

Long-run Transformations of Mobility Processes in Italy

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Working paper

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Introduction

The target of the paper is threefold. It tries, first, to establish whether, in the long run, the trend of the variations observed in the level of social fluidity of the Italian society correspond to the direction of changes observed in the absolute mobility rates. Second, it attempts to illustrate the mechanisms underlying the changes over time in the degree of openness of the Italian societies. Third, it seeks to highlight the respective role of mobility via occupation and mobility via both occupation and marriage (or stable cohabitation) in shaping the overall Italian mobility regime.

To carry out these analyses we resorted to the five waves Italian Households Longitudinal Study carried out from 1997 to 2005. This panel bears information on about 11,000 Italians born from 1900 to 1987. We studied a subsample of ILFI made up by almost 8,000 interviewees born from 1922 to 1980: They were divided in four cohorts: i) 1922-1937; ii) 1938-1953; iii) 1954-1969; and iv) 1970-1980.

As mentioned earlier, we have paid attention to their intergenerational mobility experiences occurred via occupation and via both occupation and marriage or stable cohabitation. Intergenerational mobility via occupation has been analysed twice. First, we have considered the class of arrival corresponding to the current or last occupation of the interviewees. Second, in order to avoid any bias attributable to the different length of the career of the interviewees of the four different cohorts, we have looked at the occupation they were performing when all of them were aged 25-30.

Intergenerational overall mobility, i.e. that taking into account also the effect of marriage, has been analysed considering only the current class of arrival of both married or cohabiting individuals and singles.

The Italian class structure has been represented by a seven-fold version of EG scheme:

I+II: service class high and low level, entrepreneurs (more than 4 employees), managers and professionals;

IIIa: routine non-manual employees, high and middle level;

IVab: self-employed (0-3 employees) not in agriculture;

IVc: self-employed (0-3 employees) in agriculture;

V+VI: workers supervisors and skilled manual workers;

IIIb+VIIa: unskilled manual workers not in agriculture and unskilled non-manual workers;

VIIb: manual workers in agriculture.

As usual, the class of origins of all individuals and the class of arrival of married persons has been classified following the dominance approach.

Intergenerational mobility via occupation

The variation across birth cohort of the social fluidity pattern underlying the intergenerational mobility processes referred to the current occupational class of arrival of the interviewees represent the starting point of the analyses. In order to have an initial synthetic measure of the variations over time in the levels of social fluidity, the relevant Origin by Destination by Cohort table was reproduced by means of a unidiff specification of the log-linear models. Although its fit is not very good, it improves rather parsimoniously the constant association model. Moreover, its dissimilarity index seems to be quite acceptable (Tab.1).

Tab. 1 *Log-linear models specifications and goodness of fit statistics (current occupation)*

Models	Goodness of fit statistics							
	χ^2	p	G^2	p	df	Δ	BIC	rG^2
Conditional independence	2391	0.000	2010	0.000	144	17.5	718	-
Constant association	155	0.000	159	0.000	108	4.6	-812	92.1
Unidiff	142	0.001	146	0.000	105	4.4	-799	92.7

Source: ILFI 2005

The scale parameters of unidiff indicate that in Italy the level of social fluidity has been monotonically increasing across the four birth cohorts, that is to say during the whole Twentieth century (Tab. 2).

Tab. 2 *Unidiff scale parameters by cohort (current or last occupation)*

Cohort	Scale parameters
1922-1937	1.00
1938-1953	0.87
1954-1969	0.81
1970-1987	0.77

Source: ILFI 2005

A reduction in the strength of net associations between origins and destination is usually expected to raise the amount of intergenerational mobility rates and, above all, that of upwards mobility. Unfortunately, this is not the case for Italy.

Tab. 3 *Variation across birth cohorts of the intergenerational mobility rates at current (last) occupation*

Type of (im)mobility	Cohorts			
	1922-1937	1938-1953	1954-1969	1970-1987
Immobility	32.4	24.9	29.6	30.3
Upwards mobility	16.0	25.5	27.0	19.4
Downwards mobility	26.2	22.2	18.8	28.6
Lateral mobility	25.4	27.4	24.7	21.8
N	1,411	2,254	2,664	1,632

Source: ILFI 2005

The overall mobility rate has varied across birth cohort according to an inverse U shaped trend. The upwards mobility rate displays the same trend, while the downwards mobility rate has been changing in the opposite direction, that is to say it decreased moving from the first to the second and to third cohort and dramatically increased passing from this cohort to the last one. In sum, while the raising of social fluidity generated an increase of overall mobility rate and upwards mobility rate in the second and third cohort it appears to be associated to a decline of both overall mobility and upwards mobility rates (Tab. 3)

Tab. 4 *Log-linear models specifications and goodness of fit statistics (occupation at age 25-30)*

Models	Goodness of fit statistics							
	χ^2	p	G ²	P	df	Δ	BIC	rG ²
Conditional independence	2540	0.000	2087	0.000	144	18.35	800	-
Constant association	154	0.010	158	0.010	108	4.4	-807	92.4
Unidiff	132	0.040	137	0.020	105	4.24	-802	93.4

Source: ILFI 2005

One cannot exclude that the results just shown are biased because of career effects, that is to say because the work histories of older cohorts are longer than that of the younger's one. To avoid this risk, we repeated the above analyses controlling for interviewees age or, rather, looking at their occupational class of arrival when all of them were 25-30 years old.

However, the results of the new set of analyses largely correspond to those described earlier. The unidiff model fits reasonably well the ODC table based on the occupation performed when the respondents were 25-30 years old (Tab. 4).

Tab. 5 *Unidiff scale parameters by cohort (occupation at age 25-30)*

Cohort	Scale parameters
1922-1937	1.00
1938-1953	0.80
1954-1969	0.75
1970-1987	0.72

Source: ILFI 2005

The scale parameters of this model proves, once again, that in Italy the degree of social fluidity has been monotonically increasing from the oldest to the youngest birth cohort, that is to say throughout the Twentieth century (Tab. 5)

Either in this case, the rates of absolute mobility do not follow the trends of relative mobility. The proportion of immobile people strongly declines moving from the first to the second cohort and increases from it to the third and, even more so, to the fourth cohort. The upwards mobility rates changed across cohorts following an inverse U shaped trend, while the opposite holds for downwards mobility rates that have reached their maximum value among people belonging to the youngest cohorts (Tab. 6).

Tab. 6 *Variation across birth cohorts of the intergenerational mobility rates referred to occupation performed at age of 25-30*

Type of (im)mobility	Cohorts			
	1922-1937	1938-1953	1954-1969	1970-1980
Immobility	37.2	25.5	29.8	30.8
Upwards mobility	13.5	21.6	25.1	18.8
Downwards mobility	24.4	24.1	19.4	28.5
Lateral mobility	24.9	28.9	25.8	21.9
N	1,201	1,973	2,379	1,203

Source: ILFI 2005

The variations across cohorts of the absolute intergenerational mobility rates observed in Italy can be accounted for by the changes underwent by the size of social classes during the Twentieth century.

Looking at the marginal distribution of the classes of arrival (both current and at the age 25-30), one can immediately realise that the service class and the white collars class monotonically widened their incidence among the employed moving from the first to third cohort, but shrunk in the younger. On the opposite, the proportion of unskilled non-manual and manual workers declined in the first three cohorts, but increased in the fourth one (Tab. 7). Hence, it can be maintained that the first three cohorts experienced an occupational upgrading, while the fourth one has suffered the effects of an occupational downgrading. It is precisely this occupational downgrading that can explain the decline of the upwards mobility rate and the increased incidence of downwards mobility episodes observed in the youngest cohort, despite the higher level of social fluidity it recorded.

Tab. 7 *Marginal distribution of classes of arrival by birth cohorts*

Classes	Cohorts			
	1922-1937	1938-1953	1954-1969	1970-1980
Current class				
I-II	5.9	8.7	10.0	8.9
IIIa	12.9	24.1	28.4	24.9
IVab	15.4	16.4	17.8	13.2
IVc	8.4	2.3	1.5	0.7
V-VI	17.9	18.0	14.9	19.2
IIIb+VIIa	32.6	27.0	25.2	31.1
VIIb	7.0	3.6	2.3	2.0
Class at age				
25-30				
I-II	4.0	5.2	8.8	8.3
IIIa	13.4	26.4	28.8	25.3
IVab	13.6	13.9	16.3	12.9
IVc	11.4	2.1	1.3	0.7
V-VI	19.2	21.2	16.8	19.7
IIIb+VIIa	29.3	27.6	25.5	31.1
VIIb	9.1	3.7	2.5	2.0

Source: ILFI 2005

It has to be stressed that the above results are not attributable to sample biases. They are confirmed by the dynamics of the Italian economy during the Twentieth century. Since the late Eighties, the yearly rates of change of the Italian GDP started to decline, from the early Nineties they went close to zero and became negative at the beginning of the new century. In other words, from the early Nineties Italian economy entered a stagnant conjuncture that transformed in an actual recession since 2002. Moreover, recent OECD data show that, contrary to what happened in most advanced societies, in Italy the incidence of highly skilled occupation was raising, from 1995 to 2015, only by 4.78 per cent, which is a proportion very close to that (4.55 per cent) recorded by the unskilled jobs. Therefore,

one can repeat what said earlier. It is because of the Italian economic decline, the consequent occupational downgrading and the reduction of available positions among high and middle classes that the cohort of people born between 1970 and 1987, despite the increased openness of the mobility regime, experienced a raise of downwards intergenerational mobility rate and a contraction of the upwards mobility rate. Even worse, their likelihood of incurring in downwards mobility episodes became much greater than their likelihood of experiencing upwards social mobility.

Tab. 8 *Selected parameters of the topological model fitting the ODC table (current/last occupation)*

Parameters	λ	s.e.
HI2	-0.681**	0.078
IN1	0.620**	0.096
IN1*1938/53	-0.322**	0.120
IN1*1954/69	-0.060	0.116
IN1*1970/87	-0.184	0.128
IN2	0.142	0.185
IN2*1938/53	0.245	0.230
IN2*1954/69	0.026	0.222
IN2*1970/87	0.690**	0.254
IN3	0.969**	0.197
IN4 I-II and IIIa	1.005**	0.234
IN4 I-II and IIIa*1938/53	0.138	0.287
IN4 I-II and IIIa*1954/69	-0.434	0.271
IN4 I-II and IIIa*1970/87	-0.872**	0.282
SE	-0.818**	0.065
AF2	0.247**	0.035
AF3 IIIa I-II	1.338**	0.365
AF3 IIIa I-II *1938/53	0.078	0.438
AF3 IIIa I-II*1954/69	-0.321	0.411
AF3 IIIa I-II*1970/87	-1.127**	0.420
AF4 VIIb I-II and IIIa	-1.142**	0.140

Source: ILFI 2005

Goodness of fit statistics of the topological model

χ^2	P	G ²	p	df	Δ	BIC	r G ²
266	0.000	258	0.000	120	5.6	-815	87.7

To achieve the second target of the paper, we paid a specific attention to the generative mechanisms of the increasing social fluidity observed in Italy during the Twentieth century. To do that, we specified a topological log-linear model, quite close to Erikson and Goldthorpe core fluidity model (Tab. 8). The four sets of interaction parameters expressing the variations of OD associations across birth cohorts deserve a close attention. The first set, indicates a reduction, since the second cohort, of

the overall propensity of children to enter the same class of parents. This effect is partially contrasted by the second set of interaction parameters. They show that the chances of remaining immobile in the service class and the self-employed classes increased in the fourth cohort. However, this effect is, in turn, reduced by the third and fourth sets of interaction parameters. They show, first, that the capacity of both the service class and the white collars of keeping their children in the same class has been declining across cohorts and quite strongly in the youngest one. Second, they indicate that the chances of the descendants from the white collars class to arrive at the service class have been diminishing moving from the oldest to the youngest cohort. Overall, it seems that the offspring of the service class and even more so the sons and daughters of the white collars have been progressively weakening their competitive advantages to remain in mid and high positions of the occupational stratification. This means that the increased fluidity observed in the Italian intergenerational mobility regime via occupations is due mainly to a reduction of the immobility chances of descendants from the service class and, above all, the white collars, rather than an increase of upwards mobility opportunities of the children of lower classes.

Four main factors could underlie the variations across cohorts in the mobility chances we have illustrated. From the late Seventies to the very early Nineties the inequalities regarding the equivalent disposable income of the Italian families, as measured by Gini Index, had been reducing. On the contrary, from 1993 to 1995, the inequality increased, but subsequently has remained rather stable until today. Second, between 1993 and 2004 the net average income (at constant prices) of managers and white collars diminished, while that of the working classes and the self-employed increased. Third, the reduction of the available positions in the service and white collars classes, together with the greater flexibility achieved by the Italian labour market after the late Nineties, appears to have diminished the chances of the descendants from the above classes to follow in their parents' footsteps. Fourth, the proportion of descendants from the self-employed and the lower classes possessing a high school qualification has been quite constantly raising over the whole Twentieth century. This was a consequence of the process of educational expansion, rather than an effect of a sizeable reduction of inequality of educational opportunity. Nonetheless, this process increased the number of individuals possessing the level of schooling required to perform non-manual occupations and, therefore, that of possible competitors for white collars positions and lower ranks of service class. Something different happened in tertiary education. From the late Eighties to the beginning of the Twenty-first century, young Italians reduced the enrolments at university, and this reduction was more pronounced among the descendants from the service class and the white collars. Once again, the youngest cohorts of the latter weakened their capacity to hold their parents' positions.

Intergenerational mobility via marriage

So far, we have dealt with mobility processes based on occupation. However, also marriage or stable cohabitation represents a mobility channel. Therefore, it has to be taken into account in order to complete the picture of the long-run variations of the Italian intergenerational mobility patterns. To do that, besides the occupational class of singles, we paid attention to the familial class of arrivals of the respondents who were married or in stable cohabitation. As mentioned earlier to define the latter, we resorted to the usual dominance approach.

Tab. 9 *Variation across birth cohorts of the intergenerational mobility rates via current (last) occupation and marriage*

Type of (im)mobility	Cohorts			
	1922-1937	1938-1953	1954-1969	1970-1987
Immobility	24.4	18.5	25.8	44.5
Upwards mobility	29.2	41.7	37.4	25.8
Downwards mobility	19.0	12.0	12.2	11.4
Lateral mobility	27.5	27.9	24.6	18.3
N	1,628	2,508	2,933	2,504

Source: ILFI 2005

The results of the analyses regarding mobility processes via occupation and marriage, jointly considered, are partly obvious and partly surprising. Obvious appears the reduction of the immobility rates in all cohorts, except the younger one. Marriage and stable cohabitation mix classes and more precisely reduced the effects of gender segmentations of occupational structure. This is not the case of interviewees belonging to the youngest cohort because very few were married e most of them made up homogamous couples. Rather obvious is also the fact that upwards mobility rates exceed the downwards ones in all cohort (Tab. 9).

Tab. 10 *Log-linear models specifications and goodness of fit statistics (intergenerational mobility via current or last occupation and marriage)*

Models	Goodness of fit statistics							
	χ^2	p	G ²	p	df	Δ	BIC	rG ²
Conditional independence	3,620	0.000	2,922	0.000	144	19.2	1,602	-
Constant association	311	0.000	294	0.000	108	5.9	-695	89.9
Unidiff	177	0.000	176	0.000	105	4.4	-786	94.0

Source: ILFI 2005

Even realising that unidiff model fits the relevant ODC table a bit better than the constant association model (Tab. 10) is not surprising. However, it turns out to be rather unexpected discovering that the scale parameters of the unidiff model indicate a reduction across birth cohorts of the level of social fluidity of the Italian mobility regime (Tab. 11). Therefore, one has to conclude that in Italy the process of couple formation causes an increase over time of the effects of origins on destinations. In turn, this change entirely counters the weakening of social heredity effects emerging from the working of the labour market or, rather, the process of occupational allocation, even ignoring the last cohort.

Tab. 11 *Unidiff scale parameters by cohort. ODC table via current (last) occupation and marriage*

Cohort	Scale parameters
1922-1937	1.00
1938-1953	1.03
1954-1969	1.05
1970-1987	1.70

Source: ILFI 2005

The reason why marriage stiffen the mobility regime lies in the mechanism of assortative mating. In Italy, the proportion of really heterogamous couple made up by men and women employed at the date of marriage is rather low and really stable across birth cohort (Tab. 12).

Tab. 12 *Rates of homo-heterogamy based on occupation at marriage by wives' birth cohort*

Type of couple	cohort (wives)		
	1922/1937	1938/1953	1954/1969
Homogamous	45.6	38.6	33.6
Heterogamous, similar class	24.4	27.9	33.3
Heterogamous, wife higher class	13.2	16.2	14.6
Heterogamous, husband higher class	16.8	17.4	18.5
N	250	674	788

Source: ILFI 2005

Therefore, a rather simple log-linear model predicting a constant propensity to make up homogamous couples fits rather nicely the relevant table (Tab. 13). The assortative mating process does not really mix the spouses' occupational classes.

Tab. 13 *Log-linear models specifications and goodness of fit statistics of homo-heterogamy tables by cohort based on occupation at marriage*

Models s	Goodness of fit statistics							
	χ^2	p	G^2	p	df	Δ	BIC	rG^2
Conditional independence	490	0.000	434	0.000	48	20.8	76,2	-
Constant association	32	0.450	33	0.400	32	4.2	-205	92.3

Source: ILFI 2005

The latter statement holds also for classes of origins. Italians tend to make couples that are homogamous also according to the class of origin of both spouses and this tendency is definitely stable over birth cohorts (Tab. 14).

Tab. 14 *Rates of homo-heterogamy based on origins of spouses by wives' birth cohort*

Type of couple	Birth cohort		
	1922/1937	1938/1953	1954/1969
Homogamous	47.3	38.7	35.0
Heterogamous, similar class	10.8	18.2	19.6
Heterogamous, wife higher class	18.6	20.9	22.0
Heterogamous, husband higher class	23.3	22.2	23.4
N	408	909	1089

Source: ILFI 2005

The stability across cohorts of the propensity of Italian men and women to form couples that are homogamous also for social origins is fully confirmed by the relevant log-linear models. That hypothesising the invariance over time of the net association between the class of origin of wives and that of husbands fits very well the homo-heterogamy table (Tab. 15).

Tab. 15 *Log-linear models specifications and goodness of fit statistics of homo-heterogamy tables by cohort based on class of origins of spouses*

Models	Goodness of fit statistics							
	χ^2	p	G^2	p	df	Δ	BIC	rG^2
Conditional independence	352	0.000	281	0.000	48	11.1	-93	-
Constant association	29	0.600	31	0.500	32	3.4	-218	88.9

Source: ILFI 2005

Quite obviously, the above results do not prove that the assortative mating in Italy is based only on instrumental and rational considerations regarding classes of origins and arrivals of the spouses. Empathy play its role, of course. However, the results indicate that the ideal of romantic love operates in a quite strong socially structured manner. This is why, marriage reduced the level of social fluidity

of Italian society and increases, instead of reducing, the inequality of mobility chances across birth cohorts.

Conclusions

Summing up all the above remarks is quite easy. In Italy, the effect of social origins on the chances of social mobility associated to the process of individuals allocation to the various occupational classes has been declining across all the cohorts of people born during the first nine decades of the Twentieth century. Unfortunately, this greater equality cannot display all its positive effects because it is generated by mechanisms producing the demotion of the descendants from the service class and the white collars, rather than the promotion of the children of lower classes. Moreover, the occupational downgrading that affected Italy since the beginning of the Nineties, transformed, so to speak, the greater social fluidity in a dramatic reduction in the amount of upwards mobility episodes experienced by people born during the Seventies and the Eighties. Therefore, generational belongings have become a strong factor of inequality in contemporary Italy.

To worsen this picture, the process of couple formation that, in principle, could mix members of different social classes, actually operates in the opposite direction. Mobility processes based on both occupation and marriage are far less fluid than those based only on occupations. This is so because of the strong and stable propensity of Italians to make up couple that are homogamous for both arrivals and origins of spouses. Therefore, paying attention to the overall intergenerational mobility processes observed in Italy up to the beginning of the Twenty-first century one should maintain that the level of inequality of opportunities has been increasing instead of declining.