

## **Project: Internal mobility and geographical dimensions of social inequalities**

### **1. Background and rationale**

Uneven effects of globalization and technological innovations and the upgrading of the occupational structures of the most developed areas have increased territorial disparities in many developed societies (Oesch 2013). However, few studies have focused on how spatial arrangements affect the intergenerational reproduction of social inequalities in the last decades. This research project sheds new light on the complex associations between spatial arrangements and social inequalities in Italy – a context characterized by remarkable geographical disparities. The project thus proposes to study geographical inequalities along a continuum between ‘central’ and ‘marginal’ areas. Central areas are those areas that attract highly qualified human capital (Moretti 2004), offer better job opportunities and life chances (Fielding 1992), and ease the so-called ‘inclusive institutions’, which encourage participation in economic activities that make the best use of individual talents and skills (Acemoglu and Robinson 2013). Marginal areas are instead characterized by a massive depopulation, fewer economic and life opportunities, and by a reduction in the available social services, which inevitably reverberates in new forms of social inequalities.

The disparities between central and marginal areas have become one of the most urgent research topics among economists (Moretti 2012; Chetty et al. 2014), and many countries have adopted ‘place-based policies’ to reduce geographical disparity, among which Italy with the Strategia Nazionale per le Aree Interne (SNAI) (Barca et al. 2014). Despite this growing attention to geographical inequalities, demographers and sociologists have had so far a marginal role in this debate (Lobao et al. 2004) and many aspects related to the uneven geographical distribution of social inequalities and life opportunities are yet to be analyzed.

Research on social inequality also neglected another aspect related to geographical inequalities, i.e. the geographical mobility (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003), which is a far-reaching social phenomenon (King and Skeldon 2010) with crucial effects on individual’s life chances and outcomes (Impicciatore and Panichella, 2019; Panichella 2014). Also the Italian stratification research has only marginally considered the social consequences of geographical disparities, albeit Italy has a relatively high level of social inequality (Cobalti and Schizzerotto, 1993; Pisati and Schizzerotto 2004; Bernardi and Ballarino 2016) and is historically characterized by remarkable socio-economic geographical heterogeneities. More precisely, while the cleavage between North and South (the *questione meridionale*) has been at the core of academic and public discussion (Trigilia 1992; Felice 2014; Avola 2017), as well as the specificities of the Third Italy (Bagnasco 1977), there is little research on the social consequences of the differentiation among marginal and central areas ‘within’ these geographical cleavages. The same applies to the internal geographical mobility: this issue also has been studied along the North-South cleavage (see Panichella 2014 for a review), whereas the social consequences of other internal movements have been little analyzed.

Other forms of territorial inequality have been recently considered in the Italian literature and an important public and scientific debate has arisen around the issue of marginal areas. However, this new research stream has analyzed only some specific social and economic phenomena – such as, for instance, economic resilience (Faggian et al. 2018) and the ‘nested markets’ of marginal areas (Osti and Carrosio 2020) – and their implication for the intergenerational reproduction of social inequalities has been so far overlooked. In addition, since there are no available data with detailed information

allowing to study the geographical dimension of social inequality, most empirical studies focused on specific geographical areas, making it difficult to generalize the findings nationwide.

## 2. Aim of the project and specific objectives

Four aims are addressed:

- a) to investigate the effects of geographical origin on individuals' life outcomes;
- b) to study how geographical origin intersects with other dimensions of social inequality (e.g. education, social background of origin, etc.);
- c) to examine how internal geographical mobility reinforces existing social inequalities;
- d) to collect a new quantitative survey on a representative sample of the Italian population, aiming at filling a substantial lack of data on detailed geographical origin, internal mobility and related social inequalities.

The project is part of a wider research area called GESI (*Geography and Social Inequality in Italy*), the first systematic research investigating how the geographical area of origin influences different aspects of individual life courses and reverberates on social inequalities in life outcomes in Italy. GESI considers the multidimensional and cumulative nature of social stratification by focusing on different aspects of individuals' life chances – i.e., occupational opportunities, social mobility pathways, and geographical mobility – and by paying special attention to the geographical cleavage between central and marginal areas.

Within GESI, the present project is included in the Work Package 4 (WP4) “Internal geographical mobility”. The first task (T4.1) studies the individual characteristics favoring (different types of) internal geographical mobility (Impicciatore and Panichella 2019), as well as the changes of internal migration over time/cohorts. Besides student movers, economic movers, and family-related movers, T4.1 also considers those who returned to their place of origin (also after retirement), the temporal movers, and those who experienced multiple episodes of migration (also over long distances). T4.1 also focuses on the stayers (non-movers), comparing ‘reluctant’, i.e. those who did not migrate because of valuable amenities in marginal areas (lower cost of housing, proximity with family support, etc.), and ‘committed’ stayers, i.e. those who were not able to implement a migration strategy.

The second task (T4.2) investigates the association between geographical mobility, occupational outcomes and social mobility pathways. Three groups are compared:

- those who moved from marginal to central areas (different types of movers, see above);
- those who remained in marginal areas (stayers of marginal areas);
- those who come from central areas (stayers of central areas).

The comparison among these groups – which can be barely applied to international migration – allows us not only to identify the penalizing factors of the internal movers compared to the stayers of central areas, but also to evaluate whether the choice of moving has been ‘advantageous’ compared to the decision to stay in the place of origin.

The third task (T4.3) considers whether the effects of internal mobility interact with the social background of origin, asking if its impact is stronger for individuals with lower origins (compensation effect, Bernardi 2014) or for those with higher origins (boosting effect, Di Prete and Eirich 2006). If the former effect prevails, then the question becomes whether the impact of geographical mobility is strong enough to alter the individual's position in the social hierarchy defined by circumstances of birth.

Analysis are based on existing publicly-available datasets (including Istat's Italian Labour Force Survey and Istat Multipurpose Survey on Households: Families, Social Subjects and Life Cycle) as well as a new survey (called IMOB), based on a representative sample of the Italian population, collecting novel information on geography and geographical origin in Italy.

### **3. Job description**

The successful candidates will join the GESI project and participate fully in the research life of the research team and engage in advanced independent research within the remit of the project. More specifically, the appointed researcher will carry out the following research activities:

- Contribute actively to the research of the GESI project;
- Produce a systematic literature review on the specified research area;
- Prepare and manage data sources for the project;
- Prepare scientific articles to be discussed and presented during both scheduled GESI meetings and scientific events involving external experts, and submitted to international peer-reviewed and high-impact journals for publication.
- Represent the research group at internal and external meetings/seminars and present papers at conferences and public meetings;
- Participate in the research activities of the GESI project and the Department of Statistical Sciences;
- Undertake appropriate organizational duties within the group when required such as organizing research meetings, workshops, seminars, and conference sessions.

### **4. Skills, qualifications, and requirements**

- Proven competence in statistics/econometrics; experience with relevant statistical packages e.g., R and/or STATA
- Extensive empirical research experience in quantitative social sciences, preferably in socio-demographic analysis and modelling.
- Demonstrated experience in developing research plans, collecting and managing data, and carrying out statistical analyses.
- Experience with data processing and handling of large-scale datasets at the micro and macro level.
- Track record in research and publication output corresponding to the career stage of the successful candidate
- Excellent command of written and spoken English
- Innovative and critical thinking. Proven independence in conducting research.
- Expertise in the following areas is desirable: migration studies; demographic trends, family dynamics, social stratification; structure and characteristics of the Italian labor market.

## 5. Research plan

The research activity will take place over 24 months with an expected start in February 2023. In detail, the research plan is structured as follows:

- **Step 1** Literature review and definition of the research strategy (3 months).
- **Step 2** Secondary data analysis (6 months).
- **Step 3** IMOB data cleaning and checks (3 months)
- **Step 4** IMOB data analysis (9 months)
- **Step 5** Dissemination (3 months)

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