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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Schroot, T. (2022). Professional Trajectories in Migrant Biographies of Qualified German, Romanian, and Italian Movers. *Social Inclusion*, 10(4), 138-149. <https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v10i4.5679>

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Article

Professional Trajectories in Migrant Biographies of Qualified German, Romanian, and Italian Movers

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Submitted: 27 April 2022 | Accepted: 15 July 2022 | Published: 10 November 2022

Abstract

This article tackles the issue of professional inclusion of “knowledgeable” migrants under consideration of the paradigmatic life course framework. It thus aims to contribute to international research on human capital valorisation. The comparative analysis of this study is grounded on qualitative data from 30 in-depth interviews with German, Romanian, and Italian qualified movers in Italy and Germany, who did not migrate for reasons resulting from economic hardship or poverty, but rather to improve their living conditions on familial (tied movers), professional, or socio-cultural level. Our research aimed to investigate their professional trajectories and corresponding skill utilisation. Findings of the study confirm two predominant tracks of professional integration in the labour host context characterised either by transcultural competence transfer and utilisation or by professional re-invention and skills acquisition. Particular attention within the data analysis and corresponding conclusions has been paid to potential dynamics for social and economic up and downward mobility and the role of the three heterogenous (more and less privileged) national and cultural backgrounds for brain circulation.

Keywords

brain circulation; life course; professional integration; qualified lifestyle migration; skills valorization

Issue

This article is part of the issue “Life Course Justice and Learning” edited by Aija Lulle (University of Eastern Finland), Remus G. Anghel (SNSPA–National University of Political Studies and Public Administration / Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities), Caitriona Ní Laoire (University College Cork), and Russell King (University of Sussex).

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1. Introduction

Increasingly altering labour market dynamics and the intertwined thrive to advance a knowledge society are having a significant impact on global mobility and human capital flows (Habti & Elo, 2019). In light of the global pandemic, the fast-pacing formulations for needed skill sets and evolving lacunas for qualified labour are likely to challenge several national contexts in Europe (Chi-Wei et al., 2021). Missing, unrecognised, and unutilized qualifications elicit a situation that prevents progress, innovation, economic growth, and stability in the EU.

This notion is corroborated by OECD statistics from 2017 that support the rising demand for mobile workers and confirm that skills and educational capital in Europe still trail far behind other knowledge societies on a global level, such as the US skills magnet or Australia. This points to a need for spatial mobility on the one hand,

and to an increasingly requested flexibility and adaptability in different professional fields, supported by continuous education and training in order to stay competitive in the labour market (OECD, 2017b).

Accordingly, it becomes gradually more important to research intra-European talent and knowledge distribution, in particular on drivers that cause, alter, and amplify mobility decisions of “knowledgeable movers” (Lulle & Emilsson, 2021) to direct international labour investment, training, and recruitment. Especially mixed forms of mobility, where migrants can switch categories according to convenience from skilled to non-skilled, pushed by economic reasons, professional ambitions, lifestyle change, or study purposes call for a consideration of the “double embeddedness of migration” (King, 2002, p. 101). This refers to the individual’s life course on the one hand and to the origin and host societies on the other, which are both presumed to have a decisive

impact on the progression of the labour market. Indeed, in the European context, research has been advanced on determinants that generate and direct human capital flows on micro and macro levels (Kõu & Bailey, 2014; Ryan & Mulholland, 2013); however, only a few studies turn their lens specifically on the interrelation of life course dynamics, migration expectations, and professional integration (Kõu et al., 2015), which accordingly represents a central gap in the international literature (Bailey & Mulder, 2017).

In this context, a vast body of scholarship points to the linked significance of family members for the formulation of migration motivations (Forsey, 2015; King & Lulle, 2016; Tissot, 2016). They call for attention to the expectations and choices of migrants in family life in the home and host contexts to understand high-skilled migration also beyond human capital generation and utilisation (Kõu & Bailey, 2014) and to assess their potential role in the host society (Bailey & Mulder, 2017).

Further to this, Ette and Erlinghagen (2021) underline the need to consider the heterogeneity of migration motivations within the EU and to shift the existing focus on East to West migration and particular migrant groups also to other geographical areas. In their study on migration motivations among German emigrants, the authors found out that more than half of all study participants moved for professional reasons, whereas 45% indicated also a change in personal lifestyle as a leading indicator of their desire to leave their home country.

Drawing on these premises this research aims to fill these voids and investigates a category of movers who decided to leave their home country on a permanent, circular, or indefinite temporal scale for the sake of professional advancement, in search of a new way of life, or for family reunification.

Building on the assumption that socio-economic, political, and cultural systems (e.g., legal regulations, language, religion, historical identity) as well as societal institutions (educational systems) pre-shape expectations and thus drive decisions for individual and household life trajectories (Wingens et al., 2011), the focus of this work has been put on comparing the professional inclusion dynamics of knowledgeable migrants from Germany, Romania, and Italy in two national host contexts. Particular attention has been paid to the interrelation of their migration motivation and the aspired and realized skill valorisation. The latter refers thus to the coherence of educational/cultural capital stocks and occupational positions in the host contexts.

Even though Romanian migration has been predominantly perceived as labour migration (Barbulescu et al., 2019) this work aims to focus on Romanian migrants, who, just like their German counterparts, did not move to Italy out of economic precarity or poverty, but mainly for non-economic reasons such as love, (professional) self-fulfilment, and training, or to change their way of life.

The comparative case study has been conducted in Turin and Munich, representing two major metropolitan

areas with comparable characteristics on an economic and socio-cultural level, with a study sample of respondents who can be allocated to the category of “highly skilled.” Accordingly, data has been retrieved from 30 semi-structured interviews online.

The article has been organised as follows: The first section aims to provide a short socio-historical overview of Italian mobility in the German national context and of Germans and Romanians in the Italian one as well as a brief discussion on skill valorisation. This segment is followed by an outline of the theoretical framework used for the data analysis within this study and some methodological remarks before discussing the main findings that have emerged. Finally, the last part will be dedicated to a brief discussion of the findings and potential lines of further research.

2. Setting the Scene: Migration and Skill Valorisation in Germany and Italy

The Fordist industrial development and the economic post-war boom caused a growing intra-European mobility that turned emigration to immigration countries, as exemplified by Germany and Italy (Bade, 1992; Bonifazi et al., 2009). In Italy, interregional South-North and rural-urban mobility flows could be predominantly observed towards Northern metropolitan provinces as the industrial triangle Milan, Genoa, or Turin, historically the “major poles of attraction” (Bonifazi & Heins, 2000; Bonifazi et al., 2009).

The 1960s and early 1970s marked a period of Italian guest worker mobility to European countries. In Italian population statistics from the 90s, the country observed an increasing number of foreign-born nationals, which inverted the trend of the previous decades.

Parallely the German population statistics were significantly characterised by the guest worker movements, whereas the majority of temporary foreign labour came from Italy (Luthra, 2013). From the 1980s onward, approximately 10% of the working population was represented by foreign labour (Coccia & Pittau, 2016; Hoerder, 2010).

Current data from the German Federal Statistical Office (2021) confirms a rising emigration flow in the new millennium, with a peak in 2016 when 280,000 Germans left their home country (Schroot & Marroccoli, 2021). However, little research informs on German migration to Italy, motivation, or professional trajectories, as Italy is not and has never been among the top German emigration destination in recent history (Hamburger & Sander, 2016). Instead, according to ISTAT data, the majority of foreign inflows corresponds to citizens coming from Romania (14% of the total incoming foreigners in 2018), followed by countries like Albania (6.3%) and Morocco (5.9%).

Germany’s popularity as a destination for Italian migrants has been growing steadily. However, from a comparative perspective, incoming and outgoing shares

of human capital and potential qualified workforce for the Italian labour market remain unbalanced. This regards in particular net numbers, but also the lower rates of skill matching for foreign immigrants (Coccia & Pittau, 2016).

Indeed, the German labour market provides for a strong occupational segment that is built on a stratified and standardized school and transition-to-employment system, industrial relations, labour laws, and a relatively early labour exit with an average of 43% of men and only 15% of women still working at the age of 60. These indicators facilitate job and skill matching in several professional areas, lower the risk of unemployment and inequality of occupational status (Heinz, 2003; Luthra, 2013), and represent Germany in international comparison as an “economically highly developed welfare state” (Erlinghagen et al., 2021, p. 10).

Italy instead has developed in the latest decades as one of the main destinations of international migration, even though receiving one of the lowest shares of incoming movers with tertiary education (Barbulescu et al., 2019). Indeed, the Italian context provides for an overall very low social mobility with little return on education (Assirelli et al., 2018), which is additionally starkly driven by the geographical origin of its labour. Avola and Piccitto (2020) have researched the occurrence of the “ethnic penalty” in the Italian labour market and found out that, firstly, foreign workers are increasingly challenged in pursuing social mobility compared to native labour, especially if they come from economically disadvantaged contexts. Indeed, migrants from stable economic contexts resulted less penalised. Secondly, they concluded from their findings that intra-generational occupational mobility occurs in general to a very limited extent in Italy, also for natives.

In this context, it must be noted that Italy has generally a rather high demand for low-qualified and low-paid workers, which is due to the stark presence of small firms in rather traditional sectors, such as tourism, manufacturing and construction, low investment in R&D, and a decrease in occupation public sectors (Assirelli et al., 2018).

Labour trajectories must be thus analysed in relation to tendencies in the labour market. Hence, the economic crisis of 2008 and the development that followed it pushed several natives and, in particular, (qualified) migrants from formal to informal employment niches that blocked further career progress, at least temporarily (Croitoru, 2018). In a migratory context, professional mobility must be considered in its wider context, and thus not solely in terms of economic profit and career progress. (Pre-departure) investments and gains of human capital, such as the building of linguistic skills and social capital, are grounds for (social and professional) integration in the host context (OECD, 2017a; Schroot & Marroccoli, 2021). Furthermore, the issue of class status and socio-economic and professional mobility is transnational in constitution. It must therefore be analysed outside of national contexts and borders, as it

is characterised by different ways of capital acquisition and recognition (Mihai & Novo-Corti, 2020; Scott, 2019).

Building on these premises, the participants of this study have been selected according to their particular characteristics for both host contexts. Romanian migration to Italy has a relatively short history but represents the most significant foreign community in the country (Ricci, 2010; Stan & Erne, 2014). Geographical and linguistic proximity, shared cultural traditions, and the increasing presence of Italian business in Romania are presumed to be some of the decisive determinants that put Italy in a top position of European destinations for Romanian migration (Cingolani, 2007).

German skilled movers are not comparable in numbers to their Romanian counterparts but represent an intriguing and contrasting study sample. The majority of those who decide to leave their home context can be allocated to the category of “qualified and highly skilled labour force”: 50% of them hold an academic degree (Ette & Sauer, 2010).

To provide a valid comparative perspective, this research considers a third category of movers and a second host context. Indeed, the literature confirms that qualified Italian labour force lacks access to adequate job offers that match skills according to working conditions (Avola & Piccitto, 2020), which emphasises the strong economic and non-economic incentives for them to migrate (Assirelli et al., 2018; Lulle & Emilsson, 2021) and the low return rate once they have chosen to move abroad (Saint-Blancat, 2019). All our study participants come from very diverse socio-cultural and political national settings, which points to the context-boundness of thought, behavioural, and decisional patterns.

3. The Sociological Life Course Approach: A Theoretical Framework

The conceptual framework for the analysis of the retrieved data draws on the call for mixed approaches within migration research (Erlinghagen, 2021) that should overcome the strict distinction and separation of the two leading paradigms forwarded in the latest decades: the life course theory and the transnational migration perspective. While the life course approach focuses on the causal relationships of determinants and outputs or consequences within the migration process, highlighting the significance of social pathways in historical time and place (Elder et al., 2003; Erlinghagen, 2021), the transnational perspective focuses on (transnational) practices and belonging to social fields (Basch et al., 1994). These unite different geographical, socio-political, cultural, and economic locations and networks, and connect the origin and destination contexts of the migrants. This perspective lacks a chronological reference frame but may describe specific settings within the migrant’s life (Erlinghagen, 2021).

The central aim of this case study is to delineate mobility as an important transition with lifelong

implications for the life course trajectory, in particular for the professional pathway of the sample respondents. Accordingly, the theoretical frame of this work builds on Erlinghagen’s (2021) proposal to combine both approaches to carve out the potential of the two different perspectives on individual mobility pathways.

The Sociological life course approach points to the interrelation of the timing, pacing, and sequencing individual life course events with societal economic, political, and cultural systems, structures, and institutions. Those affect and pre-shape, accordingly, individual choices, preferences and decisions, and provide a frame for a standardized life course or expected biography, as international studies (Caponio & Estévez-Abe, 2022; Croitoru, 2018; Kõu et al., 2017; Sandoz, 2020) illustrate. In the same vein, biographical life paths influence the societal context on socio-economic, juridical, and cultural levels (Heinz, 2003; Wingens et al., 2011). Speaking of migration and social inclusion in general, and of professional integration dynamics in particular, this notion is central, as it points to the agency of time and place, or in other words, of the home and destination context for the mover. Hence, the case study develops in two stages that range from the decision-making process in the home country of the respondents (On Departure), to professional integration in the host context (On the Ground).

The first stage will undergo an analysis that draws on the sociological life course approach. In the second stage, I take predominantly the transnational migration concept into consideration and compare the role of home and host context (as combined social field) for professional trajectories, and thus skill recognition and valorisation (see Figure 1).

The selected study sample draws on three national contexts with very heterogeneous socio-political, economic, and historical backgrounds. Accordingly, all target countries reveal contrasting European traditions in their collective habitus, in particular in the context of migration. This heterogeneity is further corroborated by the starkly individualistic and collectivistic patterns that prevail in three socio-cultural origin contexts of the respondents in the sample.

Settersten (2015, p. 223) reminds us that “we too often study individuals as if they exist in isolation of others,

and our methods further fracture whole people into tiny variables.” Particular importance in life course theory has been given to “family” as one of several institutions that may have a decisive impact on the pre-shaping and scheduling of expectations and life-course events as well as opportunities, decisions, and actions over the social pathways (Forsey, 2015; King & Lulle, 2016; Tissot, 2016; Uhlenberg & Mueller, 2003). Consequently, newly tied relationships may shape decisions on the life course towards mobility, represented by King (2002) as “love migrations,” as well as intra-familial bonds through care delegations as an indicator for a potential return migration (Kõu et al., 2017; Scott, 2019; Uhlenberg & Mueller, 2003).

4. Towards Interdisciplinarity: Some Methodological Remarks

The present research sought to interrogate the causal relations of expected careers and professional progress during the migrant trajectory in the context of the stage in life. It thus questions if and how the initial migration motivation is related and even determines the competence valorisation in professional paths in the host context. In this regard, an analytical lens has been put on eventual professional upward or downward mobility dynamics that are determined by the movers’ (un)ability to transfer their capital and resources from the host to the home context. Upward and downward mobility over the migratory life course trajectory is an ambiguous and contested concept, especially when talking about skilled migration from disadvantaged national contexts and aspired escalator effects (Scott, 2019). Downward mobility is mainly determined by occupational indicators when career trajectories and positions cannot be continued in the host context. However, in this case, downward occupational mobility is not coherent with the economic treatment in the host context, as, in fact, professional downgrading often runs parallel to higher wages.

This work considers upward and downward mobility from both the professional and the economic perspective and investigates, on the one hand, the acceptance of jobs of lower status and occupational decline and (better) economic treatment on the other.

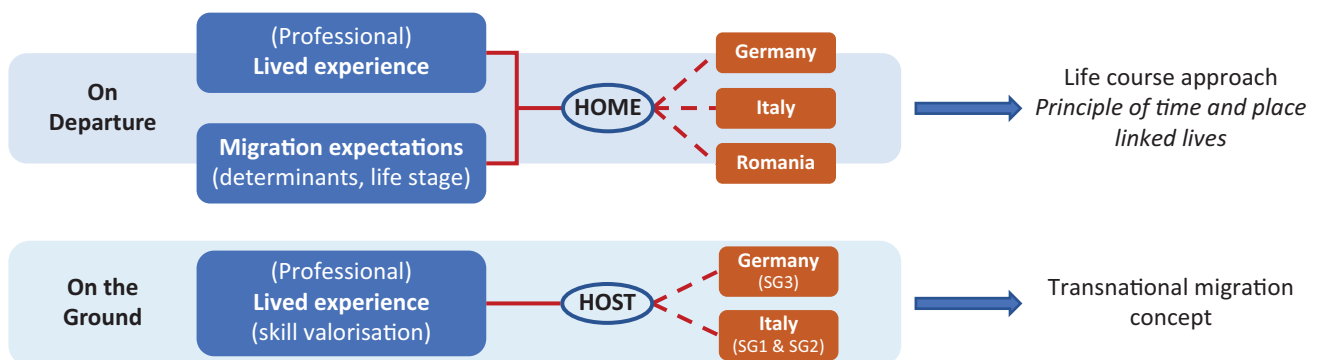


Figure 1. Theoretical framework.

4.1. Study Sample

The data that informs the comparative analysis of this case study has been retrieved in the frame of a macro study on skilled migration from 38 semi-structured in-depth interviews with German, Romanian, and Italian qualified movers that were conducted face-to-face between 2018 and 2020 in the Turin Metropolitan Area, Italy, and online from 2021–2022 with respondents in Munich, Germany. Of these, 30 interviews were selected for the sake of a more homogenous sample and to meet the research objective of this case study. Data has been scrutinized concerning the primary migration motivation of movers following the pre-set selection criteria and excluded respondents who indicated to have moved for economic reasons and poverty.

All participants had been living and working in either Munich or Turin for at least five years and could be allocated to the category of “(highly)-qualified labour force” according to Salt’s (1997) definition, i.e., holding post-secondary academic or professional education and having at least five years of work experience.

The study participants have been distinguished into three sample groups:

- SG1_Romanians in Turin (n = 8)
- SG2_Germans in Turin (n = 8)
- SG3_Italians in Munich (n = 14)

Interviews have been conducted with 19 women and 11 men with a medium age range between 35 and 50 years. Twenty-eight out of 30 study respondents were in a relationship, i.e., engaged or married, and 25 participants had children (two on average).

4.2. Research Design

This study is grounded in a bottom-up approach and was designed based on a qualitative approach for data collection, which is confirmed by the choice of the semi-structured interview as the leading and central research method. All interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analysed with the qualitative data software N-Vivo. Building on the conceptual framework and the considered research question, data has been structured using a deductive coding method (Miles et al., 2014) that provided for the three macro themes of this work: the migration motivation and expectations of the respondents (home); professional integration dynamics (host); employed strategies for skill accumulation, cultivation, and transfer.

All investigations and analyses were premised by the author from an emic and etic perspective (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Salzman, 2002). Own biographical experiences played a central role in the collection and interpretation of research findings, as the author shares the country of origin (SG2), the migratory experience, and the destination context (Turin) with some respondents.

Several questions and investigations benefited from the author’s insight and socio-cultural, political, and linguistic background. In particular, the latter eased access to German study participants and facilitated the interview conduction with all respondents in German and Italian, as “language is the fundamental means of establishing a climate of empathy, and therefore of communication, between the interviewer and the interviewee” (Corbetta, 2003, p. 279).

Additionally, sharing a migratory past facilitated, in some cases, negotiation and access to the field, as study participants were often approached through private and professional contacts. The snowball technique was mostly used for further recruitment.

4.3. Research Sites

Turin (Italy) and Munich (Germany) represent intriguing study locations for comparative research: First, both urban contexts have a long migration history (Bade, 1992; Bonifazi & Heins, 2000; Rieder, 2005). According to the latest ISTAT (2021) data, the share of migrants in Turin makes up approximately 15% of its current total population. Even though widely outnumbered by Munich (28%), both contexts belong to the top four cities with the highest foreign population share in their national contexts, which renders them potential “laboratories of diversity” (Trenz & Triandafyllidou, 2017).

Secondly, the Turin Metropolitan Area hosts more than 8% of the Romanian community in Italy and has thus one of the highest concentrations in the country. ISTAT data from 2021 shows that the share of Romanians makes up 41% of the total foreign population in the aforementioned region; accordingly, they outnumber previously predominant immigrant nationalities in the area (Omede & Procopio, 2006). In contrast, Munich has a reputation of being “Italy’s most Northern city” for its geographical proximity to Italy and the notorious presence of the Italian community in the city.

Thirdly, both urban contexts are represented by the most prestigious and traditional universities in Europe and thus important “production sites” of highly skilled and human capital, other than being leading business centres in their national contexts, especially in the automotive and banking sector.

5. Results

5.1. On Departure: The Interrelation Between Migration Motivations and Expectations

The sample data informed on three subcategories of initial motivations for high-qualified migration, which point to the variety of expectations allocated to certain stages of the life course (Figure 2). Pushing factors for professional advancement were correlated to aspirations for training opportunities and an increased coherence between obtained skill sets and career progress.

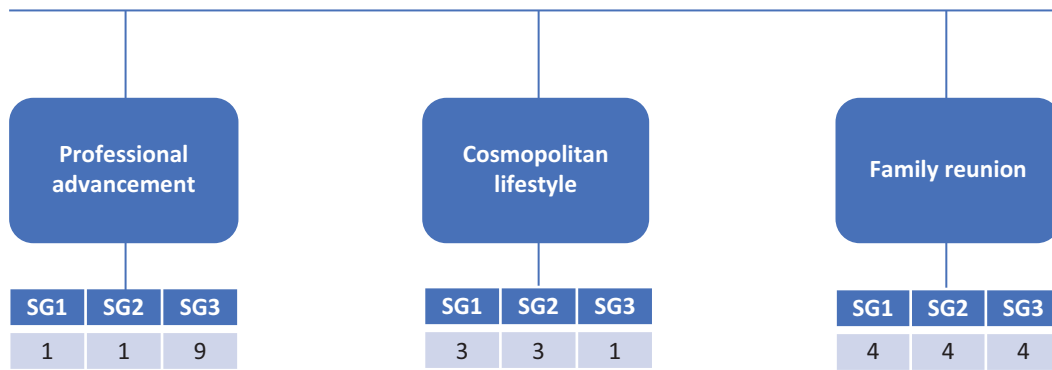


Figure 2. Migration motivation framework. Notes: Total sample is 30; SG1 stands for Romanian transnationals in Turin (n = 8), SG2 is German transnationals in Turin (n = 8), and SG3 is Italian transnationals in Munich (n = 14).

Mobilities that had been initiated in search of adventure, international experiences, or for political and socio-cultural reasons (such as disapproval of systems in the home context) have been labelled “cosmopolitan lifestyle migrations.” The third subcategory refers to what King (2002) calls “love migrations,” in which highly-skilled migrants changed their residence country as tied movers in settled relationships.

While Romanian and German respondents (SG1 and SG2) were quite equally distributed in the second and third subcategories, the majority (n = 9) of Italian study participants (SG3) can be allocated to migrations for the sake of professional advancement. This tendency toward professionally motivated mobilities within the Italian sample is not surprising considering the economic predisposition of both target countries (Germany vs. Italy) and the resulting socio-economic advantages for potential career progression.

Respondents of all sample groups started their mobility from a rather stable position in the labour market in their home country. Following the sample criteria for selection of the study participants, none had left their home context out of poverty or economic precarity, but rather for the intention to pursue a certain desired lifestyle.

It results from the data that professionally motivated mobilities (mainly SG3) are not mainly driven by unsatisfactory competence valorisation in their home country, but very often stirred by the aspiration to gain experience abroad or to exploit training and upskilling opportunities as an investment for a future career. Common criteria of choice that steered their migration decision were already existing language skills, results from market research for skill valorisation, and the desire to develop a professional profile for the aspired occupational field.

Also, the majority of SG1 respondents (Romanian nationals) left their home country in employment positions that were coherent to their existing educational and cultural capital at the time, ranging from professions in the art sector and the engineering field to journalism. Having met their Italian spouse in Romania, they

also came to Italy for love, though most of the time through business relations, or looking to change their way of life.

The desire for a lifestyle change was mainly motivated by an unsatisfactory socio-political climate in their home country (Romania) and often stood in close relation with the year and era of departure. Indeed, concerning the principle of time and place, this issue is decisive in particular for Romanian mobility. Perceived and lived corruption in a post-1989 reality—characterised by the breakdown of the Communist bloc and an ending bipolarity—are common indicators of the desire to move to another national context. Priorities for change of German respondents were rooted in socio-cultural rather than socio-political circumstances: Cosmopolitan knowledge gained from prior travels and professional experiences created an image of the Italian lifestyle that foregrounded their desire to spend a period abroad.

As Elder et al. (2003) note, social change may have a decisive impact on planned trajectories and alter the routine pathways of individuals. Thus, socio-political and economic developments, newly established affective ties or, in contrast, concluded relationships were some of the major reasons that triggered the mobility decisions of the participants of this study. International research highlights the interdependence between life course events “or the stimuli that create changes in family composition” (Clark & Davies Withers, 2007, p. 593), such as marriage and childbirth, and migration decisions. Consequently, priorities and needs that determine the migratory trajectory are constantly changing and re-define the roles of tied movers within a family as well as the temporal dimension of the mobility. Data from this study has evidenced and confirmed a presumed stark interrelation between the migrant’s stage in life and the according motivation towards mobility and preferences for personal (professional) development. The majority of our respondents moved with their spouses for professional reasons, to set in motion a lifestyle change, or for the sake of family reunification in either Italy or Germany; thus, migration preferences and choices were starkly oriented by family-related needs and wants.

Scholars further confirm the significant role of children in long- and short-term migration intentions. Aspirations for the children's well-being may thus lead to different priorities and decisional outcomes on a spatial and temporal level which renders familial migration a set of diverse occurrences rather than one single event (Moskal & Tyrrell, 2016). Relevant indicators that build the basis for the formulation of familial strategies and choices may regard standards of security, freedom of choice, flexibility, property rights in the potential host context, or an environment adapted to family needs concerning social politics and educational systems (Bailey & Mulder, 2017; Moskal & Tyrrell, 2016; Ryan & Sales, 2011; Valtolina, 2013). Findings suggest that aspiration for career progress and professional mobility are secondary especially for tied movers in the pre-departure phase, as they put focus predominantly on the educational path, competence training, and well-being of their children rather than on their own training or career goals in the host society. These observations are corroborated by Scott (2019), who confirms that temporary downward mobility, de-skilling, or delayed gratification become more acceptable if the initial and principal migration motivation was not primarily related to professional advancement. Study participants who have been allocated to the categories of cosmopolitan and tied movers built their working trajectory solely upon arrival in the host context and elaborated, after initial skill acquisition (especially linguistic competencies), strategies to recover their professionalism in the destination context, as the following excerpt exemplifies:

When he [the respondent's son] arrived, he did not accept that, as a former professor, I [took to] cleaning....Little by little, he understood that this is life, that we are foreigners in a foreign country, that we must live and do what we find, not that we choose....As a teacher in Romania, I had this approach to people...and I never backed down [from] someone who needed me....I discovered that I liked...to talk, to chat, to care for others....I discovered that I wanted to do more than just assistance work. So, first I did my training and qualification as a nurse, then I discovered that I really liked massage, so I enrolled in the Academy for Massage Therapy, where I got my certificate, and then I found out that I like osteopathy, and so I am registering for further qualification this fall. (SG1, female)

Professionally motivated movers, in contrast, had concrete pre-departure expectations for their professional insertion and integration in the host context. Indeed, all respondents belonging to this category moved with a clearly defined professional (short- or long-term) "project" to the host context, framed through formal (i.e., pre-established work contract) and technical conditions (i.e., delineated task and job description).

5.2. On the Ground: Aspired and Realised Skill Valorisation and Professional Mobility

Figure 3 illustrates two predominant professional tracks that have been observed for the skill trajectories (Jasso, 2003). Drawing on Brown et al.'s (2000) conceptualisation of vertical and horizontal learning, this article adopts this concept to skill transfer. Accordingly, horizontal skill transfer points to a spatial and timely "relocation" of competence sets from one professional setting to another in two contexts. In this regard, the transnational perspective is guiding as it points to the implementation of skills and knowledge in two national contexts and thus the building of transnational socio-cultural capital. According to international studies (Banerjee et al., 2019; Verhaest et al., 2017), the horizontal match of skills is higher in countries with strong employment protection.

Vertical skill and knowledge transfer on the other hand relies on the continuous accumulation of capital and (often forced) professional re-invention through occupation in different professional fields than those of the origin contexts. They often require lower levels of education and thus point to a "vertical mismatch," when workers are overeducated for the job they are performing (Banerjee et al., 2019).

Accordingly, professional re-invention and the change of the prior occupational field occurred mostly for SG1 and SG2. Respondents often experienced structural and socio-cultural obstacles that prevented skill transfer and forced them to integrate into occupational sectors that were not coherent with their prior educational and professional trajectory in the home context. A particular barrier to professional integration and a facilitator for deskilling dynamics observable for SG1 respondents were the missing or incomplete accreditation of educational qualifications, which often led to new training and occupational paths. The time of arrival was also, in this case, decisive, as the legal status had been changed and the process of recognition of educational qualifications from Romanian migrants has been gradually progressing in Italy since their official entry into the EU in 2007, which affected also work trajectories positively (Croitoru, 2018). The introduction of the Romanian Qualification Framework in 2013 was a key initiative to promote the recognition and valorisation of formal qualifications among Romanian movers in Europe and to harmonise assessment and certification procedures (Eurydice, 2019).

The analysis carved out three major professional fields for SG1 and SG2 respondents who had experienced vertical skill transfer in the host country. The enlargement of the EU in 2007 facilitated access for Romanians to competitions for labour positions in the public system, which became one of the major professional fields for highly specialized professionals from new EU member states, especially in the health sector.

Other than their daily and ordinary work life, volunteering activities or second jobs often complement the

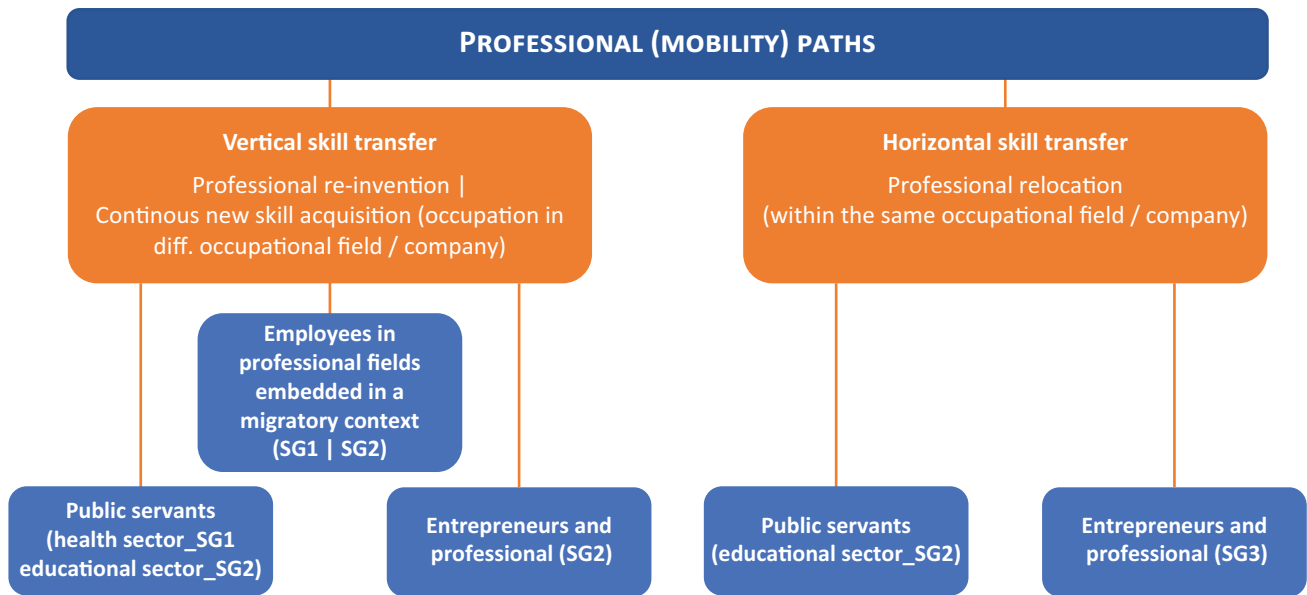


Figure 3. Professional paths and skills valorization.

work–life routine of migrants and represent an important link to the country and culture of origin. Further to this, Vouyioukas and Liapi (2013, p. 93) consider volunteer work as “part of a reskilling process” that permits them “to capitalise on their experience, reorient themselves.” SG1 respondents in particular are often professionally involved in transnational activities. Vertovec (2004) calls it “bi-focality” and points to the here-and-there perspective that migrants apply in their personal and professional context, and thus in their daily life, and might impact decisively the context and persons surrounding. In fact, several Romanian respondents engage in transnational activities that represent local reference points for the Romanian community in Turin, as exemplified by the following narratives of two SG1 respondents:

I am a migrant guide...and I basically tell the story of migration from the perspective of a migrant. The guides are all immigrants, all foreigners, and thus people arrived from other places, who tell...their story of migration. (SG1, female)

This respondent shows her host community to the *Torinesi*, to migrants, foreigners, tourists, and everybody else interested in hearing and seeing through the transnational migrant lenses.

Another SG1 study participant works for a Romanian radio in Turin:

We play international music, but there is a dedicated time for Romanian folk music much loved by the Romanian people....[The radio] focuses on the Romanians...but now they have also thought of a programme in Italian because...the Romanians got married to Italians, so the Italians are obliged to listen to the Romanian radio...then the director thought

of some contributions in Italian, two or three times a week.

Those transnational communication networks do not solely represent a link to the country of origin and diasporic identity, but also tie the communities in the host context.

Due to the privileged standing of the German language in Italy and the increased formal recognition of their competences, the majority of German respondents (SG2) worked in the educational sector, either public or private, even though this was not coherent with previously acquired competences and educational credentials. In this context, the notion embraced by Liu-Farrer et al. (2021) and Sandoz (2020) of social construction and the context-dependence of skills is relevant. Accordingly, skills are not an intrinsic quality owned by the individual, but rather assessed, developed, and identified subjectively by the migrant context, which explains the interplay of chances and choices for the migrant in certain occupational segments.

As a result of insufficient language skills at the beginning of the mobility trajectory, German language teaching was rather often a valid alternative to start the working trajectory for many SG2 respondents. This development was facilitated by the increasing demands for language instruction and socio-linguistic competencies promoted on national and supra-national levels (COE, 2020) and the preference for mother tongue (assistant) teachers in public and private schools (Schroot & Marroccoli, 2021). The latter was often embedded in the migratory context, where study participants worked as German language instructors predominantly for Italian professionals with intentions to leave their country. Interestingly, their Romanian counterparts were professionally well inserted in the same occupational

field. However, in contrast to the German sample, they focused on language and the cultural instruction of their co-nationals rather than of Italians.

Whereas professional downward mobility, the change of job status, or occupational fields conditioned socio-economic upgrading for most SG1 respondents, this was not the case for SG2 respondents, who were facing lower salaries and often higher living costs in Turin compared to their home context.

In contrast, horizontal skill transfer and thus a geographical re-location of acquired cultural, educational, and professional capital and professional fields was observable in particular for the Italian sample group in Germany (SG3). The majority of respondents referred to a rather linear progression of their professional path in the same—or very similar—occupational field. Their professional trajectory had been typically initiated with higher education in their country of origin and was continued with several years of work experience in the same national context or abroad.

6. Conclusion

This research project departed from the need for empirical investigation on professional integration dynamics of qualified labour within intra-European mobility. For this purpose, work trajectories of high-qualified movers have been analysed and theoretically framed by the life course approach and a transnational perspective on (professional) integration dynamics in the light of the three heterogeneous (more and less privileged) national and cultural backgrounds of the respondents.

The data analysis points to two distinct interrelations: first, between the initial migration motivation to move to Germany or Italy and the corresponding skill valorisation in the host context, and second, between conditions in the country of origin and destination for potential brain valorisation.

Concerning horizontal and vertical competence valorisation and corresponding professional down and upward mobility in the host context, data suggests that (a) the geographical origin of the migrants, (b) the stable economic and socio-political standing of the host context, and (c) migration motivations steered their insertion in the labour market decisively. Professionally motivated mobilities reveal fewer alterations within the professional trajectory and the related (cultural) capital implementation than those migrations motivated by lifestyle change and family reunification.

Accordingly, a high share of skilled labourers who reach the country under more or less favourable circumstances are often forced to work in job segments that are often incoherent to their background and prevent them from using the total of their human capital.

This research has faced some limitations, which could be approached and tackled in further investigations.

The sample of this study comprised data from 30 respondents, which is considered a rather small sam-

ple size that needs cautious formulations of interpretations and findings within the established systematic analysis framework. To elaborate further on key issues such as social up and downward mobility and professional aspirations, a larger sample would be helpful and corroborate several insights. Further, the adding of return and onward mobility intentions would provide an interesting perspective in light of the life course paradigm and should be further elaborated upon. Recent comparative studies (Croitoru, 2018; Williams & Baláž, 2008) that focused on the interrelation of skill valorisation and return migration provide interesting insights and tools to investigate how professional up or downward mobility in the host context affects intentions for onward or return migration.

Finally, part of the data collection has been conducted in a pre-pandemic phase. It would be highly beneficial to add a perspective that takes post-Covid dynamics related to labour market insertion and the professional inclusion of qualified migrants, on a micro (individual) and macro (policy) level.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers and the editors of this thematic issue for their very helpful review and assessment, their suggestions and comments that helped improve and finalise this work. Further thanks go to the respondents within this research, who provided the data for this study.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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