, the capital of the state of Amazonas. While the state of Roraima remained a peripheral Brazilian state, Manaus was already an important trading centre in 1960, home to more than 340,000 inhabitants. Caracaraí was the compulsory stop for river boats that travelled between Boa Vista and Manaus: cattle transported from ranches in northern Roraima were off-loaded at Bem Querer and re-embarked after a few days at the port of Caracaraí to complete their journey to Manaus; and manufactured goods travelled in the opposite direction from Manaus to Boa Vista and northern Roraima. Complementary to port-related activities were extractive forest activities, such as harvesting Brazil nuts and rubber, hunting and the preparation of animal skins, all products sold to traders headed to Manaus.

Riverine transport was and remains seasonal as the dry season prevents navigation. During the dry season, any commerce took place over unpaved roads through the forest, requiring weeks for goods to be transported. During the rainy season, however, river transport and commercial activities boomed, encouraging the arrival of temporary migrants from other parts of Brazil who worked as dockers, traders or small business owners. Since the 1960s, the municipality's population expanded rapidly and became concentrated in the urban centre (Figure 1). Three major development underscore this rapid demographic shift.[7]

[7] For a detailed account of the historical economic changes in Caracaraí see Rodriguez-Peña (2019, 2020).

Figure 1. *Total population of the municipality of Caracaraí and disaggregation of urban and rural population, 1960-2010*



Sources: Demographic censuses of 1960, 1970, 1980, 1991 (IBGE Servico Nacional de Recenseamento 1960; 1970; 1980; 1991); 1991, 2000, 2010 and 2019 data from Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatistica[8]

First, starting in the 1960s, large companies established a base in Caracaraí. Among these were Petróleo Brasileiro S.A, commonly known as Petrobras, the regional gas distributor Fogás, and the beverage distribution company Antartica. Employment in these companies entailed a qualitative jump: while all other work in Caracaraí was informal and in some instances based on barter, these companies introduced a steady wage income. Second, in the mid- to late-1960s infrastructural development boomed with the construction of the BR-174 road and its full completion from Boa Vista to Manaus in the 1990s, and the construction of housing, urban infrastructure and public utilities networks for electricity, water and sewage. These public infrastructural projects were funded by the taxes paid by the large companies mentioned above. Caracaraí's growing population required more services, which resulted in the third major development - the expansion of the public sector and public employment. Teachers, school bus drivers, health care workers, construction workers, engineers and administrators filled the ranks of public employees. The public sector became consolidated and, when Roraima became a state in 1988, public employment became regulated by a public civic exam process (*concursos públicos*). Starting in the late 1980s, however, the large corporations and the construction

[8] Data available on the City Population website https://www.citypopulation.de/en/brazil/roraima/ accessed on February 20, 2020.

companies began to leave Caracaraí[9], leaving an economic void that was partially filled by public employment. As road networks and transportation improved, public employment enabled a new form of mobility: public sector employees based in Boa Vista commuting daily to Caracaraí.

Given the recent foundation of the town, Caracaraí's residents are largely internal migrants (Figure 2). Most migrant were agricultural workers from other Brazilian states, where living conditions were extremely difficult. Interviewees described stories of not having enough food to eat (28-year-old Bruna, whose parents are from Amazonas; 32-year-old Gilberto whose parents are parents from Piauí and Alagoas; and 18-year-old Cristina whose mother is from Maranhão), having no access to any services such as schooling and health provision (37-year-old Giovanni whose parents are from Baixo Rio Branco, in the Amazon forest), large families (26-year-old Patricia, whose parents are from Amazonas and Maranhão), being orphaned or being given away by parents (34-year-old Wesley, whose parents are from Maranhão; and 23-year-old Eloisa, whose parents are from Amazonas). The stories reveal how, for many parents, Caracaraí was a place of great opportunities. For instance, Patricia indicated that her father, from Maranhão, had many siblings and food was scarce. In Roraima, however, "my grandma landed a job, while my grandpa opened a bar." Not only did this allow them to have a better life, but it also allowed their children, once adults, to get married and start their own families. Among their parents and grandparents' generation, Caracaraí was described as a place that provided land, housing and stable jobs (I5, I14, I17, I18, I19).

In 1970, about 54 percent of the residents were non-migrants (IBGE Servico Nacional de Recenseamento 1970), suggesting that internal migrants had high birth rates and large families, as often indicated in the interviews. Over the 1991-2010 period, internal migrants continued to represent an important portion of the population (Figure 3),[10] coming from many Brazilian states, primarily from Amazonas, Maranhão, Pará, Ceará, Piauí, Goiás, Rondônia and Rio Grande do Norte.[11]

[9] It appears that this was linked to lower tax rates elsewhere, such as in Rorainopolis. Moreover, the timber industry was no longer sustainable once the land in proximity to Caracaraí was declared part of national parks. As a result, the timber industry moved to Rorainopolis, which has nearby forest areas that are not protected by national park status (I34).

[10] This figure does not account for intra-state migration, that is migration within the state of Roraima.

[11] These are the states from where more than 100 internal migrants arrived in Caracaraí in 2010.

Figure 2. *Inter-state migrations to the municipality of Caracaraí in the 1960-1980 period*

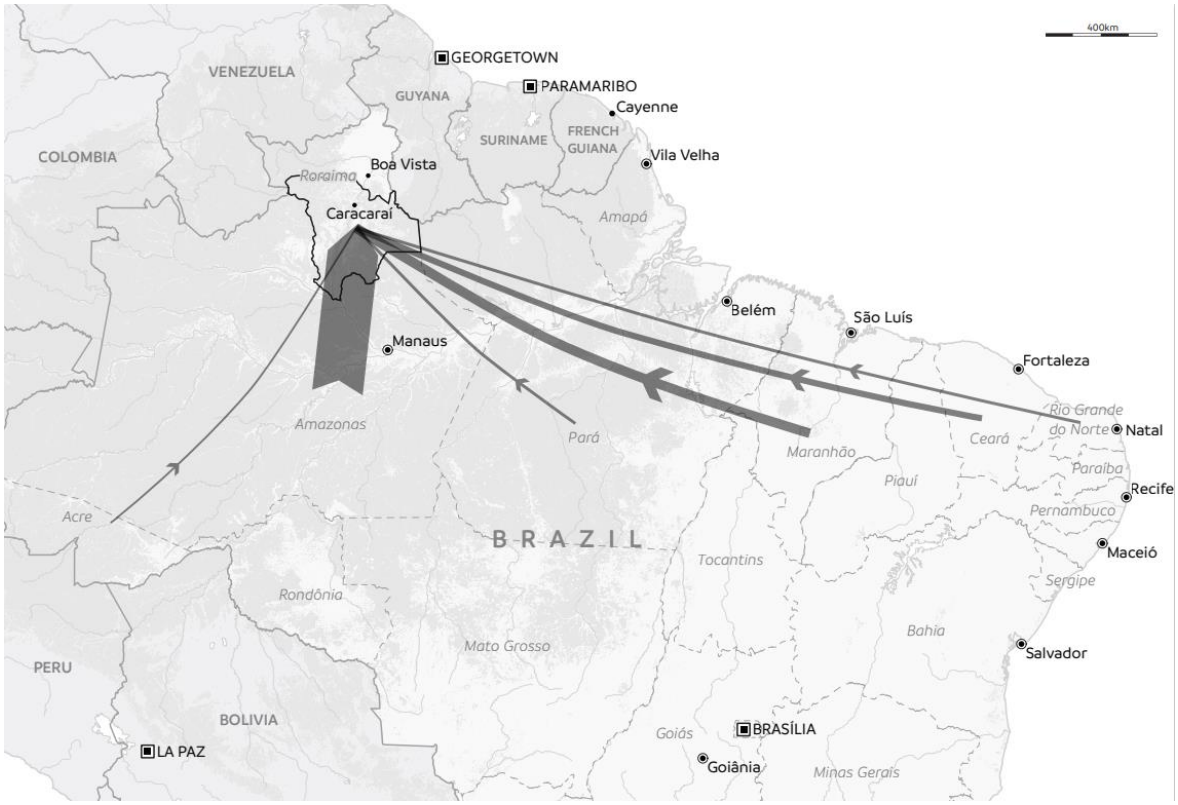
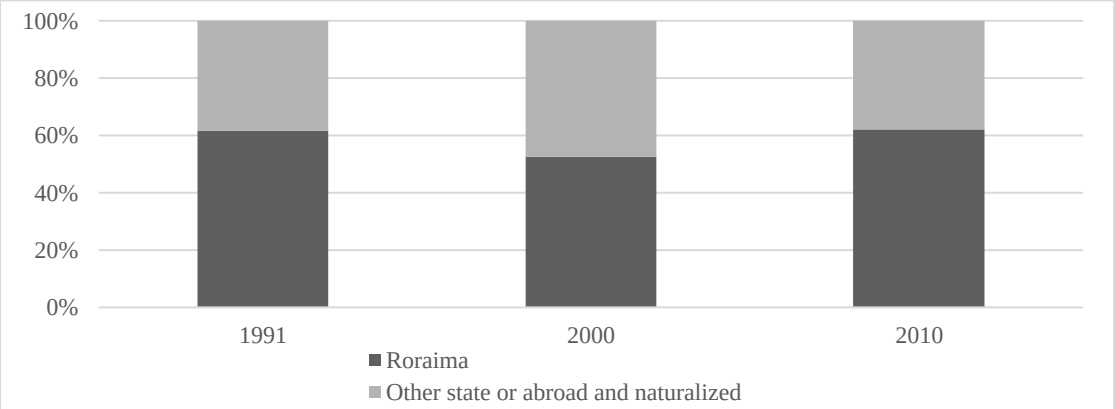


Figure 3. *Population in the municipality of Caracaraí, by birth within/outside state of Roraima, 1991-2010*



Sources: IBGE, Censo Demográfico 1991 table t3.37, 2000 table t404102, 2010 table 4.4.3.1

While the economic downturn from the late 1980s resulted in some emigration, many of the migrants settled permanently and contributed to the natural growth of the town's population

(Rodriguez-Pena 2019). Caracaraí's population continues to be very young, with over 77 percent of the population below 40 years of age in 2010. Data from the 2000 census provides a snapshot of the population's activities and where they exercise them (Table 2). About one third of the population between 15 and 64 was neither working nor studying, although this figure does not reflect the preponderance of informal casual work in the community. The data also shows low level of mobility particularly among the 15-24 year-olds, although there is little doubt that these figures undercount mobility.

Table 2. *Work and study circumstances and location, Caracaraí, 2000, absolute figures and percentages*

	Work or study in the municipality of residence		Do not work or study		Work or study in another municipality in Roraima		Work or study in other Brazilian state		Work or study abroad		**Total**	
	%	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%	number
0-14 years old	63,4	3 804	36,4	2 183	0,2	10	0,0	-	-	-	100	5 997
15-24 years old	68,7	2 031	30,9	914	0,0	-	0,3	10	-	-	100	2 955
25-64 years old	66,5	3 292	33,3	1 646	0,2	10	0,0	-	-	-	100	4 948
65+ years	31,3	121	68,7	266	0,0	-	0,0	-	0,0	-	100	387
Total	64,7	9 248	35,1	5 009	0,1	20	0,1	10	0,0	-	100	14 287

Sources: IBGE, Censo Demográfico 2000, table t404201

Since 2000, migration to Boa Vista and other Brazilian cities seems to be more common than these figures suggest. In fact, standing in contrast to these very low official figures are very high migration aspirations. About 70 percent of respondents aspired to migrate, a figure generally found in places with high emigration (see Appendix B for the general characteristics of respondents with migration aspirations). This discrepancy can be partially explained on one hand by people not registering their movements in official records and, on the other hand, by a significant presence of conditional migration aspirations for which there was no room in the survey questionnaire (see Appendix A). In the end, both sets of figures are unreliable, exposing the great value of qualitative interviews through which young people could explain their views on the town, their own values and life aspirations and their thoughts on staying and migrating. This is what the next sections explore.

5. Young people's perspectives on Caracaraí and their own prospects[12]

5.1 Local development, employment opportunities and future changes

A number of questions in the survey and in the interviews aimed to clarify how young residents perceive the town, its infrastructure, services and society. Specific questions on local education and healthcare[13] revealed that while young people rated education services as average (37 percent) or good (22 percent), healthcare was generally perceived negatively - about 55 percent felt it was bad or very bad and 29 percent felt it was neither good nor bad. However, they felt the same way about the quality of education and healthcare in other parts of Brazil, suggesting that, in their opinion, the quality of services in Caracaraí reflected overall Brazilian standards.

Older people indicated that educational services expanded over the years, particularly starting in the 1970s with the opening of more schools and the hiring of more teachers (I17, I18, I19); however, health services remained inadequate, with nurses often taking care of sick people as they did in the past (I18). Today Caracaraí has a hospital and several clinics for basic services, but there is no maternity ward and any serious emergency requires transport to Boa Vista. Many young people believe that services were better in the past,

> *The city is kind of abandoned, you go to a healthcare center and there's nothing there. And even UERR* [Universidade Estadual de Roraima] *that used to work here woosh, stopped working because it was practically new and was already falling apart.* [I32]

The closure of the branch of the state university (UERR) in 2019 was indeed a big loss for young people, who could no longer earn a university degree locally. While some young people took online courses, others commuted to the university in Boa Vista, about an hour and half drive away, or went to other cities much further away, such as Manaus. This, however, was not affordable for many families (I35). The reasons surrounding the closure of the university branch are unclear: the branch only offered degrees, in Law, Mathematics and Computer Sciences, which did not always match young people's interests or local needs (I35); some also suggested discipline issues among students who were not sufficiently prepared for university-level studies and dropped out over the course of the program, resulting in a handful of graduates (I27). With such low graduation figures, this university branch was financially unsustainable.

[12] Most material in this section is from young people, although whenever relevant, I interjected data from interviews with the older generation. The different data sources are indicated clearly.

[13] Respondents were asked "What is your opinion about the following aspects of life in Caracaraí: The schools are….and the healthcare is…" and they could answer: 1. Very bad; 2. Bad; 3. Neither good nor bad; 4. Good; 5. Very good; 6. Do not know/not applicable. They were then asked to rate their opinion on schools and healthcare in Brazil generally.

Interviewees overwhelmingly perceived that the jobs in town were insufficient for its residents (I23, I24, I25, I29, I27, I33) and most stated that the public sector was the main employer in town. It supported teachers, the police force and various posts in public works and administration. The dominance of public employment was so great that, in some cases, interviewees perceived that this was the only sector of employment in town. When asked about employment opportunities in Caracarai, 32-year-old Anita stated,

> "*There are none. You either enter through public service exams or you get an opportunity to work in the townhall, apart from that there's nothing."* [I33]

Curiously, both options are in the public sector. It would be naïve to think that the interviewee meant that there are no other jobs in absolute. Rather, the jobs that provide a good income and stability are in the public sector. However, these jobs are difficult to access either because they involve passing an official civic exam, which requires a high school diploma at a minimum, or they require a political connection, as suggested by 25-year-old Monique,

> *Here in town, it's the town administration, but you'll always need to have someone who will get you inside it, you'll need some friendships.* [I29]

Because of the competition in getting public sector employment and the importance of political connections, interviewees indicated that even getting an education was not sufficient to find secure employment in town (I21, 22, 23, I24, I29, I31, I32, I33, I37). In fact, a large segment of the population relies on low-wage odd jobs in traditional activities such as fishing, commercial activities such as retail shops and diners, and a few larger companies such as the timber company. Some respondents felt that one was lucky to get small informal jobs – house cleaning, gardening and clearing plots (I37, I40, I41). Júlio, a 29-year-old man managing a local diner described the situation as such,

> *Well, I think the whole state doesn't have many job opportunities, the jobs that we have here in town are in supermarkets, diners, and the payment is usually bad, because most of them pay worker on a daily basis, and the daily wage here in town is around 35 reais. With 35* reais*, a person can barely buy food to survive. Other thing that offers jobs here is the commercial activity and also fishing, most people here are fishermen, thanks to the river here they can provide for their families.* [I36]

Both informality and precarious living conditions are not new phenomena in the town. Bruno, a man in his late 70s, indicated that since he arrived in Caracaraí at the age of 13, he worked in different jobs always without being officially employed. However, older residents indicated that poor people lived better in the past than today. Vitor, a 63-year-old internal migrant from Barcelos, Amazonas, who came to Caracaraí when he was 20, also remembers that the quality of life was better for the poor in the past (I5). Today, the poor rely on government benefits of

various kinds such as the "social credit" of about 120 reais per month for the unemployed (I37), the *"auxílio pescador"*, which is also unemployment benefits for fishermen who are not allowed to fish during the spawning period and the "*bolsa familia*" for underprivileged families (I37, I38). Interviewees indicated that these benefits as insufficient for a family to survive, leading families to resort to hunting and fishing to supplement their diets.

Although both the older and the younger generation had positive stories about the early years of economic growth and negative comments about the town's current services, its job market and its governance, citing corruption and the need of good governance, the majority of interviewees had relatively positive expectations of the town's future. Two potential activities were mentioned: the hydroelectric plant at Bem Querer rapids, and eco-tourism. The hydroelectric plant project was uncertain: a vocal opposition disapproved of it because it would flood the area around the rapids, which holds historical and sentimental value for long-time residents. Moreover, the interviewees were ambivalent about what this project would mean for the town: while there was some hope that it might be a possible source of long-term employment and stimulate the town's economic regrowth, most people were rather cautious in their assessment, citing that this would repeat the short-term growth that Caracarai experienced with the construction boom in the 1970s. Moreover, interviewees referred to other hydroelectric projects in Brazil where growth of the nearby communities did not materialize.

Eco-tourism, the other potential area of future growth, already took place in the region. However, it was run by outsiders who by-passed the town of Caracaraí, precluding any locals from benefitting from this high-end form of adventure tourism. A small airport was built in the late 1990s just outside of town to support tourism, but political disagreements led to the dampening of these efforts. Still, older local residents still held much hope for the development of tourism,

> *"With all this favorable geographical position, one of our problems is that we cannot exploit this. We live in one of the most preserved places in the world in terms of nature. We live here almost in the center of the Amazon rainforest." (48yo André, I6) and "Today what Caracaraí has, it isn't seen much, why are people coming from Manaus to Caracaraí, with tourism, tourism here, is immense." (45yo Augusto, I9)*

Young people shared these visions of Caracaraí's potential rebirth and showed cautious hope for positive change in Caracaraí. Some focused their hope on potential new ways of thinking. Jackson, a teacher originally from Amazonas, first said, *"I'm used to saying Caracaraí's fate is extinction!"*, and then continued,

> *"I believe that, at some point in history, intelligent people will enter our town's politics, will see its potential, and will make it achieve that potential, because there are ways for Caracaraí to grow. The big problem is that, there are people who don't have the population in mind, they think about themselves. So, my hope is that someone will appear with the population in mind, as a group, not only the individual." [I34]*

Such mixed feelings were common. Young people indicated that while the population generally relied too much on the government, there were also many people who took matters in their own hands to improve their life. This shift towards a less paternalistic attitude was described by 19-year-old Thiago, who expressed recent ideological changes,

> *"Well, there has been an evolution in the way of thinking of people here lately, and it has helped the town's development as a consequence, our development. We want to spread it, changing the mindset is what we need to change Brazil!"*

When asked about hope for a better future, this same student, an aspiring philosophy student stated,

> *"I do have hope because there are still young people and according to…Socrates used to say "Wisdom doesn't belong to the Gods, we must act on the young people's thoughts, for they are the hope, they can change."* (I41)

Overall, while across generations the evaluation of the latest development of the town and its services was rather negative, affected by a sense of decline of what was once good, both the younger and the older generations saw potential for positive change because the town still had valuable (commercially-exploitable) features, such as a good location, its nature, local folklore and a good community with an apparently evolving mindset. Opportunities for change existed, either through more infrastructural development, eco-tourism, and invariably through political and administrative improvements. While continuing to put much value on the need of a good public administration with the interest of the population at heart, young people also turned the responsibility on the community and themselves, as clearly expressed by 19-year-old Marcélo, who was in his last year of high school and said *"We need to learn how to better choose our representatives."* (I40). People felt they had a right to a better administration, but they also held the duty to pursue it actively and take responsibility for their own betterment and that of the community. The reported switch from a passive to a pro-active attitude in the community's political future was experienced in itself a source of hope for positive change.

5.2 Personal conditions, life aspirations and a 'good life'

In the survey, young respondents were asked to indicate their perception of their own family's financial standing in relation to other households in the community.14 47,5 percent of respondents perceived to be overall the same as most others, 15 percent perceived to be worse or much worse, while 33,1 percent perceived to be better, and 2,7 percent much better off than the rest of the households in the community. Having a university education increased one's self-assessment, but not having a degree did not exclude having a very positive self-assessment. This can be explained by the fact that in Caracaraí commerce has allowed financial success among people with low educational achievements. Nonetheless, a university degree opens opportunities to take civil service exams and access public employment, which gives long-term stability, further increasing a sense of relative well-being in the community.

One of the two major aspirations expressed by young people was a wish to become self-employed by owning a business or growing their existing business, such as a diner (I36, Júlio), a copy and stationary supply shop (I25, Pedro), a hairdresser (I28, Eloisa) and a pharmacy (I38, Miguel). The second main aspiration was to obtain a degree. Unsurprisingly, for many young people getting more education is the pathway to the public sector,

> *My friends, who are also students, they dream of going to college, they want a good college, they want a good job, a chance to do civil service exams, these are what they are aiming at.* [I40]

In some cases, interviewees indicated that people wanted any public job, rather than aspiring for specific types of job, although generally the professions considered would be teachers, joining the police force or becoming a public administrator (I22, I29, I36, I37). Many young people who graduated and aimed to have public work were unemployed, like 24-year-old Cíntia (I37), and Monique,

> *I have a practical nursing license, I'm waiting for a vacancy on a civil service exam, it's been more than 6 years since the last one was published, I've been waiting. I'm waiting to see if I'm selected.* [I29]

Such attitude is not unique to Caracaraí as it has been observed in other parts of the world, such as in the Middle East, where young people remain voluntarily inactive while waiting for good

[14] This is an effective way of capturing subjective social status and possible feelings of relative deprivation (Smith and Huo, 2014).

jobs in the public sector (Ramos 2019: 490). Other youngsters aimed for manual jobs, such as those that contributed to the growth of the town in the 1970s-80s,

> *They say... I think many are expectant that the municipality starts some construction, then there will be some vacancies, people talk a lot about it. We see that a lot, when they start the pavement of the streets, there are going to be crowds of people asking the mayor for jobs, people want to work.* [I35]

Despite the possibility to request transfers for some public jobs at the federal and state level, young people in Caracaraí would rather wait for a concurso in Caracaraí. Aline (I30), suggested that she would take a placement in another location, such as in Rorainopolis, a couple of hours from Caracaraí, and would then request to be transferred to Caracaraí over time, but all others did not show intentions of seeking public employment elsewhere. Why was this the case?

We can find some suggestions from young people's descriptions of what it means to have a 'good life'. We asked specifically what young people valued and what influenced their life decisions, and also asked to reflect upon what a good life meant for their parents in their youth. Cíntia stated that for her a good life was "financial stability, for sure" (I37) and Aline indicated that a good life meant having enough money to be independent and not needing help from others (I30). In most cases, however, interviewees put economic factors after other social factors, or failed to mention financial factors stressing instead tranquility, peacefulness, stability (emotional, physical and financial) and comfort. While it was not very surprising to hear Giovanni saying, "A good life for me? It's to enjoy the peacefulness here in Caracaraí with my family first of all", since he was a 37-year-old man with a young family, it was surprising to hear Alessandra, a 21-year-old single woman, answer,

> *"For me it is... I like the calm life, I have been to other places like São Paulo and also Teresina. I do not like the busy life. I don't like the idea that one has to get up early, go straight to work, get back home tired and always living a busy life."* [I21].

In fact, Alessandra had good grades in school, her family could support her studies away, and she had relatives in other Brazilian states, including a cousin studying medicine out of state. Despite her possibilities and connections, Alessandra had no interest in leaving Caracaraí. Her dream entailed opening her own cosmetics shop in Caracaraí and the only travel she envisioned was to purchase goods to sell in her shop and some travel for pleasure. For some interviewees having security and stability was important, for instance owning a house and a car. However, this was generally merged with ideas of a balanced life, as 26-year-old Patricia indicated,

> *Well, I believe it's a stable life. For example, having a way to provide for themselves, owning a house, transportation. But I believe the most important is, before financial status, you need a stable life both emotionally and physically.* [I32]

Marcélo (I40) intended to be an agronomist after completing his last year of high-school and pointed out very clearly the low priority of symbols of prestige, while stressing the importance of self-achievement,

> *A good life is a life in which you can choose things by yourself that you can easily get. So a good life is not about a luxury house, money to spend, do you understand? A good life is to know you can get something you can enjoy due to your hard work, knowing that you achieved that. A good thing for me is reaping the fruits of your hard labour.* [I40]

When asked about what they thought were their parents' ideas of a 'good life' in their youth, some interviewees indicated that for their parents it meant having a job and the means to provide for the family, matching exactly their own definition. In other words, these young people valued a life similar to what their parents valued. Many interviewees, however, reacted impetuously and explained that their parents had very difficult lives and they struggled to have enough food. These young people expressed a strong sense of empathy for their parents' hardship. Cristina said, Well, my mother came from Maranhão, and a good life there was having enough food. [I39] and Monique stated, "They only lived, they didn't have a plan" [I29]. In contrast, their own vision of a 'good life' implied the ability to make potential plans to study and secure a stable job via the civil service exam, and in some cases to travel and experience life elsewhere. They could aspire to a life beyond basic needs, which was unconceivable for their parents. This provided a generational contrast: their parents could not afford to have big ambitions but, thanks to their parents' efforts, they could now plan for a life beyond basic subsistence. By drawing this sharp distinction between their own stability and opportunities and showing empathy towards their parents' hardship, these young people showed reflections upon their relative endowment.

To explore further what young people valued in life, I also asked young people about their role models and what they valued about them. This information confirmed the previous findings as the interviewees mainly valued achievements through one's own hard work, a behavior they saw in their own parents, relatives or acquaintances (I27, I28, I29, I33, I39). In a couple of occasions, interviewees stressed how their illiterate parents were able to achieve what they wanted in life, against all adversity. Interviewees also stressed their admiration for strength of character (I30, I35), honesty, responsibility, humbleness (I26, I30, I35), simplicity,

wholesomeness (I40), being ‘a levelled person’ (I32, I40) and having a ‘well-balanced life’ (I21, I26). Not only were role models generally people in their family and in the community, rather than celebrities or high profile public persons, but the traits young people admired revealed communitarian attitudes. Despite the young people’s higher ambitions than their parents, their vision of a good life remained largely unchanged and could be realized in Caracaraí, where they could remain close to family and could practice the communitarian disposition they so admired.

It is important to stress that young people were not romanticizing life in Caracaraí: young people saw the negative and positive sides of town, as represented by Anita, who said that Caracarai could not provide “education, a job”, but that it provided “peacefulness, a good level of comfort […]. And the crime rates are low, right?” [I33][15] and Gilberto who said, “I love this city. However unfortunately the city development is being a very slow one.” [I31]. Neither would it be correct to state that young people retrospectively rationalized their lack of opportunities by saying that they appreciate the simplicity of life.[16] There was no resignation in their appreciation of simple things in life, such as the resources that nature provides, the value of their family, and the strength, admiration and inspiration that they gain from being around family and friends. It appears that these young people were transmitted certain values from their parents and, since they were children, they heard about Caracaraí as a place that offered their parents good opportunities which gave them, their children, a more stable life. And this town still retained valuable features and a tranquil environment. How did these perceptions of the town and their own aspirations influence decision to migrate or to stay?

[15] The reference to crime rates is in relation to other Brazilian cities discussed as potential destinations, such as São Paulo. This was another aspect that contributed to a feeling of relative endowment of Caracaraí in comparison to other cities where crime was high.

[16] While it is that some interviewees justified retrospectively their lack of opportunities, the interview included four questions that were meant to cross-check inconsistency. The interviewees’ answers were consistent. The questions were: about the town and what it offered, about their life aspirations, about the good life, and about the role models and what they admired about them.

6. Should I go?

6.1 Conditional Migration

Some young people made it clear that they wanted to leave and they were ready to do so, because there was not much for them there (Francisco, Aline and Cristiana).[17] For some, migration was a necessity in relation to pursuing further education, work opportunities or more generally to have a better life (I23, I26, I27, I29, I31, I37, I39, I41). This sentiment was captured well by Anita, who was already set to migrate to Boa Vista to pursue her nursing degree,

> *I think that for someone to reach their objective here, they have to leave to somewhere else, either Boa Vista, Manaus, or even abroad. You just need someone to (financially) aid you so you can study. […] Yes, I plan to [migrate] because to achieve my studying objectives, since it's not possible here, the only way is to leave. If it was up to me, I would stay. […] I intend to return because my intention is to work here.* [I33].

The pursuit of migration for education was a recurrent theme. In particular, leaving to study medicine was singled out. Boa Vista seemed to meet the needs of most students, although studying in Bolivia, Argentina and Paraguay, where medical school was also cheaper than in Brazil, was seen as the only option for those who could not pass the entrance exam (I34). Beyond education, migration was also thought of as a smart pro-active choice when things got difficult financially or someone felt that their plans were not progressing as they wished. Pedro stated,

> "*There are situations in which you need to have a bit of a sharp mind. There are cases in which the job market is full, just go to another city and try a new place."* [I25]

On many occasions, however, sentiments about migration were nuanced with caution and conditionality. For Thiago, first he would have to master the language and then secure a scholarship (I41), while Francisco (I27) stated, *If I couldn't find anything else, I think I would accept it, that is if I was single.* Júlio saw potential benefits from migration, but stated, *No, it's not in my plans, but they are flexible, if anything happens, if there was great job offer, then…* [I36]

When asked whether migration from Caracaraí was necessary to achieve personal goals, most of the interviewees pointed to the fact that different goals might need different solutions (I31). Moreover, they stressed that individuals must take responsibility for their life and migration is

[17] These statements matched with migration aspirations and more concrete migration plans.

neither necessary nor sufficient to have a better life. Rather, it is an option. Bruna stated, *Well, it depends on what the person's objectives are, as there are opportunities that you do not need to go away and others you need to go away* [I26]. Patricia was also skeptical of those who try to change their life through migration,

> *It's not specifically that you say, "I'll go to that place, and there my life will change", but if you look to the city's structure, here, although it doesn't have much to offer, but nothing is independent of the person's actions. If they believe they can. Here it's like that, you've got to invest a lot, you've got to be patient.* [I32]

6.2 Leaving to Return

In some instances, migration was paired with the idea of return. Some young people pointed to a trajectory that started with leaving to obtain a degree, possibly gaining some work experience and then returning for public employment. Evidence shows that many migrants intend to return at first, but they may postpone their return and eventually never do so (Carling and Schewel 2018). When asked whether people return after migrating from Caracarai, perceptions are that people do so (I24, I27, I35). Sometimes return is a call to help the town's development and the local population [I31], but often return is based on gaining public work, as Aline clearly stated,

> *Here is what I intend to do: I would try to be approved on the first civil service exam that I apply to, then there will be a state's one and I intent to apply for it as well and pass it too. And I really hope it* [these steps] *will let me to come back here, if it has job vacancies for Caracaraí.* [I30]

Return sometimes is linked specifically to the family and the desire to be close to them or the obligation to take care of older parents [I33]. Monique put it simply,

> *The ones that come back, it's because they really…it's like this, talking about me, if I went to study in Boa Vista, I have my mom here, so, as soon as I finished there, I'd want to come back here, to come work here* [I29]

Some young people expressed veiled doubts about the viability of their future return, as expressed by Cristiana, an 18-year-old high school student very determined to become a surgeon,

> *Sometimes I think about it. If I do succeed in graduating in the field I want, there wouldn't be job for me here. I cannot come back here until I can have a job in my specialty.* [I39]

And indeed, interviewees also indicated that sometimes people had better opportunities elsewhere, which kept them away from Caracaraí. In some cases, however, people who did not intend to return returned because they failed to secure better opportunities elsewhere.

7. Or should I stay?

7.1 The preference to stay

Young people frequently showed a preference to stay. Giggling, 18-year-old Joana, said, *I like it here* [I22] and Miguel, 38, said *I'd prefer living here.* [I38]. Others explained that they appreciated Caracaraí's peacefulness, its small-city life, low crime and proximity to nature, which could be handy during moments of hardship, as Giovanni indicated,

> *Sometimes we are short of money, but we can go to the shore and fish, and you have something to eat. This is the reason I don't want to leave.* [I35].

One could notice a commitment to help people, to see the town develop, to expand their business. While waiting for the situation to improve, they could enjoy what the town had to offer. Júlio, if given all necessary documents and financial means to migrate, would do this,

> *As I've said, I would go, but I want to make this clear: if I had the required financial means, if someone came to me and said "Hey, I'll make an investment in you, here is some money", I would start a business or buy a business here, so that it would create job opportunities for other people here, so that I could somehow make my contribution to the town where I live in. […]I would invest here because I believe in our town, I believe that if we invest here, we'll be helping each other.* [I36]

Patricia contrasted the shortcomings of the town with its positive aspects, as she expressed that she still preferred Caracaraí to other places she saw,

> *Maybe if the town improved, it could be different, but speaking of a place to live, of all the towns I've seen I would rather live here, because it's calm, even with the crime rates.* [I32]

The preference to stay was not based on the lack of awareness of the benefits of migration. Giovanni, who has a sister in the US and has many relatives who studied away from Caracaraí and returned, stated,

> *I can tell you that 90% of the ones who left, improved their lives. In my family, the ones who left succeeded in life. There are two doctors, an engineer, a lawyer, all of them successful. They studied for that. All of them left to study. One graduated Medical school in Manaus and the rest of them graduated in Boa Vista. But I love Caracaraí and I don't intend to leave, it's so peaceful here.* [I35]

Despite the employment insecurity, the 'good life' they valued was possible locally. Migration might result in higher incomes, but it almost certainly would result in a busy life with more work than social interactions and the beauty of nature. Career and job aspirations existed, but in most cases they were not a driving force for mobility, reflecting Preece's findings that work may not be a driver of migration when it is not of high importance in people's lives (Preece 2018: 1785-1786). Many young people expressed love for Caracaraí and little appreciation for

urban lifestyles and expressed feelings of privilege in comparison to those who spend most of their lives working and do not have time for social relations, for appreciating nature and enjoying a well-balanced life. Their future, however, rested strongly on securing public employment and in the hope for Caracaraí's economic re-birth, both of which largely depended on political will, as expressed by Cíntia, *My plan is to have a good life here, I think it is very possible to do so, but it would have to be through a public sector job.* [I37]

7.2 Limited capabilities and lack of courage

Despite the presence of young people who aspired to migrate, some either could not or did not feel strong enough to do so. In a few interviews, young people indicated that migration was not always possible for people with limited financial resources. Even studying in nearby Boa Vista was impossible for some families who could not support the cost of living in the city (I23, I29, I31, I33, I35). A couple of interviewees were very frank in revealing that staying in Caracaraí was due to their lack of courage. Wesley, 34-year-old, candidly stated, *I do not have the courage to do it. See, I have never gone to other places. I am a little frightened. I am delighted that some people leave Caracaraí and manage to succeed. [I24]*

Anita, who was scheduled to start living and studying in Boa Vista, seemingly referred to her fear of living in big cities,

> *I have a (girl)friend, actually two, that went in the beginning of this year to São Paulo. And they invited me to tag along. But I'm not brave enough to go, I think it's too dangerous, very dangerous. It's one of my fears, right? So whoever wants to go, it's a fear of mine that doesn't let me go.* [I33]

International destinations were seen as particularly risky, as reported by this resident who spent a few months in Ireland to learn English,

> *I have talked to many people about it previously and everybody told me "Hey don't go", "It's dangerous", "Life here is okay", "It's not necessary to go there", "You will spend a lot of money and you will never get the same amount of money", for me the money isn't the most important thing in life. I don't think like them.* [I38]

Among those who perceived migration as too risky, there were also those with rather negative views about the town, but would then sigh, *"No, I'll hang on, until…"* [I29], revealing possible *acquiescent immobility*.

8. Aspirations to stay and relative endowment

Research on aspirations to stay suggest that three factors can explain immobility: factors that retain, those that repel and 'internal constraints', such as social norms that shape gender roles and parent-child relations (Schewel 2020). In Caracaraì, retaining factors included proximity to family, friends and a social network; the presence of nature, a beautiful river, a small, quiet and relatively safe and peaceful urban environment, and a 'slow life'; valuing personal traits such as humbleness, honesty, wholesomeness and endurance, which they observed among friends and family. In contrast, there were shared feelings of repulsion for city life and characteristics they associated with the city: its busyness, lack of balance between work and social life, distance from family and friends and detachment from nature. Internal constraints were also visible, for instance among people who showed fear of the outside world and saw migration as a high risk, or those who felt that return after migration was necessary to take care of aging parents. Overall, the ensemble of these factors point of a crucial revelation: by not singling out financial security and stability as the most important aspects in life, **young people in Caracaraì already possessed many things they valued and saw no strong need to migrate**.

Schewel (2020) also considers the critical question of whether staying, or immobility, might be associated with cognitive constraints, specific social norms or "low" aspirations (343-344). To the Western observer it may seem odd that young people in Caracaraì gave low priority to employment and careers and some aimed for 'any' public job. Is this lack of ambition, "low" aspirations, a weak capacity to imagine alternative livelihoods or resignation to whatever secure job comes their way? The parents of many of the young people in this study had low levels of education, which may have stunted their children's professional ambitions. However, I want to stress that linking high aspirations to a successful career and a higher income is a major assumption embedded in neoliberal thought. Even in prosperous societies where young adults have access to a good education and employment opportunities, and where individualistic career projects are encouraged from a young age, young people show aspirations that go beyond prestige and high incomes, preferring instead jobs that can fulfill their personal and professional happiness and feelings of satisfaction (Hoskins and Barker 2017). In Caracaraì, young people did not shun the thought of a career, but they valued other aspects of life that gave them a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment and often **they were not willing to sacrifice these aspects of life for a career**.

The preference to stay was accompanied by feelings of hope, which were present in two ways, at the community and the individual level. At the community level, conversations revealed **hope for future developments** based on Caracaraí's past economic boom and its unexploited future potential. Young people seemed to have learned this appreciation and hope from their parents, who had largely experienced Caracaraí as a good place that offered them a steady job, a piece of land, a house, schools and health services, unlike their places of origin. It was common for interviewees to make statements that compared the town's past to the present, followed by expectations of the future. Gilberto was not alone in his conviction when he stated, *"I do believe Caracaraí has potential. I dream about it. This is my dream, lots of development, lots of opportunities, and happy people."* While for some hope was centred around the potential construction of the hydroelectric plant and the development of eco-tourism, in general hope was associated with potential entrepreneurial investment and politicians' securement of federal and state funds to invest in the future development of the town. The political decisions to halt various previous attempts to jump-start eco-tourism suggested that this might not be an easy road. However, there was hope for better political representation, less corruption and for greater democratic representation.[18] Visualizations of the possibilities of change ignited hope in both the young and the older generations and made staying a logical long-term investment. While migration studies often show how young people have no hope for improvements and feel that their only way to progress is migration, even when it implies high risk such as through irregular migration (Vigh 2009), many young people in Caracaraí felt that by staying, by enduring and 'waiting it out', in the long-term they were in fact 'going somewhere' (Hage 2009) (case B, Table 1).

Yet, young people were not completely putting their fate in the hope for the town's development. They also held realistic **hopes at the individual level**. What enabled the 'waiting it out' was the hope of opening a business or securing a stable and financially remunerating job through **public employment**. Securing a public job entailed patience and the right political connections and young people in Caracaraí showed the willingness to wait for the *concurso* and, despite their criticism of corruption, to accept a political recommendation if necessary. The links between public work and lower migration aspirations has already been noted in other

[18] A couple of demonstrations took place in front of one of the schools as parents of school-children asked for better school conditions, including air-conditioning in classrooms in prefabricated buildings that, even when we conducted the survey in the evening, had temperatures above 28 degree centigrade.

parts of the world such as in the Middle East and North Africa (Ramos 2019), French Guiana (Osburg 2020; Vezzoli 2015) and Italy (Vezzoli 2020).

The last insight from this research is **the role of relative endowment** in shaping preferences to stay. In conventional relative deprivation studies, the focus has been on the relative deprivation among non-migrant households who observe the higher socio-economic levels of migrant households. This ignores that people value more than income and socio-economic achievements and they might have multiple groups of reference. Jolivet's (2015) showed that young Moroccans compared their situation to that of European societies hit by the 2008 economic crisis and drew relative satisfaction as they compared their relative well-being 'here' rather than living in an economic crisis 'there'. Young people in Caracaraí referred to several reference groups not only in different places but also across different timeframes.

First, young people showed feelings of **inter-generational relative endowment** as they referred to their parents' livelihood in other Brazilian states. Young people knew they had greater stability and set of opportunities than their parents at their age. They were aware of their parents' upbringing in large families in very precarious conditions, limited or no formal education in rural areas of Amazonas, Maranhão and other Brazilian states. Their parents could not aspire to study and have a profession, but in Caracaraí they found a relatively developed town with work opportunities, schools for their children and a fairly open community where they could access land and a house. Young people were conscious of their relative security and well-being in comparison to their parents' early life.

Second, **present cross-spatial relative endowment** was visible as young people related the present quality of life in Caracaraí to other places, both rural places in the municipality and cities in Brazil and abroad. When looking at more rural areas, such as *Baixo Rio Branco*, people noted the difficult living conditions in small villages far away from schools, health centres and all other services. While the bright lights of the city had some attraction, there was no strong desire to live an urban life that they associated with stress and crime. Caracaraí was a nice in-between: it offered the proximity to nature and its beauty and tranquility, its resources and the health and education services that fulfill most needs, without the stress and worries of big cities.

Foreign destinations, when considered, were also associated with fast lives and excessive work.[19]

This inter-generational and cross-spatial perspective generated feelings of relative well-being and relative endowment, which translated in a rather positive and optimistic outlook on life in Caracaraí. In simple terms, life in Caracaraí was simply not that bad; actually, their life in Caracaraí was already much better than it had been for their parents in their origin community, than it is for people in more rural areas or in large crime-ridden busy cities. What they could gain through migration – studying and gaining a profession – was worth it only if in the end it could bring them back to this town, where calm, security, family and nature were constant and a fish in the river was always available during rough times. Because mobility is not just about the possibility to gain but also about the certainty of what you lose, relative endowment made migration feel relatively risky and rather unappealing.

9. Concluding insights

A number of migration theories suggest that young people living in a place with few opportunities would have high migration aspirations and eventually engage in migration, particularly when economic stagnation endures. Moreover, it would be expected for a 'young' town with 'shallow roots', such as Caracaraí, to engender a culture of migration, with young people disengaged from local activities and in pursuit of migration opportunities elsewhere. Young people in Caracaraí challenge these assumptions and their reflections help to see the complex decision-making process that underlies migration decisions even in cases that seem clear-cut to migration theorists.

In Caracaraì there is no visible culture of migration. Certainly, some young people indicated that they would leave the town right away if they had better opportunities to study or work elsewhere and others had adventurous ideas. Frequently, migration aspirations were conditional on a good job, a safe destination and a sufficient income to support the family. Most often, however, young people in Caracaraì showed aspirations to stay. A number of retaining factors, such as closeness to family and nature, kept them in Caracaraí, while perceptions of city life as too busy repelled them from potential migration destinations.

[19] Foreign cities were hardly considered as places of residence; instead, they were places of discovery, adventure and excitement such as New York and Chicago, or the romantic idea of Paris.

By adopting a historical and societal approach, this article shows how people make sense of their social circumstances and why they might not see benefits in migration despite difficult economic conditions. By going beyond 'objective' indicators, we observe that residents' perceptions of place differ from what outsiders, who rely on socio-economic indicators, might perceive. This reveals differing value systems and distinct life aspirations and values that can explain limited forms of migration in Caracaraí as in other places with limited socio-economic opportunities. This forces us to reflect upon common assumptions such that young people share universal ambitions for career and high financial returns and invite us to investigate the extent to which these ideals are embraced around the world. People make sense and assess what is happening around them by considering *the history of place* and *the past of its community,* their own *life aspirations* and personal vision of a *'good life'* and their assessment of the *potential future changes in situ*. This finding reminds us of the importance of adopting a 'time perspective' that considers people's dynamic ways of accounting for events and interactions of their past, present and future. It also provides further evidence of how feelings of hope tied to positive outlooks on the present and future locally may reduce migration aspirations.

The article also sheds light on feelings of relative endowment and how they may be formed from comparisons to several reference groups: the lives of parents in their young age, people in other more deprived communities nearby, in other parts of the country and even abroad. Ultimately, relative endowment gives value to one's living conditions and plays a role in shaping young people's preference to stay.

While all the evidence collected and reflections put forth in this article helps us explain preferences to stay, it is essential to conclude with a cautionary note. The factors shaping the aspirations to stay or migrate interact and may even contradict each other. A process of internal tension and negotiation may take place as young people might have life ambitions that require what is available beyond the town, generating migration aspirations, while at the same time they experience a combination of appreciation of local features and suitable local opportunities, hope for the future and a feeling of relative endowment may make staying attractive. Changes in any of these conditions would lead to the reappraisal of mobility preferences. This ambiguity is visible in the conditional nature of migration aspirations among many young people in Caracaraí which provide evidence of the possibility for change and the readiness to consider migration as a viable option should local developments or public employment not materialize, resulting in their inability to fulfill aspirations locally. Yet, as long as young people in Caracaraì feel that the town can offer them what they perceive is a 'good life', then migration might be

viewed more as the certain loss of what they value than for the possibility of what they might gain.

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Annex

Table A1. *Main characteristics of survey respondents*

Category	Subcategory	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	127	48,1
	Female	124	47,0
	Other	10	3,8
	…*	3	1,1
	Total	264	100,0
Year of birth	1980-1989	29	11,0
	1990-1999	75	28,4
	2000-2004	159	60,2
	…*	1	0,4
	Total	264	100
Place of birth	**Town of Caracaraí**	**144**	**54,5**
	Municipality of Caracaraí	8	3,0
	Another municipality in Roraima	58	22,0
	Another state in Brazil	52	19,7
	Another country	2	0,8
	Total	264	100,0
Mother's place of birth	Town of Caracaraí	68	25,8
	Municipality of Caracaraí	4	1,5
	Another municipality in Roraima	16	6,1
	Another state in Brazil	**160**	**60,6**
	Another country	2	0,8
	…*	14	5,3
	Total	264	100,0
Father's place of birth	Town of Caracaraí	58	22,0
	Municipality of Caracaraí	3	1,1
	Another municipality in Roraima	20	7,6
	Another state in Brazil	**160**	**60,6**
	Another country	3	1,1
	…*	20	7,6
	Total	264	100,0
Highest degree	Primary education (6-14yo), not completed	17	6,4
	Primary education (6-14yo), completed	36	13,6
	High school (médio, 15-18yo)	**166**	**62,9**
	Technical (15-18yo)	32	12,1
	Superior (university, 18-22)	10	3,8
	Post-graduate	1	0,4
	…*	2	0,8
	Total	264	100,0
Mother's highest degree	Never enrolled in any formal education	14	5,3
	Preschool (up to 5yo)	11	4,2
	Primary education (6-14yo), not completed	61	23,1

	Primary education (6-14yo), completed	37	14,0
	High school (médio, 15-18yo)	**72**	**27,3**
	Technical (15-18yo)	14	5,3
	Superior (university, 18-22)	10	3,8
	Post-graduate	8	3,0
	Master	1	0,4
	Doctorate	1	0,4
	I do not know	29	11,0
	…*	6	2,3
	Total	264	100,0
Father's highest degree	Never enrolled in any formal education	14	5,3
	Preschool (up to 5yo)	6	2,3
	Primary education (6-14yo), not completed	**76**	**28,8**
	Primary education (6-14yo), completed	46	17,4
	High school (médio, 15-18yo)	55	20,8
	Technical (15-18yo)	5	1,9
	Superior (university, 18-22)	6	2,3
	Post-graduate	5	1,9
	Master	1	0,4
	Doctorate	1	0,4
	I do not know	40	15,2
	…*	9	3,4
	Total	264	100,0

*… indicates missing data

Table A2. *Aspirations to stay and to migrate, with specific migration destinations, and demographic characteristics of respondents and their parents*

							Migrate to					
		Total	Total non-migration		Total migration		Municipality		Other Brazilian location		Abroad	
			Absolute	%	Absolute	%	Absolute	% of total migration	Absolute	% of total migration	Absolute	% of total migration
	Total	**268**	**71**	***26,5***	**197**	***73,5***	**18**	***9,1***	**103**	***52,3***	**76**	***38,6***
Gender	Male	131	39	*29,8*	92	*70,2*	12	*13,0*	39	*42,4*	41	*44,6*
	Female	127	32	*25,2*	95	*74,8*	6	*6,3*	56	*58,9*	33	*34,7*
	Other	9	0	*0,0*	9	*100,0*	0	*0,0*	7	*77,8*	2	*22,2*
	...	1	0	*0,0*	1	*100,0*	0	*0,0*	1	*100,0*	0	*0,0*
Year of birth	1980-1989	30	13	*43,3*	17	*56,7*	3	*17,6*	10	*58,8*	4	*23,5*
	1990-1999	78	23	*29,5*	55	*70,5*	4	*7,3*	29	*52,7*	22	*40,0*
	2000-2004	160	35	*21,9*	125	*78,1*	11	*8,8*	64	*51,2*	50	*40,0*
Place of birth	Caracaraí, town	148	42	*28,4*	106	*71,6*	8	*7,5*	61	*57,5*	37	*34,9*
	Caracaraí, municipality	8	2	*25,0*	6	*75,0*	1	*16,7*	4	*66,7*	1	*16,7*
	Other municipality in Roraima	55	15	*27,3*	40	*72,7*	5	*12,5*	17	*42,5*	18	*45,0*
	Other Brazilian state	55	12	*21,8*	43	*78,2*	3	*7,0*	20	*46,5*	20	*46,5*
	Another country	2	0	*0,0*	2	*100,0*	1	*50,0*	1	*50,0*	0	*0,0*
Marital status	Single	179	39	*21,8*	140	*78,2*	10	*7,1*	69	*49,3*	61	*43,6*
	In a relationship	82	29	*35,4*	53	*64,6*	7	*13,2*	31	*58,5*	15	*28,3*
	...	7	3	*42,9*	4	*57,1*	1	*25,0*	3	*75,0*	0	*0,0*
Education	Primary education, incomplete	18	6	*33,3*	12	*66,7*	2	*16,7*	7	*58,3*	3	*25,0*
	Primary education	34	15	*44,1*	19	*55,9*	1	*5,3*	10	*52,6*	8	*42,1*
	High school	167	38	*22,8*	129	*77,2*	12	*9,3*	71	*55,0*	46	*35,7*
	Technical school	36	7	*19,4*	29	*80,6*	1	*3,4*	12	*41,4*	16	*55,2*
	University	10	5	*50,0*	5	*50,0*	0	*0,0*	3	*60,0*	2	*40,0*
	Post-graduate	1	0	*0,0*	1	*100,0*	0	*0,0*	0	*0,0*	1	*100,0*
	...	2	0	*0,0*	2	*100,0*	2	*100,0*	0	*0,0*	0	*0,0*
Famiy status, self-assessed	Much worse	12	5	*41,7*	7	*58,3*	1	*14,3*	4	*57,1*	2	*28,6*
	Worse	31	7	*22,6*	24	*77,4*	3	*12,5*	11	*45,8*	10	*41,7*
	The same	126	31	*24,6*	95	*75,4*	5	*5,3*	58	*61,1*	32	*33,7*
	Better	89	24	*27,0*	65	*73,0*	7	*10,8*	27	*41,5*	31	*47,7*
	Much better	7	4	*57,1*	3	*42,9*	0	*0,0*	2	*66,7*	1	*33,3*
	...	3	0	*0,0*	3	*100,0*	2	*66,7*	1	*33,3*	0	*0,0*
Mother's place of b	Caracaraí, town	67	17	*25,4*	50	*74,6*	2	*4,0*	26	*52,0*	22	*44,0*
	Caracaraí, municipality	5	2	*40,0*	3	*60,0*	1	*33,3*	2	*66,7*	0	*0,0*
	Other municipality in Roraima	14	6	*42,9*	8	*57,1*	0	*0,0*	6	*75,0*	2	*25,0*
	Other Brazilian state	167	41	*24,6*	126	*75,4*	12	*9,5*	64	*50,8*	50	*39,7*
	Another country	2	0	*0,0*	2	*100,0*	1	*50,0*	1	*50,0*	0	*0,0*
	...	13	5	*38,5*	8	*61,5*	2	*25,0*	4	*50,0*	2	*25,0*
Mother's educatior	No formal education	14	5	*35,7*	9	*64,3*	1	*11,1*	6	*66,7*	2	*22,2*
	Preschool	13	4	*30,8*	9	*69,2*	0	*0,0*	5	*55,6*	4	*44,4*
	Primary education, incomplete	59	18	*30,5*	41	*69,5*	6	*14,6*	20	*48,8*	15	*36,6*
	Primary education	38	10	*26,3*	28	*73,7*	2	*7,1*	18	*64,3*	8	*28,6*
	High school	78	18	*23,1*	60	*76,9*	4	*6,7*	31	*51,7*	25	*41,7*
	Technical school	13	3	*23,1*	10	*76,9*	1	*10,0*	5	*50,0*	4	*40,0*
	University	12	1	*8,3*	11	*91,7*	0	*0,0*	7	*63,6*	4	*36,4*
	Post-graduate	8	0	*0,0*	8	*100,0*	0	*0,0*	3	*37,5*	5	*62,5*
	Master	1	1	*100,0*	0	*0,0*	0	-	0	-	0	-
	Doctorate	1	0	*0,0*	1	*100,0*	1	*100,0*	0	*0,0*	0	*0,0*
	I do not know	26	10	*38,5*	16	*61,5*	0	*0,0*	8	*50,0*	8	*50,0*
	...	5	1	*20,0*	4	*80,0*	3	*75,0*	0	*0,0*	1	*25,0*
Father's place of bi	Caracaraí, town	55	12	*21,8*	43	*78,2*	4	*9,3*	23	*53,5*	16	*37,2*
	Caracaraí, municipality	3	2	*66,7*	1	*33,3*	0	*0,0*	0	*0,0*	1	*100,0*
	Other municipality in Roraima	22	6	*27,3*	16	*72,7*	2	*12,5*	5	*31,3*	9	*56,3*
	Other Brazilian state	169	43	*25,4*	126	*74,6*	6	*4,8*	71	*56,3*	49	*38,9*
	Another country	3	0	*0,0*	3	*100,0*	1	*33,3*	2	*66,7*	0	*0,0*
	...	16	8	*50,0*	8	*50,0*	5	*62,5*	2	*25,0*	1	*12,5*
Father's education	No formal education	14	6	*42,9*	8	*57,1*	1	*12,5*	5	*62,5*	2	*25,0*
	Preschool	7	3	*42,9*	4	*57,1*	0	*0,0*	3	*75,0*	1	*25,0*
	Primary education, incomplete	77	22	*28,6*	55	*71,4*	4	*7,3*	33	*60,0*	18	*32,7*
	Primary education	48	13	*27,1*	35	*72,9*	4	*11,4*	16	*45,7*	15	*42,9*
	High school	58	7	*12,1*	51	*87,9*	3	*5,9*	24	*47,1*	24	*47,1*
	Technical school	4	0	*0,0*	4	*100,0*	2	*50,0*	2	*50,0*	0	*0,0*
	University	6	1	*16,7*	5	*83,3*	0	*0,0*	4	*80,0*	1	*20,0*
	Post-graduate	5	0	*0,0*	5	*100,0*	0	*0,0*	2	*40,0*	3	*60,0*
	Master	1	1	*100,0*	0	*0,0*	0	-	0	-	0	-
	Doctorate	1	1	*100,0*	0	*0,0*	0	-	0	-	0	-
	I do not know	38	14	*36,8*	24	*63,2*	0	*0,0*	13	*54,2*	11	*45,8*
	...	9	3	*33,3*	6	*66,7*	4	*66,7*	1	*16,7*	1	*16,7*

Total = 264 respondents; 4 respondents gave more than 1 migration destination

APPENDIX A: Reflections on the collection, meaning and usage of survey data on migration aspirations

The survey data revealed that about 70 percent of respondents had migration aspirations, with 38% indicating they would go within Brazil, just about 28% would go internationally and 6% would move within the municipality (which is very large and includes smaller towns). Such high figures are generally associated with places where there is a culture of migration leading to high out-migration rates. For instance, estimates of migration aspirations in Senegal were in the 57-84 range for people in the 18-39 age group in 2011 (Carling and Schewel 2018: 951). At the same time, we know that while there is a relation between migration aspirations and actual migration, only a small portion of these migration aspiration are realized (Carling 2019). For example, Hoppe and Fujishiro (2015:22) found that only 2 percent of those who expressed migration aspirations but did not have any concrete plans, had migrated 12 months later.

Nonetheless, further reflections on the questions and answers in the questionnaire led to two specific observations. First, respondents were asked what would they do if, ideally, they were given the necessary papers and/or financial assistance and they could choose multiple answers among a set of options.[20] It is feasible that this 'most ideal' situation introduced a bias towards choosing migration as there was almost no risk in migration, "possibly nudging respondents in the direction of saying they would move" (Carling 2019: 21). In hindsight, in the interviews, some respondents had a 'casual attitude' towards saying 'yes, I would migrate' in similar way as a person might say yes when given a free object or free food. While we cannot say for sure how many respondents might have interpreted the conditional framing in this manner, it is fair to say that this might have influenced the answers. Moreover, interviewees frequently added comments suggesting that they would go only if they knew they would get a job that allowed them to earn more money, to take care of their family or to fulfill their personal trajectory.[21]

[20] Respondents were asked "Ideally, if somebody were to give you the necessary papers and/or financial assistance to live or work elsewhere, what would you do?" to which they could give select multiple answers from this list: 1. Stay here; 2. Moving within the municipality of Caracaraí; 3. Move to another town or city in Brazil, specify_____; 4. Move abroad, specify your preferred destination _____; 5. Other, please specify _____."

[21] There were also a few individuals who indicated that they would go immediately, without a doubt, showing that migration had been part of their considerations. These, however, were fewer (five out of 18 questionnaires that had unsolicited comments for the question on migration aspirations).

These answers suggest they would *reluctantly leave* if better conditions were available elsewhere, distinct from whose who would *willingly leave*, and some that were *reluctantly staying*, which stood apart from those who were *willingly staying* (following the approach taken by Seyfrit, Bjarnason and Olafsson (2010), as cited in Carling 2019). Moreover, the question asked about the possibility "to live and work elsewhere", which may have been interpreted by some interviewees as temporary travel for curiosity and adventure rather than the aspiration to migrate. Interviews also revealed that the tentative nature of migration aspirations was clearly visible when destination preferences were discussed, as vague preferences were mentioned, although internal destinations seemed a bit more concrete. Among all interviewees, four had relatively concrete migration plans: one woman to migrate to study in nearby Boa Vista; a man to work in a town within the state of Roraima close to Venezuela; a woman was considering the possibility of migrating to the state of Goiás where the mother lived; and a young high-school student in her last year had a long-term plan to attend university in Boa Vista, and then migrate to the US to pursue medical school. Considering that in 2,5 percent of the questionnaires, respondents added comments, not solicited in the questionnaire, to give nuance to the migration aspiration answers and that in general there was very little evidence of concrete migration plans, it is necessary to be cautious with the interpretation of the migration aspiration survey data.

Indeed, recent literature has shown that different formulations of the migration aspiration question may produce very different responses, raising important reflections on what they actually measure (see Aslany et al. 2021; Carling 2019 for an excellent review on this topic). The difficulties in capturing migration aspirations transpire in research that analyses such data. In their global analyses of the intentions to migrate, Migali and Scipioni (2018; 2019) used Gallup poll data, which measures the 'intentions to migrate' disaggregated in three indicators: migration desire, migration plan and migration preparation. They argue that there is such high discrepancy between migration desire and migration preparation, [22] and suggest that questions about the personal migration project are likely to pick up other social dynamics, so that the results "should be interpreted as a proxy for life dissatisfaction rather than potential migration" (Migali and Scipioni 2018:3). They further suggest that "these surveys were actually mopping

[22] For example, in Latin America and the Caribbean migration desires are just under 26 percent of respondents, 3 percent of the population is planning to migrate and only about 1 percent is preparing to migrate (Migali and Scipione 2018: 9-10).

up a number of other issues that – while deserving to be studied on their own – may have had little to do with concrete intentions to migrate." (Migali and Scipioni 2019:191). This indeed seemed to be the case for the survey in Caracaraí. I became increasingly convinced that the migration aspiration figures represent more a sense of dissatisfaction with the community and an imaginary escape than actual desires to migrate (Migali and Scipioni 2018:3). Fortunately, interviews were designed to explore broader life aspirations, the perceived opportunities and constraints which could be matched with aspirations to migrate or to stay (Carling and Schewel 2018: 954). Through this triangulation, I was able to think critically about the collected data on migration aspirations.

The table below takes a sample of 20 survey respondents, including some who added comments, and shows how figures of migration aspirations would have been shifted using a different categorization. The crude Yes/No answer allowed in the survey led to 12 Yes. When, however, the Seyfrit et al (2010) classification was considered, I could recategorize the answer based on the comments provided resulting in some individuals who would willingly leave and others who would reluctantly leave. Even the much simpler suggestion by Carling (2019) to include 'I don't know' as a possible answer would have reduced the Yes answers from 12 to 7. For all these reasons, I did not rely strongly on the dataset for the analysis of aspirations to migrate or to stay.

Table A3. *Outcomes when applying other classifications of migration aspirations to collected data*

No	Gender	Age	Place of birth	Education level	Migration aspirations (survey data)	Migration aspirations: reluctantly leaving (RL), reluctantly staying (RS), willingly leaving (WL) and willingly staying (WS) (Seyfrit et al 2010)	Migration aspirations with I don't know (Carling 2019: 38)	Comment
21	F	22	Caracaraí	High school	No	WS	I don't know	
22	F	18	Caracaraí	High school	No	RL	I don't know	No strong desire to migrate; after some thought there was a mild consideration of migration
23	F	20	Caracaraí	High school	Yes	WL	Yes	Either to Boa Vista or to Rio de Janeiro (but these are not strong preferences at all)
24	M	34	Boa Vista	High school	No	RS	I don't know	
25	M	23	Boa Vista	High school	Yes	WS	I don't know	He plans to expand his business, possibly open a branch in Rorainopolis; at the end he said he has friends in the US and they always say nice things about Canada and he would like to check it out.
26	F	28	Amazonas	University	Yes	RL	I don't know	
27	M	19	Boa Vista	High school	Yes	WL	I don't know	
28	F	23	Amazonas	Technical school	Yes	WL	Yes	
29	F	25	Amazonas	University	No	WS	No	
30	F	26	Amazonas	High school	Yes	WL	Yes	
31	M/O	32	Caracaraí	University	Yes	WL	Yes	"It depends on the opportunity. I was born and raised here. I'm fed up with the lack of progress , there isn't much ecolution here. I **might** go"
32	F	26	Caracaraí	Technical school	Yes	RL	I don't know	
33	F	32	Caracaraí	Technical school	Yes	RL	Yes	
34	M	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	
35	M	37	Caracaraí	University	No	WS	No	
36	M	29	Amazonas	High school	No	WS	I don't know	I would invest here if money was given to me
37	F	24	Boa Vista	University	No	RS	I don't know	
38	M	38	Caracaraí	University	No	WS	No	He will open a pharmacy in Caracaraí and one in Mucajaí with a partner
39	F	18	Caracaraí	High school	Yes	WL	Yes	Medical school trajectory
40	M	19	Caracaraí	High school	Yes	WL	Yes	
41	M	19	Caracaraí	High school	Yes	RL	I don't know	

APPENDIX B: General characteristics of respondents with migration aspirations

This appendix provides some general characteristics of young people who had a positive attitude towards migration. Appendix A explained the need for caution in this analysis. Therefore, I rely on these figures not for their absolute but for the relative value in relation to each other. Migration seems most desirable among those with mid-levels of education and skills (78 percent), who would want to pursue higher education and get qualifications for a professional career, but this percentage lowered to around 54-56 percent for those with primary and tertiary education. Based on self-assessment of socio-economic standing, migration was preferred by the middle segment of the town's population (those who felt their conditions were worse, same or better than the rest of the community), possibly reflecting that it is among this group that there is the highest life dissatisfaction and unfulfilled life aspirations (Migali and Scipioni 2019). When housing conditions were considered, migration aspirations were lowest among those who had free housing or accommodation in exchange for services, probably signaling limited financial resources and a realization that the favorable living conditions would not be possible in another location after migration.

The birth place of the interviewees did not seem relevant in shaping migration aspirations, and the lowest migration aspirations were among those young adult whose father was born in other rural areas of the municipality (33 percent of this group had migration aspirations). This seems to suggest that for young adults whose reference point was more rural areas, Caracaraí was a place that already had more to offer, thus relatively endowed.

The survey data also allowed to see whether previous migration was associated with current migration aspirations. Previous migration was based on earlier relocation of the interviewee, his/her parents born elsewhere or migration in the family – siblings or other family members. There was no association between siblings' migration and migration aspirations, but having close family members (including aunts and uncles and cousins) in Brazil and abroad had some relevance on the interviewees' migration aspirations. Among those with family in other parts of Brazil 73,9 percent had migration aspirations, while migration aspirations decreased to 70,2 percent for those without family away. Having visited the family in other parts of Brazil seemed to increase migration aspirations: 77,2 percent of those who visited family away had migration aspirations versus 69,9 percent of those who did not visit family in Brazil. Having family abroad also seemed to influence the aspiration to migrate as 81,5 percent of those with family abroad aspired to migrate, while those without family abroad had lower migration aspirations

(72,5 percent). Having visited family abroad, however, seemed to decrease migration aspirations, which may be associated to being confronted with significantly different lifestyles, including the reality of a busy urban life.

Data also showed that young people who had online contact with friends and family had higher migration aspirations (74.4 percentage) than those without such online contact (51.7 percent). This seems to suggest that having social networks outside of Caracaraí increased migration aspirations as well as information and, possibly, the networks to facilitate migration.