

Geographic mobility and occupational achievement: Examining the role of Italian cities as ‘escalator’ regions

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The Research Problem

‘Escalator’ regions are metropolitan city-regions that dominate intra-national migration systems (Fielding 1997, 1992). Due to their centrality in social, occupational, and geographic mobility processes, these areas attract relevant inflows of upwardly mobile young adults originating from external areas, mainly living in single person households. As a consequence, ‘escalator’ regions provide them with chances for accelerating processes of upward occupational mobility. At a subsequent stage, in later-middle age, migrants towards “escalator” regions are encouraged to re-migrate towards eternal regions in nuclear households, though maintaining their social standings. Patterns of ‘escalator move’ have been observed in relation to internal mobility processes directed to specific areas, such as South-East England, including London (Findlay et al. 2009), and the Paris region in France (Lelièvre & Bonvalet 1994). Does such an ‘escalator’ effect of cities on social and occupational mobility also play a role in the Italian internal migration system?

Although Italy can be considered a country that shows lower rates of intra-national migration compared to the USA and the other European countries (Bell et al. 2015), it has experienced intense and prolonged interregional mobility (especially from Southern to Northern regions) after World War II, mainly due to the strong territorial differences in terms of economic development and labour market opportunities between South and North. More than nine million Italians have been involved in long-distance internal migration between the mid-1950s and the early 1970s (Impicciatore and Strozza 2016). Although showing lower intensity, in the more recent years the phenomenon has been far from being negligible. More than 2.5 million people have left Southern regions between 1990 and 2010.

Accordingly, internal geographic mobility in Italy has been mainly studied as South-to-North migration. Previous studies have shown that migrants from Southern to Central and Northern Regions have benefitted from higher employment opportunities and have experienced patterns of social mobility, though usually as horizontal moves from rural working class to urban working class (Panichella 2014). However, less is known on the role of cities in shaping internal migration in Italy and on the relationship between occupational mobility and other dimensions of geographic mobility in Italy, beyond North-South divide.

Aiming at filling this knowledge gap, we focus on metropolitan city areas in Central and Northern Italy as destinations for internal migrants and we explore the occupational consequences of different trajectories of geographic mobility towards these areas. We distinguish among migrants coming from different macro-regions (Central-North and South) and migrants coming from areas with different degrees of urbanization. We first investigate the selection into different types of internal migration movements towards Northern large cities, considering which individual factors are mainly associated with different migratory trajectories. Second, we consider whether occupational achievement and inter-generational social mobility are triggered by different forms of internal geographic mobility towards large cities.

Data and Methods

To investigate these issues, we use data from the Italian Households Longitudinal Survey (IHLS), which is a panel survey divided into five waves collected between 1997 and 2005. The first wave (1997) gathered retrospective information on all relevant events experienced by individuals before the date of the interview, while the subsequent surveys updated these pieces of information, recording all significant events occurring to the members of the sample in the period between the previous interview and the date of the interview.

IHLS is still the only source of data in Italy collecting information on the entire residential history (at the municipality level) of a representative sample of the Italian population. Moreover, data provide an unprecedented opportunity to apply a life-course approach to geographical mobility in Italy because IHLS collected also detailed

information on the entire life histories of the respondents, including social origin, education, occupational career and family events.

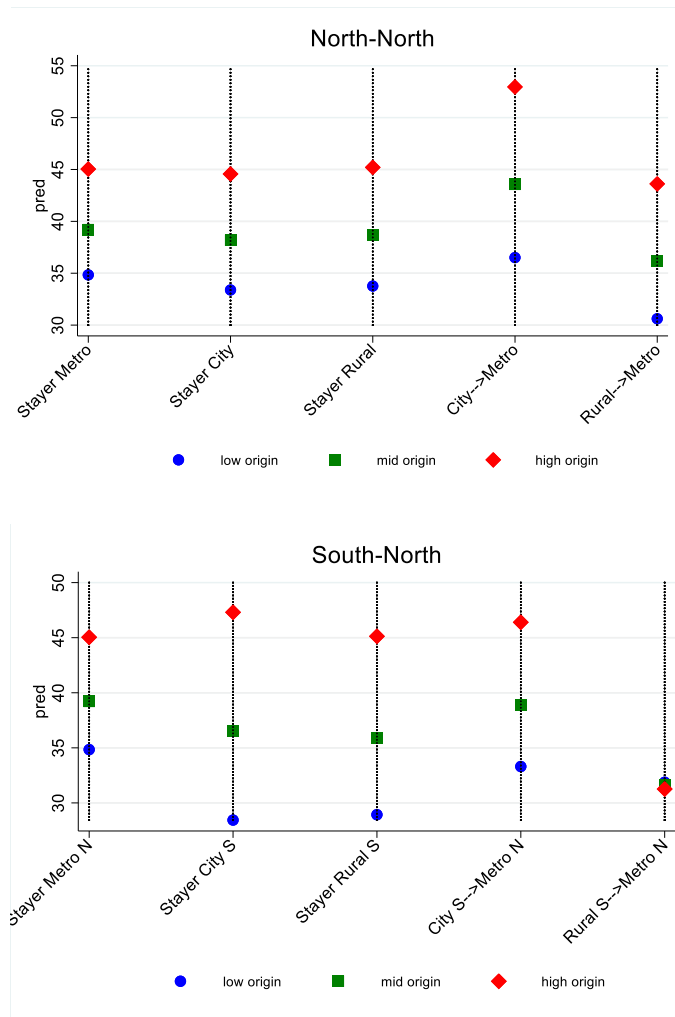
We restricted our sample to subjects born between 1930 and 1980 and followed individual trajectories from 15 to 50 years of age, or 15- (age at interview) if the case is right-censored, i.e. we focused on life segments and behaviours experienced between 1945 and 2005.

The key variable in our analysis is time varying *Geographic Trajectory*. First, we divided the Italian territory (at the municipality level) into three groups, following the DEGURBA classification (Cities; Towns and Suburbs; Rural Areas). Second, we defined Metropolitan Central and Northern Cities as the extended area including Cities, Towns, and Suburbs within the Province related to cities having more than 300,000 inhabitants in Central and Northern Italy (Torino, Genova, Milano, Venezia, Bologna, Firenze, Roma). Third, we identified different geographic trajectories towards Metropolitan Central and Northern Cities: from Central-Northern Cities, Towns, and Suburbs; from Central-Northern Rural Areas; from Southern Cities, Towns, and Suburbs; from Southern Rural Areas. In this way, we explore either North-to-North and South-to-North migrations. Finally, we study the relationship between geographic trajectory and occupational achievement, comparing migrants with stayers both in the origin and destinations.

We developed Random Intercept Models on the Occupational Achievement (using the De Lillo-Schizzerotto prestige scale) including time-varying Geographic Trajectory as main independent variable, controlling for other socio-demographic characteristics. Furthermore, to study how the relationship between occupational achievement and geographic mobility changes by social class of origin (i.e., to observe different patterns of inter-generational social mobility in different forms of geographic mobility), we developed models that include interaction terms between these two variables.

Preliminary results show predictions of the Occupational prestige scale by three different levels of social origin. The occupational outcomes of North-to-North migration towards large cities (Figure 1) are stratified by geographic and social origin. Internal migrants from Northern Cities, towns, and suburbs, having mid and high social origin do experience an ‘escalator’ move, achieving higher occupational standings than stayers in large cities. Conversely, migrants from Northern Rural Areas, having mid-low social origin, generally access the lower occupational segments. Furthermore, the same group

of South-to-North migrants (Figure 2) appears concentrated in lower occupations, regardless of social class of origin.



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