



The class attainment and the career mobility of southern italians in northern Italy and in west Germany. A comparison between internal and international migrants

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ABSTRACT

This paper studies the class attainment of a single group of migrants, the Southern Italians, to two destinations: Northern Italy and West Germany. It analyses whether the labour market trajectories vary among institutional contexts or follow the same integration pathway across different receiving societies. In doing so, this study expands the literature in two directions. On the one hand, it stresses the importance of macro-features of the host society for studying migrants' integration processes. On the other hand, it highlights similarities and differences between internal and international migration.

The paper reports empirical analyses based on the Longitudinal Survey on Italian Households (ILHS) and the German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP). The results show that the inclusion of Southern migrants, both internal and international, took place at lower levels of the class structure. The greater rigidity and the strong emphasis on vocational training of the German labour market pushed Southern migrants into the unskilled urban working class. In Northern Italy, by contrast, the possibility of entering the public sector facilitated their inclusion in the middle classes. Despite those differences, in both destinations, Southern migrants had fewer opportunities of upward social mobility than the native population.

1. Introduction

Migration studies have used two different research designs to evaluate the integration of immigrants into the labour markets of the hosting societies (Van Tubergen, Maas, & Flap, 2004; Levels, Dronkers, & Kraaykamp, 2008). The first is the *multiple origin group in a single destination* (henceforth MO-SD), which compares the socio-economic positions of different immigrant groups in a single host country. The aim of this analytical strategy is to study whether and how the integration of migrants differs among ethnic groups, even after controlling for individual characteristics. This approach has its origin in the classic studies on American migration, and it is still the one most widely used, mainly because of the increasing availability of comparative quantitative data conveying information on the socio-economic position of migrants. The second approach is the *single origin group in multiple destinations* (henceforth SO-MD), which analyses the integration of a single migrant group across different destinations. By focusing on a relatively homogeneous group of immigrants, this design enables systematic examination of those structural and institutional characteristics of the host society that affect the integration of migrants (Lewin-

Epstein, Semyonov, Kogan, & Wanner, 2003; Kogan, 2007). Due to the lack of suitable data – and also because of the difficulties of finding two (or more) homogenous migrant groups within different destinations – the SO-MD design is not widespread, and the (few) studies based on this approach have not yielded consistent results (Cheng, 1994; Model, Fisher, & Silberman, 1999; Kogan, 2003; Cohen & Kogan 2007).¹

Besides the differentiation between MO-SD and SO-MD designs, there is a further analytical cleavage typical of migration studies: the distinction between internal and international migration. As noted by Wimmer and Glick-Schiller (2003), since WW2 the main research streams on migration have focused on cross-border geographical movements, while the internal migration of citizens from one city to another, or from rural to urban areas, has not been considered worthy of attention. Thus, 'migration' has somehow come to mean 'international migration', even if the earlier analyses of migration flows mostly concerned the internal ones (King & Skeldon, 2010: 1620). Actually, the relation between internal and international migration has been studied for migrations from Mexico to the U.S. (Lozano-Ascencio, Roberts, & Bean, 1999), but it has been substantially neglected by the current European literature.

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¹ These two research designs are not mutually exclusive, since there have also been studies that apply the MO-MD approach, comparing multiple origin groups in multiple destinations (Van Tubergen, Maas and Flap 2004).

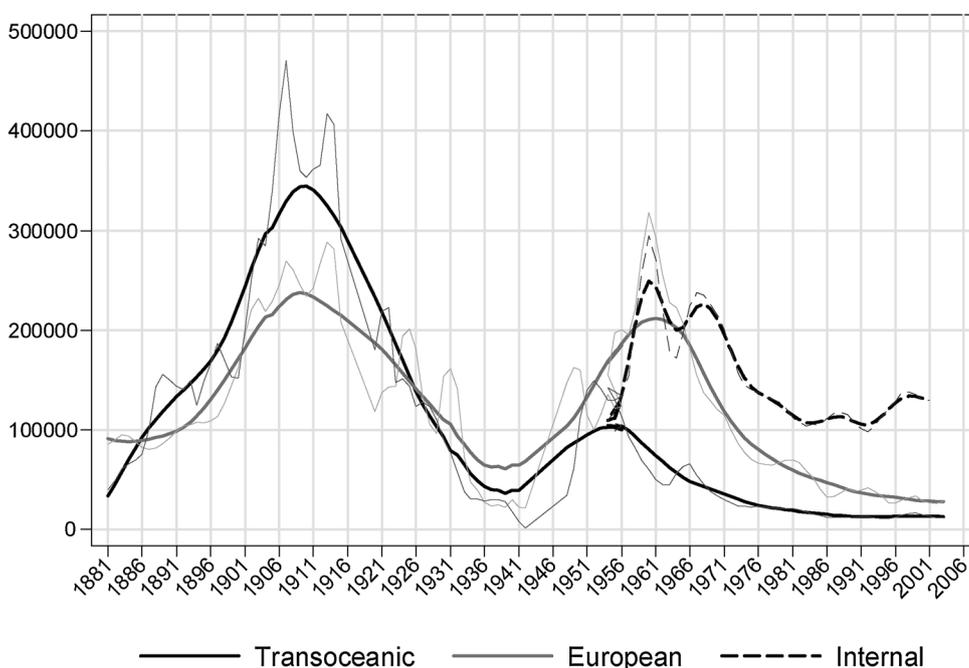


Fig. 1. Italian migration flows (1881–2002). Lowess smoothing, bwidth(0.2).

Source: *Transoceanic and European flows*: serie storiche Istat (<http://seriestoriche.istat.it/>); *Internal flow*: movimento anagrafico della popolazione italiana, Istat (1955–2002)

The aim of this study is to go beyond these analytical (and geographical) boundaries by using the SO-MD approach and comparing, at the same time, the labour market integration of internal and international migrants. From this standpoint, the analysis of the Italian case is interesting because Italy is one of the few countries in the world that has experienced both major (unidirectional) internal and large international migrations (Castles, 1970). This study focuses on the male Southern Italians who migrated to Northern Italy and to West Germany, and the empirical analysis considers their class attainment and their further career mobility, evaluating their integration process in the long run.

This paper contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it underlines similarities and differences between internal and international migrations. Following Ellis (2012: 197), who call for a revival of research on the causes and effects of internal migration in the US, this comparison is a crucial contribution to the sociological, economic and demographic literature on geographical mobility. Second, this work stimulates the discussion on the *methodological nationalism* affecting much of the current literature on migration (Wimmer & Glick-Schiller, 2003), which (implicitly or explicitly) defines the unit of analysis (i.e. whether a geographical movement is a migration) by the boundaries of the nation-state. Third, using longitudinal data – which are uncommon in migration studies – including information on natives, migrants and non-migrants at origin, this paper provides a complete description of how experiences in the early stage of the job career produce inequalities in the long run. Finally, the paper sheds light on the socio-economic integration of Italian migrants, because very little is known about the consequences of the Italian migrations (both internal and European) that occurred after WW2. Only in recent years has the issue of integration in the long term been studied in the literature, especially as regards the fate of Southern Italians in the North (Panichella, 2014; Ballarino & Panichella, 2015b), while there is still little research on their integration in other destinations like West Germany and other European countries.

This study is organized into seven sections. After this introduction, Sections 2 and 3 describe the main features of the migration of Southerners to Northern Italy and to West Germany, while section 4 sets out research hypotheses concerning their labour-market integration. Section 5 presents the data and the methods, Section 6 describes the empirical evidence, and Section 7 concludes.

2. Southern Italian migration in northern Italy and in west Germany

Until the mid-1970s Italy was a ‘classic sending country’ with a very long and complex history of internal and international migrations (Fig. 1) (Bonifazi, 2013). Between 1870 and 1970, around 25 million persons left Italy to work and live abroad, in both other continents (USA, Latin America, Australia) (*Transcontinental flow*) and other European countries (*European flow*) (Casacchia & Strozza, 2002). Such an amount roughly equals the population of the Italian nation in 1861, at the moment of its unification (Gabaccia, 2000). Besides the international emigration flows, after WW2 Italy also experienced a massive internal migration from the South to the North whose key features were very similar to those of international migrations: a one-way movement from a relatively underdeveloped to a relatively developed area; people leaving from the most backward zones of the sending countries and entering the lower occupational strata of the receiving countries; difficult integration and conflict with the native population (Panichella, 2014).²

This study focuses on a specific aspect of Italian migration history: it compares the Southern Italians who moved to the North between the 1950s and the first half of the 1970s with their peers who moved, in the same period, to Western Germany. These two migration flows had very similar characteristics, hence their comparison is a stimulating and rare framework in which to apply the SO-MD approach and compare internal and international geographical movements. The main features of these migration flows are compared in Table 1.

Both of the migration flows developed during the 1950s–60s, as a consequence of the crisis of Southern Italian agriculture and the industrial development of the areas of destination. While from the point of view of Southern Italy emigration to the North of Italy and to West Germany was a practical response to the fall of employment in the agriculture of the *Mezzogiorno*, the huge supply of Southern Italian unskilled labour was one of the main factors that supported the dramatic industrial growth experienced by both areas of destination (Castles & Kosack, 1973). West Germany participated in the post-war

² Italy also experienced important internal migration to Rome and from the North-East to the urban areas of the North-West. Nevertheless, after WW2 migration from the South to the North was the largest internal migration flow.

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