

# **Social origins, occupational attainment, and early career progression. An Italian-Dutch comparison**

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This paper examines the effect of social origin on occupational attainment and its evolution over the work life. In particular, the focus is on social inequalities at labour market entry (in terms of impact on socio-economic status), and on whether occupational progression accounts for accumulation or compensation of these inequalities over the work career. Men and women entered the labour market from the 30's to the mid 80's are examined in two countries characterised by different evolution of their institutional configurations: Italy and the Netherlands.

Comparative intergenerational mobility research typically focused on social inequality looking cross-sectionally at limited time points in the biography of individuals – being the first occupation, the occupation at a certain age, or the occupation at later stages of the career (e.g., Blau and Duncan, 1967; Breen 2004; Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992). While the second generation of intergenerational mobility research considered how the first job mediates the overall relation between social origin and occupational destination, career mobility has often been downplayed in this field, not least due to unavailability of comparable life history data.

However, while interesting *per se*, career mobility has also important implications for intergenerational reproduction, as argued by relatively recent developments in the literature (Barone and Schizzerotto, 2011; Manzoni et al. 2014; Hillmert, 2015). Uneven paths from the first job on could indeed mitigate or strengthen social inequality at labour market entry, and therefore career mobility is important for the evaluation of the overall process of social stratification in a given society (*ibidem*).

In this paper, we examine the stratification process in Italy and the Netherlands focusing on the contextual determinants of career mobility and their importance for intergenerational reproduction. In doing so, we built on previous literature that integrates inter- and intra-generational mobility perspectives by illuminating the role of institutional and historical contexts.

In this regard, Italy and the Netherlands offer a privileged field of comparison. Until the 80's both countries were characterised by rigid labour and products markets, employment-related welfare entitlements, as well as familialistic-oriented cultures (Esping Andersen, 1990). However, the institutional settings of the two countries started

to diverge considerably with the crisis of the fordist model in the early 80's (*ibidem*). On the one hand, The Netherlands reacted to this crisis by largely flexibilising labour and products markets, thus favouring job-creation, lowering job-tenure, and considerably increasing workforce turnover (Muffels and Luijks, 2008). Conversely, Italy reacted to the rising unemployment rates by introducing flexibility as a partial and controlled experiment directed towards specific groups "at the margins" of the labour market, thus failing in fostering job-creation and turnover levels (Regini, 2000).

We argue that these two strategies not only led Italy and the Netherlands to different macro-economic performance in the following decades, but also had important effects on both the level and the distribution of career mobility across social groups, and therefore on the intergenerational transmission of inequality.

Data are from the 'Italian Longitudinal Household Panel Studies (ILFI)' and the 'Family Survey Dutch Population (FSDP)'. These data were particularly adequate for our aims, since they allow the reconstruction of full occupational trajectories of a quite large sample of men and women entered the labour market from the 1930 to the 1985.

The analyses are performed *via* growth curves modelling on monthly-personal datasets. These models account multiple time-observations nested within individuals – in our case, monthly observations of ISEI scores along individuals' careers. We restricted our overall sample to the first 15 years after leaving full time education, in order to focus on the early career development and to allow for cross-cohort comparisons (careers are right-censored for the last cohort of entry). This strategy allows us to estimate the ISEI score at labour market entry conditioning on social background – i.e, the social origins penalty at the beginning of the career – and to understand whether this initial penalty accumulates or compensates along one's early career. Moreover, the inclusion of educational level – and its interaction with the career duration – will allow us to disentangle the 'direct' and 'indirect' effects of social origins both on labour market entry and on career progression. All models are run separately in for men and women in the two countries, and for different labour market entry cohorts, thus allowing for gender specific cross-country and cross-cohorts comparisons.

The empirical results show that career mobility is generally more limited in Italy compared to the Netherlands, and that – in both countries and irrespective of the period considered – women are less mobile over the early career compared to men. Interestingly, a pattern of increased intra-generational mobility over the 20<sup>th</sup> century can be found only in the Dutch context, whereas in Italy people entered the labour market after the 80's are as immobile as the earlier cohorts.

However, these patterns of career mobility are unevenly distributed across people with different social backgrounds, thus leading to distinct patterns of intergenerational transmission of inequality. In Italy, both the direct and indirect effects of social origins on the socio-economic status of the first job are relatively large and quite stable over the life course. Conversely, in the Netherlands, the direct and indirect penalty related to social origins is comparatively lower at labour market entry but slightly increasing over the early career, especially for the latest cohort. Anyway, the slow pace of accumulation

in the Dutch context led to lower levels of social inequality after 15 years of career compared to the Italian context.

Finally, our findings confirm a general reduction of social inequality along the 20th century both in Italy and especially in the Netherlands.

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