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## Stereotyping Roma people in Italy: IRT models for ambivalent prejudice measurement

### Abstract

‘Gypsy’ is a name that conjures up a wide variety of images in peoples’ minds. Romanticised for their freedom or reviled for their antisocial behaviour, Roma people have in turns been the subject of both exotic myth and virulent prejudice. Roma are depicted as romantic or criminal outsiders: anything from thieves to talented and artistic people. Exploiting the potentiality of Item Response Theory models, this study aims to assess the level of consolidation of positive and negative stereotypes on Roma people in Italy. In addition, we investigate how socio-demographic covariates affect the degree of acceptance of a clichéd depiction of Roma. Results suggest that images and representations of the ‘Gypsies’, which confirm a distinction between nature and culture, persist in our culture. On the one hand, Roma are perceived as ‘free’ from societal constraints (nature); on the other hand, they are portrayed as criminals and untruthful, relational qualities that arise in a societal organized condition (culture). This distinction continues to be misused to delegitimise minorities groups, especially Roma.

*Keywords:* Stereotype, Roma people, IRT models

## 1. Introduction

European Union (EU) institutions adopt the term ‘Roma’ as an umbrella term to include groups of people who share more or less similar cultural characteristics, such as the Roma, Sinti, Travellers, Ashkali, Manush, Jenische, Kaldarash and Kalé. Throughout their history in Europe, the Roma people have generally faced many obstacles to their integration into mainstream society. The reasons for this are complex, but it is clear that ethnic discrimination of Roma by non-Roma has been an important factor (Erio, 2013). As pointed out by Nicolae (2007), anti-Tsiganism, anti-Gypsyism, and Romaphobia essentially mean the same thing: “[...] a very specific form of racism, an ideology of racial superiority, a form of dehumanisation and of institutionalised racism. Anti-Gypsyism is used to justify and perpetrate the exclusion and supposed inferiority of Roma and is based on historical persecution and negative stereotypes”. Prejudices against the Roma are so deeply rooted in European culture that clichés are often not conceived as such and accepted instead as fact. Stereotypes typically take a probabilistic, non-categorical form and rely on local, contextually circumscribed, understandings of group life in order to accomplish stereotyping ‘by implication’. The negative behaviour of one individual tends to be automatically applied to all ‘Gypsies’ and is attributed to Romani culture instead of to the individual (Erio, 2012). The stereotypes, that underlie common sense, serve as the unspoken backcloth to banal forms of interaction, invoking pejorative images of others without articulating them explicitly (Dixon and Levine, 2012). A good example of this is the views on Roma people, characterised as agitated, passive, unattractive and bad, a sort of ‘natural trait’; these findings confirm once again that an anti-Roma prejudicial vision is ancestral and may function as a common marker for cultural identity (Pérez et al., 2001; Fontanella et al., 2016).

Chulvi and Pérez (2003), in their studies on the social representations of ‘Gypsies’, found that the typical traits assigned to Gypsies suggested their having an essence different from that of humans, being represented as anti social nomads with a questionable morality and

a preference for isolation within a self-enclosed universe beyond the realm of the human species. Along the same lines, Marcu and Chrysochoou (2005) found that more natural than cultural characteristics were assigned to the Gypsies (*outgroup*) than to the British (*ingroup*). In the nature/culture debate in Western society, nature is considered the primitive condition before human society (Williams, 1985), and culture begins at the point at which human beings surpass their natural inheritance and where the wild is domesticated (Strathern, 1980). In this perspective, a Gypsy is considered a wild, noisy and dirty being who reacts instinctively in an aggressive and unsophisticated manner, lives in an aggregate group and passively adapts to situations (Marcu and Chrysochoou, 2005). This representation characterises the primitive status of nature, in terms of being unable to control supposedly biological determined traits. In this sense, the Roma people represent not only an outgroup, but an outsider in the social map of human identity (*ontologisation*). Haslam and Loughnan (2014) suggest that groups that are denied human nature are likely to be overlooked, distanced, objectified and treated instrumentally. As for the description of Roma as people who do not want to settle in one place, the 'nomad' theory is often used to provide a form of cultural legitimation for excluding and marginalising the 'Gypsies' (Sigona, 2005). This commonplace is used not only to segregate the Roma people, but also to reinforce the popular idea that they are not citizens of the country they are living in, and that they do not belong to it. In Italy, the label *nomad* is applied generally to the whole of the Roma and Sinti population, without considering whether they are Italian citizens or foreigners, travellers or sedentary people, war refugees or migrants. The stereotype of nomadism is a powerful discursive frame, that persists at the core of contemporary anti-Gypsyism, and is linked to a discourse that imagines the entire Roma community as "involved in criminal activities, irreverent towards religion, harbouring sinister magical powers and primitive, as evidenced in promiscuity, dancing and baby-snatching" (Woodcock, 2010).

Although the prejudice on Roma people is overwhelmingly negative, traditional, historically rooted, 'romanticised' stereotypes are also widely shared. "The romantic image of

Roma includes such elements as musical and dancing talent, capability of passionate love and other strong emotions, spontaneity, free and spiritual character, magical relatedness to nature, ability to enjoy themselves, etc.” (Cahn, 2002). ‘Gypsies’ are often associated with the cliché of the ‘children of the wind’. Nicolae (2007) includes those attitudes in the dehumanisation process, which is pivotal to anti-Gypsyism and leads to seeing Roma as a subhuman group closer to the animal realm than to the human realm: “Even those rare cases of seemingly sympathetic portrayals of Roma seem to depict Roma as somehow not fully human, at best childlike. Roma are in the best cases described as free-spirited, carefree, happy, and naturally graceful. All these characteristics are frequently used to describe animals.” According to Puskás-Bajkó (2014), the wildness/savageness and freedom stereotypes refer to the hard-to-civilise spontaneities of the Gypsy individual bodies and to the essential freedom of the Gypsy social body : “[...] the metaphors describing the alterity of a (non-European, non-civilised, non-adhering to the norms of modern society) way of living always resort to corporeality: whether envisaged as an undisciplined individual body [...] or as an uncontrollable social body [...], the fictional portrait of the Roma people [...] seems to put forth, with both repulsion and fascination, the idea that Roma people experience their bodies in a different way than the civilised man, whose manners and norms of coexistence remain unknown to these inherently free savages.”

As a consequence of both the negative and the positive traits ascribed to the Roma people, they are considered incapable of functioning in a modern society (Marinero, 2009). From this perspective, stereotypes on Roma people appear to serve a system justification function, allowing to explain and rationalise social arrangements by making them legitimate and natural. According to system justification theory (Jost and Banaji, 1994; Jost et al., 2004), stereotypes and other social judgments serve to maintain ideological support for the prevailing social system by justifying and rationalising inequality.

In this paper we analyse the ambivalent attitude towards Roma people, who, as stated by Kligman (2001), “[...] are simultaneously among history’s most romanticized and reviled of

peoples.” Given the responses to a stereotype scale, collected by means of a web survey, we exploit the potentiality of Item Response theory models to investigate both the dimensionality of the stereotypical view of the Roma people and the extent to which the chosen stereotypes display a diversified level of consolidation and play a different role in shaping the prejudice intensity. Item response theory (IRT) is based on stochastic models for the responses of persons to items, where the influence of items and persons on the responses are modelled by disjunct sets of parameters (de Ayala, 2009). In our analysis, we hypothesise that the degree of acquiescence to the clichéd views both depends on some socio-demographic features and the respondents’ political orientation.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 illustrates the research materials. In particular, in this section we better clarify the aims of the study, the procedure and the sample composition. The approach adopted in the analysis is described in Section 3, where we focus on the IRT modelling approach. The issue of the Roma stereotype scale dimensionality is investigated in Section 4. In Section 5, after a brief review of the IRT adopted model, we provide the main findings in terms of the degree of consolidation and endorsement of the stereotype. Section 6 presents an analysis of the respondents’ attitudes, based both on their endorsement of the stereotypical images and their prejudices deduced from an open-ended question. Finally, the discussion and conclusion are provided in Sections 7 and 8, respectively.

## 2. Research materials

### *Aims and measures*

Our study aims to analyse the ambivalent perception of Roma people seen as incapable of functioning in the modern civilised society, due to their lack of morality, on the one hand, and to their free-spirit essence, on the other hand. For this purpose, we have developed a stereotype scale comprising statements of both ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ connotative meaning. The

negative clichés are related to the ‘moral’ dimension, depicting Roma as individuals involved in illegal and criminal activities, engaged in antisocial behaviour, who exploit the social welfare system instead of working, neglect personal hygiene, domestic conditions and education. This first latent variable is similar to the ‘warm-trustworthiness’ trait of the Stereotype Content Model (Fiske et al., 2002, 2007) and to the morality dimension defined by Wojciszke et al. (1998). According to Cuddy et al. (2008), the latter traits overlap entirely, encapsulating honesty, fairness, friendliness, and sociability. The positive myths are directly linked to the romantic image of Roma as ‘children of the wind’, and consider their carefree and cheerful temperament, their predilection for freedom and their artistic talents. The statements for the selected stereotypes (see Table 1) were derived from a review of the literature (see, among others Council of Europe, European Commission, 2006; Vitale, 2011; Maūcec, 2013; Naga, 2013). Each statement is rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’. However, in the analysis, we adopted a three-point scale, collapsing some modalities. We found it convenient to merge the initial categories into a smaller number of modalities because some of them received few responses. By so doing, we ensure a more reliable estimation of the category threshold parameters (see Andrich, 1995, for a deeper analysis of collapsing categories in polytomous IRT models).

The stereotype scale was part of a comprehensive survey aimed at measuring attitudes towards Roma people and migrants (Fontanella et al., 2016). The questionnaire also included an open-ended question aimed at exploring more in depth the respondents’ opinion on the Roma people by letting them answer in their own terms. We edited the questionnaire with the online survey software SurveyGizmo and recruited respondents through advertisements placed on social networks such as Facebook and various Italian mailing lists. The adverts contain a web URL that was directly linked to the survey.

### *Participants*

Out of the 492 participants, who completed the stereotype scale and provided information on some common socio-demographic data such as gender, year of birth, region of residence, educational attainment, 64% are female, and 69% are from the Italian southern regions. As concerns the age distribution, we found that respondents are aged from 16 to 60 years (mean=29; standard deviation=7.6). The overall level of education is high, since a large proportion (66%) of respondents attained a first or second level degree. In addition, we asked the respondents to place themselves on a 7-point left-right political scale. Here, those who place themselves in the middle of the scale are identified as having a more centrist view than those who identify themselves as being either more Left (1,2) or Right (6,7) wing. As regards their political orientation, 47% of the participants placed themselves on the left side of the political spectrum and 10% on the right side. Table 1 provides details on the level of disagreement or agreement with the selected stereotypes across the sample.

(Table 1)

### 3. IRT models for latent trait analysis

The analysis of attitude towards Roma people can be performed within the IRT framework. IRT, also known as Latent Trait Analysis (Lazarsfeld and Henry, 1968), constitutes a prominent approach for addressing the measurement of unobservable traits via the estimation and analysis of latent variables. IRT models have been widely employed in many fields of research where the objects of analysis are often of a latent nature (psychology, education, health, business and other behavioural sciences). These models offer opportunities to examine latent constructs rigorously, providing more accurate and consistent results compared to the traditional way of building measurement instruments, such as the Classical Test Theory. In IRT models the focus is on the pattern of responses to a test or questionnaire and the aim is to

describe the relationships between the latent trait and one or more item properties (e.g. item difficulty, discrimination and pseudo-guessing), producing linear and reproducible measures (de Ayala, 2009). In greater detail, the likelihood of a given answer to an item is expressed in terms of the respondent's location on some continuous latent traits and the item characteristics.

A key strength of IRT models is this clear-cut separation between personal and item parameters. Moreover, those model parameters are expressed according to a common measurement unit in the same continuum, becoming directly comparable (de Ayala, 2009). From the IRT perspective, several models have been developed over the years, differing from each other in terms of item parameters included in the model (they might range from 1-parameter to 3-parameter models) and in terms of response option format. In the latter respect, there are models designed to be used for binary outcomes and models intended to analyse polytomous data. As IRT models are especially suited for dealing with categorical indicators, they are enclosed in the broader framework of Item Factor Analysis (IFA), which has been developed as extensions of classical linear factor analysis. As pointed out by Wirth and Edwards (2007), the rationale underlying factor analysis applies to continuous and categorical variables alike; however, the models and estimation methods for continuous data are not appropriate for categorical item-level data. In fact, dichotomous or polytomous item response formats may fail to maintain the distributional properties assumed by models for observed variables measured on interval or ratio scales. In such a case, Item Factor Analysis (IFA) offers an appropriate alternative. An item factor analytic model can be viewed as consisting of two components. First, a classical factor model represents a continuous latent response variable as a linear function of the multiple latent traits. Then a threshold model represents the nonlinear relationship between the latent response variable and the probability of a given observed response to an item (Wirth and Edwards, 2007; Skrondal and Rabe-Hesketh, 2007). There are a wide range of IFA models available in both the Structural Equation Models (SEM) and Item Response Theory (IRT) literatures and a taxonomy is provided by Thissen and Steinberg (1986).

In our analysis, we first address the issue of the stability of measurement properties of the Roma stereotype scale between different groups of subjects. Violations of this measurement invariance at the item level are known as item bias or differential item functioning (DIF). For manifest groups, DIF means that, conditioning on the person traits, one or more items function differently in a focal group in comparison with a reference group (Scheuneman, 1979). The difference relates most commonly to the item location and more rarely to the degree of discrimination of the item. Following the approach proposed by El-Komboz et al. (2014), and considering a unidimensional solution, we performed DIF detection in a data-driven way without the pre-specification of reference and focal groups. However, the resulting groups are characterised by combinations of covariates and thus directly interpretable. In particular, we detect different location parameters for the positive and the negative stereotypes with regard to the respondents' political stance. The invariance of the item parameters is achieved if we consider two separate models for the positive and negative sub-scales. As a second step, in order to estimate both the stereotype degree of consolidation and endorsement and the influence of the selected socio-demographic factor, we perform a latent trait analysis on the Roma stereotype scale by adopting the multidimensional version of the two-parameter normal ogive model (Beguin and Glas, 2001).

#### 4. Statistical analysis: The dimensionality of the Roma stereotype scale

As pointed out by Alfieri and Marta (2011), research into the relationships between positive and negative dimensions of attitudes have reached contrasting conclusions in terms of the factorial structure dimensionality. In some studies, a weak correlation between positive and negative aspects of the same attitude favours bidimensionality within the same construct, while other research has found a strong correlation between the two aspects, supporting the hypothesis of a single dimension for the latent attitude. Alfieri and Marta (2011) also provide a

comprehensive literature review of the debate on dimensionality and polarity in the study of ethnic attitudes, where emerging theoretical models present a multidimensional and multifaceted view of prejudice.

In our study, in order to investigate the unidimensionality of the endorsement of a stereotypical perception of Roma people, we verify if the statements included in the stereotype scale are affected by DIF. In other terms, we detect whether the item properties are stable or vary between different groups of subjects. Many researchers (see, among others, Lord, 1980; Ackerman, 1992) have suggested that one of the major causes of DIF is that the biased items measure abilities other than those of the reported test score. In other terms, it is common to view DIF as the failure to account for secondary dimensions. Therefore, the presence of DIF may be due to the inclusion of multidimensional test items, and the test measuring additional latent traits other than the primary trait of interest.

In order to detect DIF with respect to possible group differences related to the participant socio-demographic covariates, we adopt the model-based recursive partitioning algorithm for polytomous items proposed by El-Komboz et al. (2014). The implementation of the estimation procedure has been performed through the package *psychotree* (Zeileis et al., 2014), available for the R system for statistical computing. More in detail, using the partial credit model (PCM; Masters, 1982), the responses to the 20 stereotypes are assessed with respect to possible group differences related to the covariates: gender, age, region of residence, educational attainment and political position. The resulting PCM tree, that is partitioned with respect to the political position of the respondents, is presented in Figure 1.

(Figure 1)

Since there is more than one terminal node, the null hypothesis of a one unidimensional joint IRT model for the entire sample has to be rejected. Moreover, the PCM tree allows us to highlight a very clear distinctive pattern for the positive and the negative stereotypes, with regard to the political position of the respondents. However, fitting two separate PCM to the

negative (Figure 2(a)) and positive (Figure 2(b)) stereotypes leads to confirm the measurement invariance of the two models with respect to all the considered covariates, suggesting a bidimensional factorial structure. Therefore in our analysis, we adopt a confirmatory approach considering two correlated latent traits related, respectively, to the ‘morality’ dimension, which encompasses statements with negative connotative meaning, and the ‘romantic image’ of Roma people, measured via the positive stereotypes.

(Figure 2)

## 5. The bidimensional correlated factor solution

In our analysis, we are interested in estimating both the level of consolidation of the different stereotypes, and the degree of conformity to the stereotypical view with reference to both the morality trait and the romantic image of Roma people. For this purpose, given the polytomous responses to the selected stereotypes, we consider the multidimensional version of the two-parameter normal ogive model (2PNO; Beguin and Glas, 2001). More in detail, by adopting a bidimensional independent cluster structure, where each latent trait is measured by a single sub-scale, we assume that, for each observed polytomous item  $Y_k$ , a continuous variable  $Z_k$  underlies the observed ordinal responses. Furthermore, there is a linear relationship between item and person parameters and the underlying variable, such that for each individual  $i$  we have  $z_{ik} = \alpha_{kq}\theta_{qi} + \varepsilon_{ik}$ , where the error component  $\varepsilon_{ik}$  follows a standard normal distribution. The relation between the observed item responses and the underlying variable is expressed by the threshold model  $y_{ik} = c$ , iff  $\gamma_{k,c-1} \leq z_{ik} \leq \gamma_{k,c}$ , where  $c = 1, \dots, C$  indicates the observed response category for subject  $i$  and item  $k$ . In this specification,  $\theta_{qi}$  represents the score of subject  $i$  on the  $q$ -th latent variable and is defined as personal parameter;  $\alpha_{kq}$ , known as discrimination parameter, is analogous to the loading in confirmatory factor analysis since

represents the relationship between the latent variable and the item responses;  $\gamma_{k,c}$  are the ordered thresholds:  $\gamma_{k,0} = -\infty \leq \dots \leq \gamma_{k,c-1} \leq \gamma_{k,c} \leq \dots \leq \gamma_{k,C} = \infty$ . The discrimination parameters and the thresholds are defined as item parameters. In order to detect possible effects of the selected socio-demographic factors on the endorsement of stereotype about Roma people, in our model we allow for the dependency of the personal parameters, representing stereotype acceptance levels, on the individual covariates: gender, age, educational attainment, regional area of residence and political position. For the estimation of person and item parameters and of the regression coefficients, we adopt a fully Bayesian approach, which takes into account all sources of uncertainty and the parameter estimation is internally consistent. Details of the model and the estimation procedure can be found in Fontanella et al. (2016). We estimated the model parameters using MCMC techniques, running multiple chains for different starting values. The code was written in MATLAB (Mathworks). The first 5,000 iterations were discarded, and 1 out of 5 of 20,000 posterior draws are subsequently used for estimation. Trace plots were examined in order to check whether the chains reached a state of convergence.

### *5.1. Stereotype degree of consolidation*

As pointed out above, in the 2PNO model each item, representing a stereotype, is characterised by a discrimination parameter and by  $C - 1$  thresholds, where  $C$  is the number of points of the chosen Likert scale. The discrimination parameter quantifies how well a single latent dimension is measured by the related item and is an indicator of the nonlinear correlation between the item and the latent variable (Tuerlinckx and De Boeck, 2005). More specifically, the item discrimination value represents the ability of the item to discriminate people at different levels of the underlying trait. In the Bayesian specification of the model, since all items measure the correspondent latent construct in the same direction, we assume that, for each latent construct, all discrimination parameters are positive (Fontanella et al., 2016). The discrimination parameters are reported in Table 2, along with the 95% credible intervals.

(Table 2)

For the two analysed dimension, the selected items are sorted according to descending order of the corresponding discrimination values. The results suggest that the stereotypes, which contribute the most to discriminating respondents in terms of the endorsement of Roma people negative view, are related to their lack of respect for other people's space. A high contribution to the morality dimension is also recorded for the statements related to criminal and deviant behaviours and to the idea that Roma people are a burden on society, being work-shy and prefer to live on benefits. In relation to the romanticised view of the 'Gypsies' common ideas on Roma cheerfulness and skills are distinguished with reference to the assessment of their artistic talents, especially as great musicians, and of their tendency to enjoy the small things in life.

In Table 3, we report the item locations, computed as the mean of the corresponding estimated thresholds (Andrich, 2010).

(Table 3)

For each analysed dimension, the selected items are sorted according to ascending order of their location values, which in general indicate the overall difficulty of the item, while in our analysis can be interpreted as the level of flexibility of the associated stereotype. More specifically, the higher the location parameter, the lower the rigidity of the stereotype. In other words, statements with lower location values correspond to more deeply ingrained stereotypes. The estimated thresholds for each dimension are represented in Figure 3. According to their location parameters, the most ingrained clichés on Roma people are that they are noisy and do not care for education, their houses and their personal hygiene. As regards the generalisation of positive traits, the most rigid stereotypes are that Roma people are freedom-loving, passionate dancers and free spirits.

### 5.2. *Stereotype endorsement*

The person parameters, or latent trait scores, estimated with the 2PNO graded response model discussed above, represent the respondents' endorsement of a stereotypical view of Roma people with regard to the 'morality' and the 'romantic image' dimensions. The latent trait scores, the item location and the threshold estimates can be represented through a person-item map, shown in Figure 3 for each analysed dimension, which is useful in order to compare the range and position of item parameters (thresholds and locations on the lower panel of each plot) to the range and position of the person measure distribution (upper panel).

(Figure 3)

The person-item maps order the level of endorsement of the clichéd view and the degree of difficulty to adhere to a given stereotype on the same latent axis. More precisely, the larger the person score on the latent trait, the higher the individual's stereotypical attitude; the lower the location parameter of a stereotype, the higher its level of dissemination among the respondents. Subjects showing low stereotypical attitudes are nevertheless prone to endorse the most ingrained clichés on Roma. From inspection of Figure 3, it is possible to notice a greater level of endorsement of positive stereotypes and clichés related to the vision of Gypsies as 'children of the wind'.

(Table 3)

The correlation coefficients between the estimated latent variable scores is equal to  $-0.3$ , with 95% credible interval  $(-0.35; -0.20)$ . Therefore, endorsement of the romantic image of Roma people is negatively correlated with the acceptance of unfavourable stereotypes. However, the weakness of this correlation supports the bidimensionality of the stereotype scale.

### 5.3 *Endorsement dependence on individual features*

Our model specification allows also for the assessment of the influence of the chosen covariates on the endorsement of the stereotypical view of the Roma people. In particular, we

include in the model the following socio-demographic variables: gender as dummy with baseline female; mean centred age; area of residence, coding with 0 the Italian southern regions and the islands and with 1 the central and northern regions; educational attainment distinguishing between non graduated (0) and graduated (1) respondents. The political position on the left-right political spectrum is incorporated by considering the dummies "left" and "right" with baseline the politically centrist view. The regression parameter posterior means are shown in Table 4.

(Table 4)

Considering the significance of the estimated relationships, it is possible to highlight how endorsement of stereotypes does not depend on gender, region of residence and educational attainment. As for age, older respondents show a higher level of conformity to stereotypes portraying a romantic image of Roma people. The most influential covariate is the position on the left-right political spectrum. Respondents with leftist ideology are less inclined to accept negative stereotypes and more liable to support the generalised ideas related to cheerfulness, skills and abilities. Respondents on the Right wing are more disposed to confirm stereotypes with a negative connotation, while their acceptance of the positive ones is not dissimilar from the more centrist participants. The different attitudes towards endorsement of the stereotypes according to the declared political position is confirmed by the latent scores distributions represented in Figure 4.

(Figure 4)

## 6. Prejudiced attitudes towards Roma people in everyday discourse

The application of the PCM partitioning algorithm, discussed in Section 4, has disclosed that the Roma stereotype scale cannot be analysed by considering a joint unidimensional IRT model, since there is a clear distinctive pattern for the item parameters related to the negative and the positive parameters. In particular, stereotypes show DIF with respect to the respondents' position on the political spectrum. Furthermore, the moderate negative correlation between the latent traits of 'morality' and 'romantic image', estimated through the multidimensional 2PNO model discussed in Section 5, supports the bidimensionality of the stereotype scale.

In order to better understand the attitudes of the respondents with high or low scores in each of the two latent traits, it is worthwhile investigating their answers to the open-ended question on their attitudes on the Roma people. As for the morality dimension, the free-responses of the participants with a higher level of endorsement are largely consistent with the stereotypical view of Roma as a burden on society - *'Roma are parasites that can only live by their wits'*, *'A plague to society'*, *'Slackers'*, *'Roma are not useful to society'*, *'Roma take advantage of services, they are not entitled to'*. Their responses focus also on the cliché of Roma as people who engage in criminal behaviour

- *'because of the Gypsies, an Italian citizen cannot go around freely without having to be constantly on guard!'*, *'They are criminals, they have come here only to commit crimes and increase criminality'*, *'Roma should not be all tarred with the same brush, and as there are Roma who steal, abuse women and exploit children, there are also those who make their own way. However, I believe the number of those who are dishonest to be much higher'*, *'The Gypsies are dishonest and engage only in illegal activities such as drug dealing and usury. Toward them, unfortunately, also my principles of solidarity and openness to the other expire'*.

On the other hand, for the participants with a higher level of endorsement of the positive stereotypes, the free-responses show an interest on Roma culture and tradition - *'I am deeply fascinated by their culture, as from everything that is different and gives me the opportunity to*

*enrich myself*’, ‘*People who travel physically and mentally are fond of the Roma people*’, ‘*I have been working for the education and integration of Roma children for two years, and I am fascinated by their culture*’, ‘*I respect and love their culture*’, ‘*Roma are a people who could teach us that a less rigid society ensure more peace and freedom*’. In addition, many responses highlight how the lack of integration is due to the mainstream society rather than to an alleged unwillingness of the Roma - ‘*They are marginalised because their society, culture and traditional economy were quickly erased by contemporary Western societies.[...] As a result, they were relegated in an unacceptable state of disrepair, with negative consequences for us and for them. I think that before real opportunities, they would be the first to want to escape from poverty, filth and marginality*’.

For both the latent traits, most of the free-responses of the participants, who show the lowest scores, are linked to the concept of ethnic equality and to the unfairness of overgeneralisation - ‘*We are all equal*’, ‘*Roma are human beings like everybody else and should be treated as human beings*’, ‘*I think they are just human beings like everyone else, with the same strengths and weaknesses*’, ‘*I do not believe you can generalise about any ethnic group. There are Roma who are honest, dishonest, religious, atheists, good musicians, tone deaf, noisy, quiet, sympathetic, unpleasant*’, ‘*I have no opinion in particular: my opinion is on individuals, not on ethnic groups*’, ‘*I cannot express unequivocal opinions on such a broad category of people*’.

The analysed attitudes of respondents with larger positive and negative coordinates on the axes of the bidimensional factorial solution, are coherent with the interpretation of the latent variables as conformity to a positive or negative stereotypical images of the Roma people.

## 7. Discussion

Nowadays, about 180,000 Roma and Sinti live in Italy, and they represent a share of 0.25% of the total Italian population. This is the lowest share among the Mediterranean countries, far lower than France (0.6%), Spain (1.8%) and Greece (2%). Half of them – i.e. about 70,000 people - arrived in Italy between the fifteenth century and 1950. A majority of them (60%) are Italian citizens, while the rest are immigrants (mainly from former Yugoslavia) or EU citizens of Romania. Approximately 40,000 people live in the so-called ‘nomad camps’. Four out of 5 of the total Roma population live in normal houses, study, work and lead an existence like any other citizen, Italian or foreigner, resident in our country (Associazione 21 Luglio, 2014). However, their everyday life remains mostly unknown in the eyes of public opinion. As pointed out by Sigona (2008), for the majority of Italians, Roma do not exist as people, but only as stereotypes. On the eve of the last elections for the European Parliament, the results of a research conducted by Pew Research Center (2014) in different European countries, amongst which France, Greece, Germany, Italy, Poland and the United Kingdom, were published. The news dates back to 14 May 2014 and the interesting part of the survey is the one referring to opinions on some ethnic groups, such as Muslims, Jews and Roma. Hardly surprisingly, the most negative feelings concern the Roma people. In Italy only 10% of the respondents declared they were in favour of this group, while 85% declared a negative opinion. Italy is followed by France (66% against), Greece (53%) and lastly Spain, with 41% of respondents against: in other words, anti-Roma prejudice and stereotype seems to constitute a pan-European phenomenon. In the introduction to a collection of papers dealing with multidisciplinary approaches to Romani studies, Stewart points out how “Across eastern Europe, and to some extent in other countries of Europe, where Anti-Gypsism has political currency - either at a local level, as in the United Kingdom, or at a national level, as in Italy, Gypsies are a population about whom it has until recently remained acceptable to be unapologetically racist”(Stewart and Rövid, 2010). In a poll conducted by SWG (2014) in Italy, the 86% of the sample (706 participants) declared to hold their wallet when a ‘Gypsy’ gets on the bus, confirming that the Roma are the social

group against which there is the highest sense of discomfort. The results of our analysis confirm this general tendency and peculiarity of prejudice and stereotypes towards Roma: open, direct, racist, full of negative perceptions, in other words ‘delegitimising’ (Bar-Tal, 1990). The figure of the ‘Gypsy’ continues to trouble our developed and modern society. Its appearance continues to generate fear and rejection, as it evokes something undefined and altogether disturbing.

In a recent study conducted by Fontanella et al. (2016), the authors showed how the Roma population continue to be not accepted by a large part of the society. In particular, comparing attitudes towards Roma people and migrants in terms of prejudicial predisposition and social distance, the authors highlighted how the survey participants disclosed a higher level of prejudice towards Roma people and a lower closeness to them. As shown in Section 5, the negative stereotypes, which contribute the most in shaping this prejudicial predisposition and differentiate the survey participant stereotype endorsement, are those linked to antisocial and criminal behaviours. The crime cliché is a recurring theme in the studies on prejudice against the Roma, and our data confirm this tendency. The ‘Gypsy problem’ has become a stable trait of the Roma.

On the other hand, the most ingrained clichés are linked to Roma negligence in terms of personal hygiene, domestic conditions, education and to their refusal to integrate in the mainstream society. This exclusion serves to create a social distance between the majority and the minority and to deny similarities between ‘us and them’. The majority attributes the absence of integration to the different ‘essence’ of the minority. The construction of the behaviour and the practices of Roma people as deviating from the norm leads people to see them as abnormal and, thus, to accuse them more easily. People categorise Roma, and minorities in general, outside the boundaries of normal human behaviour (Chrysochoou, 2004). This attribution serves as explanation as to why the Roma people continue to be seen at the fringes of society, and this attitude is concretely visible in the Italian social policy of the ‘nomad camps’ for Roma people. In this sense, politically and socially Roma are treated as a special subgroup, occupying

a spatial and temporal enclave, thus denying the immediacy of their existence. Costi (2010) argues that political authorities in Italy have constructed the Roma as a dangerous immigrant community that is not constitutive of the Italian nation, 'where the Roma are treated as the other'. Enforcing the separation of Roma from mainstream society through the use of camps is a key factor in the perpetuation of their status as 'inner enemies' rather than 'strangers' (Bauman, 1989). Roma people live segregated in the camps, and the vicious circle persists.

The stereotype regarding the Roma people as being 'burden on society', since they prefer to live on welfare benefits instead of working, shows an intermediate level of consolidation among the respondents. The endorsement of this preconceived idea is strictly linked to the claim that immigrants and the nomads are a threat to the welfare of the Italian people, especially considering the weak welfare state, which fails to provide for Italian citizens either. According to Costi (2010), "if citizens have not internalised their own rights of citizenship then it is unlikely that there will be space for such rights to be extended to immigrants and especially the 'nomadic' Roma."

Along with this negative generalised representation of Roma people, there survives also the image of the 'Gypsy' as the 'child of the wind' who enjoys freedom in love and spirits, has innate artistic talents and cherishes the small things in life. The endorsement of such a stereotypical view is significantly higher for participants who declare themselves to be on the left-wing of the political spectrum, who on the contrary show less acceptance of the negative clichés. Generally, expressed negative stereotypes are assumed to be much more likely to negatively impact broad social beliefs. Kay et al. (2013) suggest that positive stereotypes, promoting antiquated beliefs about social groups, can make them damaging to general egalitarian social beliefs: "[...] because positive stereotypes [...] are less likely to be noted as information worthy of skepticism, they may be especially potent means of (i) influencing people's general beliefs about the nature of group differences [...] and, ironically, (ii) triggering other, negative stereotypical beliefs about the target group [...]". The view of Roma as being

exotic seems to perpetuate the romantic vision of the Gypsies, the pervasive myth about minority culture. The myth can be retained because failure to meet mythical expectations is attributed to deviancy or to social pathological causes that are somehow a product of urban living. This seemingly benevolent attitude (Fiske et al., 2007) accentuates and reinforces the separation distances, so Roma become deviant when enmeshed in the social mainstream.

This study improves our current understanding of the moral dimension of anti-Roma prejudice and stereotypes. This point, still little studied in the literature about Roma people, could be useful for researchers in order to understand the factors that play an important role in stigmatization and prejudice. Given the history of discrimination and victimization of the Roma group, our study shows that, consistent with SCM model of content of stereotypes (Cuddy et al. 2008), morality assesses the other's perceived behaviour in the social context (deviance of Roma group). This means that morality not only describes group stereotype, but *becomes a dimension* of group stereotype, as documented by SCM model and the BIAS map (Cuddy et al. 2007). Moreover, this result of our study could be important to understand how cultural and social context shapes the stereotypes: Roma become deviants precisely when enmeshed in the social mainstream. Situations and their corresponding cognitive appraisals elicit discrete patterns of emotions, which in turn trigger specific behavioural responses (e.g. offensive action) adapted to cope with the potential threat the other individual or group poses (Frijda et al., 1989; Lášticová, and Findor, 2016). Our research also confirms the coexistence of stereotypes ambivalent toward the Roma: positive and negative stereotypes coexist and in this way people continue to justify the iniquitous treatment of this group (Bye et al. 2014).

## 8. Some conclusions

Our results show that in our culture images and representations still persist of the Gypsies that become a scapegoat for us to give them all the responsibility. As some authors have shown (Klein and Epley, 2016) when people consider the behaviour of others', they tend to adopt an "outside approach", basing their predictions on observed behaviours. This perspective serves to maintain a desirable self-image and a positive self-concept. If we look at the data closely, we can see two images of Roma people that oppose nature and culture: on the one hand, we have the 'free' from societal constraints (Roma are wild, noisy and dirty like animals); on the other, Roma are criminals and deceitful, relational qualities that arise in a societal organised condition (culture). This distinction, part of a process of evaluative prejudice, continues to be used to delegitimise other groups, especially Roma. Dehumanisation can be observed in the most extreme forms of bigotry, but also in milder forms in which others are viewed not in straightforwardly negative terms, but with indifference or even with superficially positive attitudes inflected by patronising, condescending or even idealising perceptions (Haslam and Loughnan, 2014). But the reality is very different, because in Italy the Roma population is still largely outside the labour market that provides good jobs and decent wages, and young people are not in school or training courses. Policies tend to deal with the spatial dimension of conflict only reactively: keeping the distance between Gypsies and Italians, recognising and representing them in public discourse, and in our images, confirming the fear of 'the other' in 'our' backyard, without attempting to acknowledge the real needs of this population. Of course, the results presented here are only a starting point for discussing these ideas, but they may be a first step in trying to understand this complex phenomenon.

Table 1: Percentages of respondents who disagree or agree with the statements of the Roma stereotype scale

Stereotypes	Roma:	disagree	agree
Negative	are burglars	38.4	19.5
	houses are very messy	32.5	20.1
	are lazy	35.8	20.7
	their presence causes criminality	35.6	23.8
	are tricksters	26.0	24.4
	have no respect for other people's space	38.0	29.1
	are dirty and have poor personal hygiene	29.3	29.1
	are not interested in education	24.6	30.7
	prefer to live on benefits instead of working	27.8	31.3
	are work-shy	29.3	32.9
	are noisy	22.8	33.5
	do not want to integrate and prefer to be marginalised	24.2	35.0
Positive	are gifted craftsmen	33.5	16.3
	are great musicians	19.5	17.7
	have artistic talent	21.5	21.7
	girls are beautiful and seductive	19.5	25.4
	enjoy the small things in life	13.6	31.7
	are free spirits	16.3	35.8
are passionate dancers	10.4	37.6	
are freedom-loving	10.0	49.2	

Figure 1: Partial credit tree for the Roma stereotype scale. *'pospol'*: position on the political spectrum (1: left; 2: centre; 3: right); grey circle: negative stereotypes; black circle: positive stereotypes

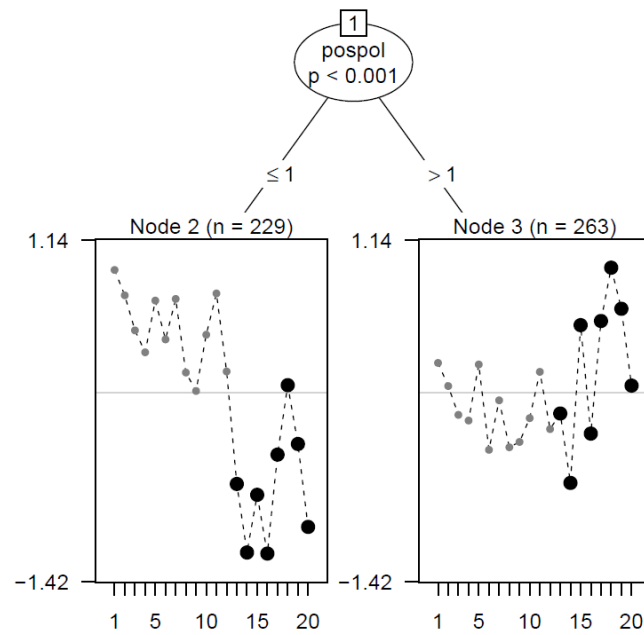
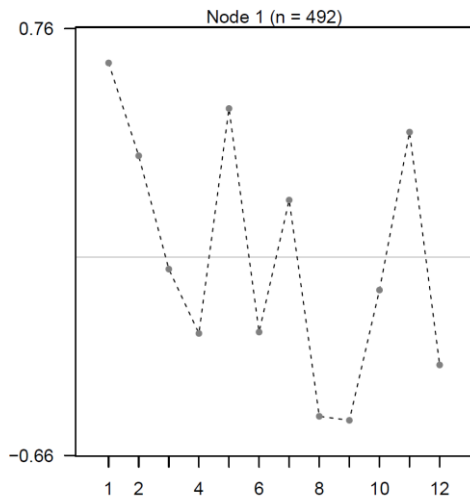
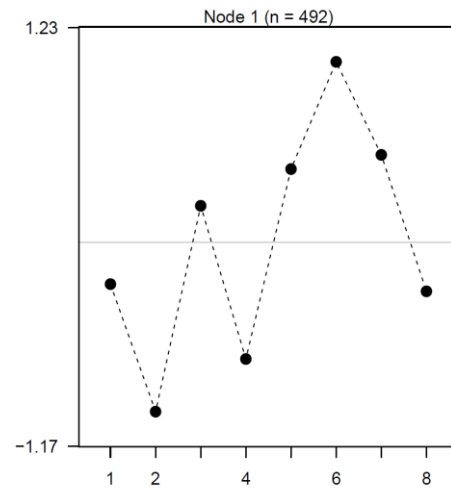


Figure 2: Partial credit trees for the negative and the positive Roma stereotype sub-scales.



(a) *Negative stereotypes*



(b) *Positive stereotypes*

Table 2: Item discrimination parameter estimates and 95% credible interval

<i><b>DIMENSION</b></i>	<i><b>Roma:</b></i>	<b>Estimate</b>	<b>95% CI</b>	
Morality	have no respect for other people's space	2.06	(1.71;2.45)	
	are burglars	1.71	(1.41;2.04)	
	their presence causes criminality	1.69	(1.42;2.00)	
	are work-shy	1.68	(1.43;1.97)	
	prefer to live on benefits instead of working	1.63	(1.39;1.89)	
	are tricksters	1.62	(1.38;1.89)	
	do not want to integrate and prefer to be marginalised	1.52	(1.30;1.77)	
	are lazy	1.16	(0.99;1.34)	
	are not interested in education	1.10	(0.93;1.28)	
	are dirty and have poor personal hygiene	1.03	(0.87;1.21)	
	are noisy	0.92	(0.77;1.08)	
	houses are very messy	0.64	(0.53;0.77)	
	Romanticised portrait	are great musicians	1.52	(1.23;1.84)
		enjoy the small things in life	1.42	(1.17;1.70)
have artistic talent		1.38	(1.13;1.70)	
girls are beautiful and seductive		0.99	(0.82;1.18)	
are freedom-loving		0.91	(0.74;1.09)	
are gifted craftsmen		0.88	(0.72;1.06)	
are passionate dancers		0.74	(0.59;0.88)	
are free spirits	0.71	(0.57;0.86)		

Table 3: Item location parameter estimates and 95% credible interval

<i>DIMENSION</i>	<i>Roma:</i>	<b>Estimate</b>	<b>95% CI</b>
Morality	are noisy	0.39	(0.25;0.52)
	are not interested in education	0.59	(0.45;0.73)
	houses are very messy	0.67	(0.54;0.81)
	are dirty and have poor personal hygiene	0.69	(0.54;0.85)
	do not want to integrate and prefer to be marginalised	0.70	(0.54;0.86)
	prefer to live on benefits instead of working	0.97	(0.79;1.17)
	are work-shy	1.00	(0.82;1.18)
	are tricksters	1.12	(0.93;1.32)
	are lazy	1.14	(0.97;1.32)
	their presence causes criminality	1.47	(1.25;1.72)
	have no respect for other people's space	1.64	(1.36;1.92)
	are burglars	1.74	(1.46;2.02)
Romanticised portrait	are freedom-loving	0.31	(0.12;0.50)
	are passionate dancers	0.35	(0.17;0.52)
	are free spirits	0.53	(0.35;0.71)
	girls are beautiful and seductive	1.13	(0.92;1.35)
	enjoy the small things in life	1.28	(1.01;1.56)
	are gifted craftsmen	1.49	(1.26;1.76)
	have artistic talent	1.77	(1.45;2.15)
are great musicians	2.00	(1.64;2.41)	

Figure 3: Person - item maps for the negative and the positive stereotype sub-scales.  
*Upper panel of each plot: estimated person parameter distribution. Lower panel of each plot: estimated thresholds (•) and location (\*) parameters. The dashed line represents the latent trait mean*

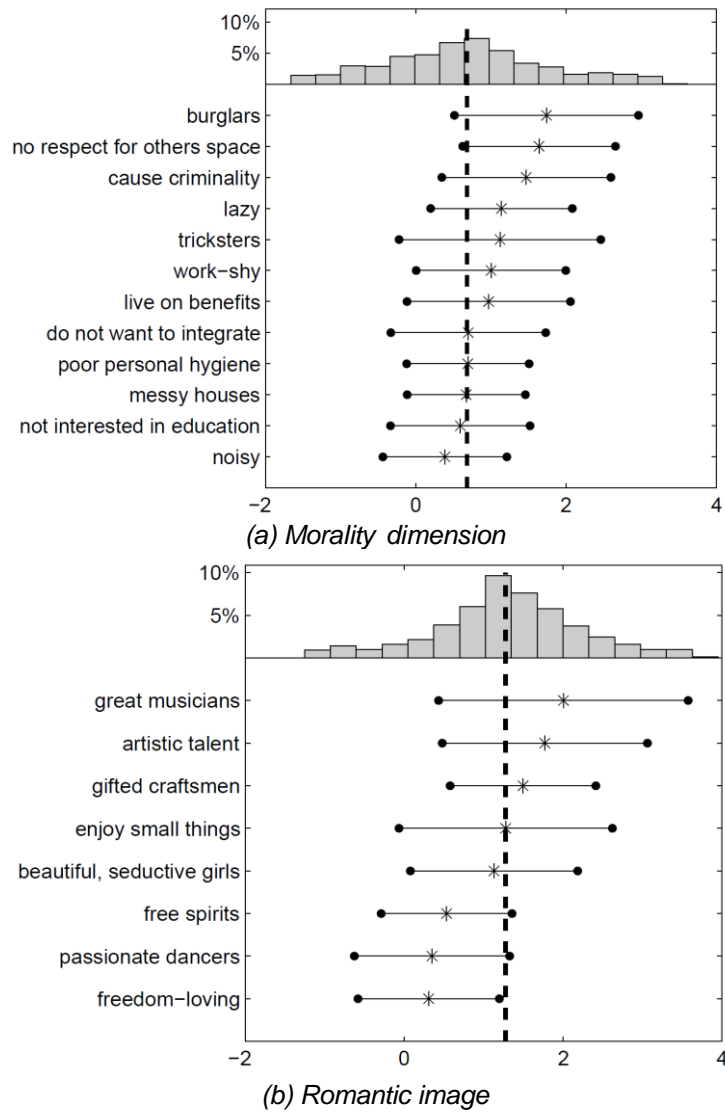
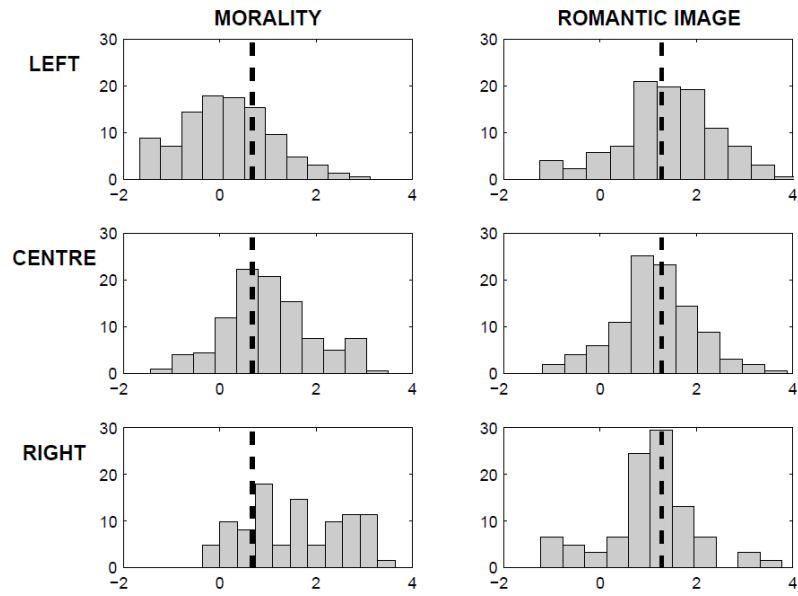


Table 4: Regression parameter estimates

	Morality		Romantic image	
Intercept	0.91	**	1.22	**
Age	0.00		0.01	*
Male	0.10		-0.15	
North-Central Italy	0.04		-0.07	
Graduate	0.16		0.08	
Left	-0.86	**	0.25	*
Right	0.56	**	-0.13	

Figure 4: Person parameter distributions for the negative and the positive stereotype sub- scales according to the position on the political spectrum. *The dashed line represent the corresponding latent trait means*



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