Early Occupational Outcomes of School-To-Work Transition in Italy. A "Centre-Periphery" Geographical Approach

Francesca Tosi (presenting author), Giulia Dugar, Livia Elisa Ortensi

1. *Background and rationale*

School-to-work transition (SWT) brings with it a twofold significance. Not only it sheds light on aspects related to the private and psychological dimension of young adults or post-adolescents (Arnett 2000) and on mechanisms closely linked to national demographic and economic (Impicciatore and Tosi 2021). But it also produces a cascade of consequences on marking events characterizing the so-called transition to adulthood. The expansion of education, and more specifically, the increased enrolment in tertiary education (Barbagli et al. 2003), is strongly associated with a delay in completing one's education – thus, postponing the achievement of other markers of the transition to adulthood, such as entering the labour market, forming a family, having the first child (Schizzerotto and Lucchini 2004; Impicciatore and Tomatis 2020), or moving out of the parents' home (Patiniotis and Holdsworth 2005). Overall, a delayed transition to adulthood is likely to impact youths' earnings and family formation, thereby affecting the demographic and economic well-being of countries (Brzinsky-Fay 2014).

In recent years, the European context has witnessed a general delay in the transition of young people from education to their first job, with particularly unfavourable conditions for women (Eurostat 2012), remarking the gender gap significance even in youth unemployment rates. Indeed, the time interval lengthens even more when considering the transition to a permanent job position (Quintini 2007; Pastore 2015). To this regard, Italy is one of the worst-placed scenarios in the European panorama, especially since the 2008 economic crises has exacerbated such delay (Pastore 2019). If the age of entry into the labour market was relatively low for the generation born in the 1940s – as it benefited from a favourable economic situation – for recent generations, facing an agitated economic landscape marked by rising unemployment rates and an extended period of education, the delay in the SWT is more pronounced. Moreover, recent labour market reforms have led to an increase in the share of atypical or non-standard workers (temporary, coordinated, and continuous collaborators) and, once again, these contractual forms are even more common among women, individuals with tertiary education, and those from the middle managerial class (Istat 2022).

Although SWT is often looked at in a comparative perspective among national contexts, scarcer is research focusing on intra-national territorial differences (Raffe 2008). Even research specifically focused on the Italian case has not given the necessary attention to the role played by geographic disparities – besides the canonical North-South divide – in a region historically characterized by significant regional heterogeneity in socioeconomic terms (Viesti 2021).

In light of the implications that the growing national disparities have on SWT and, subsequently, on youths' socioeconomic possibilities and the arising of inequality patterns, this contribution wishes to fill-in the literature gap by assessing to what extent geographical origins in Italy can be deemed as an influential factor to predict early occupational outcomes, measured through the contractual form (standard, quasi-standard and non-standard workers[1]), job-related prestige

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[1] According to Istat's (2022) classification.

(skilled and unskilled) and the earned income. This proposal fits within a broader research framework that aims to examine the implications of Italian geographical and regional heterogeneity on social stratification and the intergenerational reproduction of social inequalities.

2. Data e methods

This contribution relies on individual-level data from two surveys implemented by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat) respectively on the labour integration of high-school graduates and the other on university undergraduates and graduates' degree holders. Published in 2015, these surveys allow us to investigate the education-to-work transition of high-schoolers and university graduates who completed their studies in 2011, offering a detailed image of their early occupational situation four years after obtaining their educational qualification. To observe the geographical dimension in this study, we use Eurostat's Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS) from 2016. Since Istat's micro-data provide respondents' province-level detail, Eurostat's geographic focus is at NUTS-3 level, which corresponds to the Italian *province* territorial and administrative division. Among the territorial classifications available for NUTS-3, we opted to investigate the geographic implications based on the "urban/rural typology". This classification discerns provinces into three regions: predominantly urban, intermediate, and predominantly rural. It distinguishes between urban clusters and rural grid cells and takes into account the share of the population living in each region. This approach not only allows us to examine territorial peculiarities but it offers a unique perspective to understand the nature of the provincial region.

As a method, we employ logistic or multinomial logistic regression as appropriate to examine the territorial effects of respondents' early-occupational outcomes, which we operationalize through: i) the type of contract (standard and non-standard); and ii) job prestige (skilled and unskilled). An ordered multinomial logit regression will then be estimated to observe iii) respondents' earned income. We will also consider possible mediating factors that dictate early-occupational outcomes, such as gender, parents' educational level, school type (for high-school graduates) and academic discipline (for university graduates), and graduation marks standardized by school type/academic discipline and geographic macro-area. Despite relying on the NUTS-3 territorial classification, our modelling strategy also accounts for the canonical North-South divide, given its historical and political significance in the Italian context. Therefore, in addition to the urban/rural NUTS-3 typology, provinces will be categorized also by their geographical macro-area of reference (Centre-North and South).

Finally, since Istat's individual-level data include information not only about the province of origin, but also the province of current residence and work, it provides an opportunity to observe respondents' geographical mobility and the relationship between internal spatial mobility and early-occupational outcomes (Tosi et al. 2019).

Table 1 offers a brief description of our sample by selected variables of interest.

Table 1. Sample description, selected variables (%)

	High-school graduates	University graduates
Geographic macro-area		
Center-North	67.0	61.0
South	31.6	38.0
Abroad	1.4	1.0
NUTS-3 urban/rural typology *(province of origin)*		
Predominantly urban	38.8	42.7
Intermediate	50.3	45.4
Predominantly rural	12.4	10.9
Contract type		
Standard	21.1	26.9
Quasi-standard	2.9	12.0
Non-Standard	7.4	10.3
High school type		
Liceo	45.5	70.4
Technical college	21.6	24.8
Vocational college	33.0	4.4
University discipline		
Scientific	-	16.1
Medicine	-	12.8
Engineering	-	10.6
Architecture	-	15.5
Economics-statistics	-	8.8
Social-politics	-	13.3
Law	-	4.9
Human sciences	-	14.3
Sport sciences	-	3.4
Parents' education		
No title/primary ed.	2.5	4.8
Lower secondary ed.	26.3	19.5
Upper secondary ed.	44.0	45.2
Undergraduate degree	2.6	3.5
Graduate degree	11.3	25.0
Tot.	100	100
(N)	*26,235*	*58,400*

Source: Istat's Survey on University graduates' vocational integration (2015) and Survey on Educational and professional paths of upper secondary school graduates (2015).

3. *Expected results and further developments*

The paper will explore the relationship between geographical origin and early occupational outcomes in Italy, with the aim of uncovering geographic inequalities and patterns of social stratification, as well as their intergenerational transmission. Additionally, it will evaluate how

mobility and the geographical trajectories of young people can influence their early career opportunities and life paths. As a robustness check, in the paper we will also alternative definitions of territorial centrality/marginality, such as altimetry, whether the province is predominantly constituted by mountain or coastal areas, or if it belongs to a central or an inner area according to the SNAI (National Strategy for Inner Areas) classification. This database categorizes all 7901 Italian municipalities into six groups based on their level of centrality or marginality, considering the availability of educational, health, and transportation services.

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