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What is the impact of educational systems on social mobility across Europe? A comparative approach

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Abstract

Education is reasonably expected to enhance intergenerational social mobility. However, the extent to which educational systems foster or otherwise constrain social mobility remains controversial. In this paper, data from the European Social Survey covering 22 countries is analysed in order to assess social mobility in the second half of the 20th Century. Variation across five cohesive regional clusters is examined in detail. Results confirm increasing rates of social mobility in Europe and their close relation to massive structural shifts. The erosion of the education-occupation linkage presents a current threat to this trend. Considering formal credentials only, the most equalitarian educational systems are to be found in the United Kingdom and Ireland, but their ability to allocate individuals in the occupational structure is lower than in the other regions. Scandinavian systems show higher chances of social mobility through education, while Mediterranean systems present lower fluidity rates in both the background-education link (like Eastern European countries) and the education-occupation link (like the UK & Ireland). Gender and migration are identified as key factors to explain these differences.

Key words: education • educational systems • gender • migration • social mobility

Classification-JEL: I24, J21, J70, Y10, Z13

Resumo

Há razões para esperar que a educação promova a mobilidade social intergeracional. Porém, a competência dos sistemas educativos para alimentar ou, pelo contrário, limitar a mobilidade social continua a ser motivo de controvérsia. Neste texto, analisam-se dados do European Social Survey relativos a 22 países com o intuito de aferir os padrões de mobilidade social na segunda metade do século XX. A variação entre cinco grupos regionais coesos merece particular atenção. Os resultados confirmam as taxas crescentes de mobilidade social na Europa e a sua relação estreita com transformações estruturais massivas. Uma ameaça actual a esta tendência é constituída pelo enfraquecimento da relação educação-ocupação. Considerando apenas qualificações formais, os sistemas educativos mais igualitários encontram-se no Reino Unido e na Irlanda, mas a sua capacidade para colocar indivíduos na estrutura ocupacional é menor do que noutras regiões. Os sistemas escandinavos apresentam probabilidades mais elevadas de mobilidade social através da educação, enquanto os sistemas mediterrânicos têm taxas menores de fluidez quer na relação origem-educação (como os países da Europa de Leste), quer na relação educação-ocupação (como o Reino Unido e a Irlanda). Género e migração são identificados como factores fundamentais para entender estas diferenças.

Palavras-chave: educação • género • migração • mobilidade social • sistemas educativos

INTRODUCTION

Moving from a particular social class to another through individual merit is a feature often associated with modernity, democracy and industrialization. It is certainly utopic to think that equal opportunities would be accomplished as long as formal postulates were incorporated in national and international law-making, but one could expect modern societies to become progressively more “fluid”.

A key pathway for modern times to enable social mobility is education. In fact, the extent to which educational systems may foster or otherwise constrain social mobility has been a controversial topic on the sociological agenda. The current paper makes a contribution to this debate by developing a number of theoretical statements and testing them on the European Social Survey 2008’s extensive dataset. Despite convergence in many respects, educational

systems in Europe are still notably diverse. It is therefore possible to assess if some educational models are more efficient in stimulating social mobility while others are more “reproductive”, or else if educational models are irrelevant for social mobility patterns. Specific patterns regarding employment structure, gender and migration will be taken into account in this analysis of the complex relation between education and social mobility.

SOCIAL MOBILITY AND EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS

The dominant idea of functionalist sociology until the 1960s was expressed by Lipset and Bendix’s (1959) classic comparative study which supported the thesis that industrialization fosters social mobility around the globe. While this notion inspired and legitimized a wide range of national and international policy-making, it has been criticized by many studies since the 70s.

In the educational field, Coleman’s (1975) report on the United States and the work of Bourdieu and Passeron (1964; 1970) in France earned a strong public impact. Both showed that educational achievement was attached to social background more than to any other factor; the chances of succeeding at school and graduating were considerably higher if the student’s parents were, for example, highly educated professionals rather than illiterate factory workers. Some authors explained such variation by individual rational choices (Coleman, 1975; Boudon, 1974), whereas others argued that educational systems were appropriated by dominant classes as a tool for social reproduction and symbolic legitimacy (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1970; Bowles and Gintis, 1977). Later research by Devine (2004) or Fitz et al. (2006) in the United Kingdom broadly confirms such theses. While the “direct effect” of class background on class destination has declined, the “indirect effect” (through education) has actually increased since the 60s despite comprehensive educational policies. As concluded by Fitz et al. (2006: 75), “education has not served as a mechanism for increasing social mobility, rather it has become the means by which advantages have been transmitted intergenerationally”.

Bertaux (1977) concluded that major moves between different social classes were generated by structural shifts rather than equality principles. According to his study, almost all peasants or factory workers had parents with the same occupation, but since the first group was shrinking a part of its members was moving into industry or low-skilled services. Likewise, professional parents raised children to attain the same occupational status as

themselves drawing on their advantage in the educational system; since this class was expanding, the entrance of some new members was possible, especially children of service employees who did well at school. Thereby, schooling was at once enhancing mobility and reproducing privilege, as well as contributing to an overall shift from traditional class culture and solidarity to growing individualized values and mass culture (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Such general patterns were observed from the 70s at least until the 90s (Merllié and Prévot, 1997).

The influential book by Erikson and Goldthorpe (1993) compares different generations of people born between 1900 and 1950 in a handful of developed countries and observes a general stability (or a “constant flux”) of social fluidity patterns across time. In the words of the authors, “we have found no evidence of general and abiding trends towards higher levels either of total mobility or of social fluidity” (102). Social mobility appears to be fostered in the initial stages of the industrialization process since rural exodus generates a structural shift towards an enlargement of privileged classes, and it stagnates in the further stages of industrialization.

Focusing on employment structure, Esping-Andersen et al. (1993) also attribute major shifts in the 20th century to structural change rather than social fluidity based on equality principles. It should be underlined that the service sector grew dramatically between 1960 and 1985 across industrialized countries. On the one hand, the number of professionals nearly doubled. The possibilities of young people from other social backgrounds to get into this group, in particular through education, increased. On the other hand, a “post-industrial proletariat” emerged with the expansion of low-skilled occupations in the service industry. Composed mostly by women, this group is especially vulnerable both to equality/democratic policy and exploitation/exclusion mechanisms, since it combines high rates of social mobility and high rates of de-protection and unemployment. Such group is smaller in “rigid systems” as Germany and larger in “open systems” as the United States. As stated by the authors, “the welfare state, the industrial relations system and education emerge as key institutional filters for employment structuration” (Esping-Andersen et al., 1993: 33).

These various contributions succeeded in creating both theoretical arguments and statistical procedures that set a distinction between total measures of social mobility and relative or “circulation” rates. If structural change brings particular social classes to enlarge and others to contract, some social mobility is generated (for example, children of peasants become factory workers or technicians) but this is more properly considered a functional request, which differs from an increasing “fluidity” between social classes. It is though important to consider

that effective personal agency is located somewhere between total and relative mobility rates. It is true that the former is sustained by structural change, but people also participate in this change. Such participation may be considered at the individual level, for instance when someone holding a higher education diploma struggles to work as a professional and rejects other options, as much as at the collective level, for instance if individuals join a movement for the recognition of their activity as “skilled” or “professional” (Parkin, 1978).

Using more sophisticated statistical procedures, recent works (such as Breen and Jonnson, 2005; Breen *et al.*, 2009) contribute to this controversy by showing that social fluidity has actually increased during the latest decades in some industrialized countries, especially in Central Europe and Scandinavia, while remaining stable in others (United States, Japan). The authors conclude that “several analyses have pointed out the importance of the educational system as the driving force behind changes in social fluidity and differences between countries” (Breen and Jonnson, 2005: 233). Buchanan and Hannun (2001) also claim that, if universal trends linked to the “industrialization thesis” may be refuted as clearly shown by evidence from Latin America or Africa, they may actually be a useful contribution to understand the evolution in specific regions of the world. For instance, in Southeast Asia social mobility trends increased during the industrialization process in close relation to state policy on education. In their comparison of some European countries, Muller and Karle (1993) highlight not only important differences between national educational systems – for instance, more selective and “reproductive” systems in Germany and France, more fluid and equalitarian systems in Scandinavia – but also their autonomy *vis-a-vis* the industrialization process. The authors concluded that an institutional approach should be privileged in order to understand these differences (see also Andersen and Van de Werfhorst, 2010).

Extensive international benchmarks such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (OECD, 2001, 2004, 2007) suggest that social background, despite being an important factor to explain inequalities in academic achievement worldwide, is more crucial in some countries than others, and this variation is not correlated with economic patterns, nor with average scores. Van de Werfhorst and Mijs (2010) explore this variation drawing on two major differences in educational systems: internal differentiation and national standardization. According to their study, systems with apparent early differentiation (based on tracking) and/or large private sectors produce a stronger relation between social background and educational achievement, with visible effects on efficiency (higher average scores) and greater social reproduction. Standardization (for example, through prescriptive curricula and national exams) reduces this “social origin effect”, especially in highly differentiated systems.

Considerations on gender and migration have increasingly come to the fore, although they remain to a large extent marginal in the quantitative analysis of social mobility. Links between the growing number of women in paid employment and the worldwide expansion of education, the enlargement of the service industry, or job mobility and corporate flexibility strategies have been documented (Hochschild, 1989, 2000; Esping-Andersen et al., 1993; Schofer and Meyer, 2005; Soskice, 2005; Boca and Wetzels, 2008; Bastos et al., 2009). In addition, the fast increase in the number of university graduates raised concerns about the “over-education” of workers and the particular vulnerability of women to a downgrade in skill and status ladders as “latecomers” in the labor market (Thurow, 1999; McIntosh, 2005; De Grip, 2005). A report published by the European Commission (2009a) suggests that the impact of gender on occupational segregation has persisted if not increased over time. However, the use of quantitative methodology on this subject remains sparse due to either research tradition or lack of reliable data (Oakley, 2000).

At the same time, the share of foreign workers in western societies is now larger than ever recorded (Castles and Miller, 2003). OECD’s (2008) extensive report on the profile of migrants uncovers two distinct trends during the period of 1985-2005 in Europe: in the northern half of the continent (except for Ireland), immigrant populations became much higher educated, whereas in the southern half this was not the case at all; indeed, the reverse trend is observed in Italy, Greece and Spain. The same report also shows that over-qualification is more common for migrants than indigenous in all countries, three or four times as much in some cases. This is especially the case in Southern European *and* Scandinavian countries. A growing body of research exposes important effects of institutional arrangements on immigrants’ rate of unemployment (Zorlu, 2008; Reyneri and Fullin, 2011; Lagana, 2011), longevity of employment contract (Kogan, 2011), wages (Zorlu and Hartog, 2005), or investments in education (Van Tubergen and Van de Werfhorst, 2007). In particular, Reyneri and Fullin (2010: 46-7) compare research in six countries of Europe and conclude that while “penalization as regards access to more qualified occupations still occurs in all countries, for all migrant groups and for both genders”, the returns on education seem to vary across countries and generations of migrants. The suggestion of these authors is that difference is closely related to risks of unemployment and level of welfare assistance available.

The analysis of data from the European Social Survey 2008 will allow us to examine three key questions that remain to be answered. First, what trends in social mobility can be

observed over the last decades in Europe? Second, what is the impact of different educational systems on such trends? Last, can gender and migration explain some of this variation?

DATA AND METHODS

Sophistication in the analysis of social mobility increased considerably over time, but some challenges persist. To start with, advances in data collection have hardly followed or been followed by theoretical statements. This means today there is a significant explaining deficit and little ability to inform public debate or policy-making. Such lack of explanation is related to “abstracted” notions of social and educational mobility, eluding central markers such as social class or educational level. Dealing with these variables as continuous variables enables some statistical operations, although it may reduce their sociological relevance. This is why the classic studies of Bertaux (1978) or Bourdieu and Passeron (1964; 1970) are critically recovered in this paper, favouring a double qualitative bond in such relation. In other words, to be a factory worker or a business man, as well as a higher education graduate or an early school-leaver, can not be reduced to different points on a scale (or two scales) since these identity markers hold specific (qualitative) social and cultural meanings.¹

On the other hand, as claimed by Buchanan and Hannun (2001), most comparisons have covered only Northern-Western developed countries. It is important to question if similar trends can be found in other regions of the world such as Latin America, Africa, Asia, or even Southern and Eastern Europe. Certainly a major downfall is the lack of reliable and comparable data for some regions.

Breen and Jonnson (2005) acknowledge that recent extensive data collection platforms such as the European Social Survey (ESS) enable large-scale comparative analysis as questions are designed to be comparable and applied across different countries. Funded by the European Union, the ESS is led by the City University’s *Centre for Comparative Social Surveys* in the United Kingdom and developed in cooperation with six other research units in Europe. In its most recent version (4th Edition, 2008/2009), the EES covered a sample of 56,752 individuals, representing all people aged 16 and over in 31 European countries. The questionnaire includes 662 variables and it has been improved since the 1st Edition in 2002.

¹ A radical perspective might avoid any cross-national quantitative comparison, but we argue that it is possible to develop a comparative study that is more sensitive to the cultural meanings of class and education if these variables are understood qualitatively and their context-bound symbolic content is explored.

One of the limitations is that national sample sizes are small in comparison with datasets used in other studies (e. g. Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1993; Breen and Jonnson, 2005). Our analysis will deal with this problem by zooming out the units, that is, comparing not countries but regions within Europe. Such procedure is possible because there are theoretical arguments and empirical evidence on common trends within European regions regarding social class structure, welfare regimes and educational systems, based on cultural, economic and political socio-historical similarities.²

Five regional clusters will be considered in our analysis (Table 1). A similar typology is famously used by Esping-Andersen (1993) in characterizing welfare regimes in Central and Northern Europe. His contribution has been discussed by a wide range of authors since then, in particular due to its neglecting or misplacement of gender issues (Trifiletti, 1999). The expansion of the original typology to embrace the notion of specific types of welfare regimes both in Mediterranean countries (Arts and Gelissen, 2002; Gal, 2010) and Central-Eastern countries (Cerami, 2006; Fenger, 2007) has also been put forward. On the other hand, Archer's (1978) socio-historical study of European educational systems provides an important theoretical basis for our typology in that it provides an in-depth analysis of one system in each of our clusters except for Mediterranean countries. Some recent comparisons were also useful to sketch ongoing trends and challenges in different national educational systems across Europe (Prats and Raventos, 2005).

Table 1. Socio-educational profile of five selected regions in Europe

Clusters	Expenditure per student (% of GDP)	% of tertiary education	% of upper sec education	% of adults in education	Tracking in sec education	Degree of local decisions	Scores in PISA
Scandinavian	+++	+++	+++	+++	++	+++	+++
Central	++	++	+++	++	+++	++	++
Mediterranean	++	+	+	+	+	+	+
UK & Ireland	++	++	++	+++	+	+++	++
Eastern	+	++	+++	+	++	+	++

Note: Regional profiles are based on OECD (2009, 2010) and Martins (2010).

The *Scandinavian* cluster comprises Finland, Denmark, Sweden and Norway. It is characterized by a long-term high state budget for education, low-differentiated comprehensive secondary systems (with residual levels of retention and drop-out), high rates

² In doing so, risks naturally arise; some generalizations are requested and some variability is lost, but an holistic approach to social and educational systems is respected. The alternative option of isolating particular variables from a whole coherent system would entail other risks of distortion.

of higher education attendance and lifelong learning, high scores in international skill tests, technologically advanced schools, and decentralized organization relying largely on the autonomy of municipalities and schools. Most of these features were established before the 60s and they are associated with an equalitarian advanced social structure, professionals making up nearly 30% of the adult population.

Germany, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland and Austria make up the *Central* cluster. Their systems combine average public investment (in % of GDP) and average private investment, a high ratio of students to teaching staff, expanded vocational pathways at secondary education level, low higher education attendance and average scores in international tests. Educational systems are greatly stratified under the influence of protective and corporate employment systems and welfare regimes. Such “rigid” systems are associated with a specific social structure in which the share of “post-industrial proletariat” (service employees) is small, but their possibilities of social mobility are also little. Likewise, tertiary education rates are not high but those who do complete tertiary education are expected to attain a secure place in the professional class.

Composed of Portugal, Spain and Greece, the *Mediterranean* cluster presents low rates of higher education attendance, low results in international tests, a recent public investment in education (partially supported by the European Union) and low private investment, a selective though undifferentiated secondary education model with high levels of retention and drop-out, and a national centralized structure. The share of youth out of both education and paid employment is relatively high. Although these countries went through significant structural changes during the past decades, such patterns are apparent when comparing them with the other European countries, and they are still ascribed a more traditional social structure and a smaller “new middle-class”.

The *UK & Ireland* cluster shows average public investment and high private investment, especially in tertiary education. Organization is based on a comprehensive, liberal and decentralized structure. This system enhances variation in scores of students and schools; not unrelated, rates of higher education attendance and lifelong learning are high, while early drop-out rates in secondary education are also substantial. Such patterns are linked to an open and flexible social structure, with high levels of inequality and weaker employment relations. The transition from education to work is therefore risky, and a high percentage of higher education graduates cannot get professional jobs.

Countries of the *Eastern* cluster are characterized by a specific “post-communist” system with a centralized structure, free universalistic secondary education, expanded vocational

segments, average scores in international tests and average rates of higher education attendance. Recently grown professional classes incorporate a high percentage of higher education graduates. Our analysis will consider Central-Eastern countries only (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia), since countries from South-Eastern Europe hold other specific patterns.

As for social class, the ISCO classification used in the ESS will be aggregated in five main classes: (A) legislators, officials and managers, characterized by property and/or top organizational authority; (B) professionals and technicians, characterized by advanced specialized skills; (C) clerks and service workers, comprising mainly interpersonal occupations; (D) skilled agricultural workers, craft workers and industrial operators; and (E) street vendors, cleaners and rural laborers. The singularity of service workers (the “post-industrial proletariat” according to Esping-Andersen et al., 1993) is thus respected, since their daily work, required skills, working conditions and mobility opportunities are considerably different than both professionals and industrial or agricultural workers. The aggregation of agricultural workers with other groups requires some caution, but since this group is small in contemporary Europe (especially in some regions) it generates non-representative samples when considered separately.

Comparing the educational degree and occupation of the active population with those of their fathers when respondents were 14 years old will be used as an indicator of intergenerational social mobility. Based on the literature review, estimates of total mobility (the number of people who joined a class other than recorded for their father) must be then followed by estimates of relative mobility, i. e. the same value weighted against the change in dimension of occupational categories over the period at stake. A limitation of this methodology is that the occupation of both ESS respondents and their fathers is recorded at different ages, and it is likely that individuals progress in the labor market over their lifetime. Students working in service occupations, for example, may be recorded as experiencing (temporary) downward mobility but will often get higher status occupations later on. Estimates may thus contain some negative distortion, affecting especially Scandinavian countries as they hold the highest rates of working students (European Commission, 2009b). However, this is not too problematic since five aggregate occupational categories are used and a low rate of individual mobility between them is expected. Plus, social mobility through formal careers within organizations is declining (Van Leeuwen & Maas, 2010). Numbers confirm that the proportion of people in the two categories with the highest status is similar in younger and older ages, signalling the importance of educational credentials over longevity in

accessing them. Except in the *Scandinavian* cluster, class A is actually larger in the younger generations than in the older ones; in Mediterranean countries, such proportion reaches as high as 3 to 1. Finally, it is difficult to account for the lifetime effect because future itself is uncertain. For instance, an economic crisis may block expected upward mobility.

Analysis will consider all active population born from 1940 to 1984. In order to assess change over time, the 1970-84 cohort will sometimes be treated separately. Specific trends regarding those who went through education since 1975 and entered the labour market in the period of 1985-2008 shall then be identified.

RESULTS

Social mobility across Europe

ESS data on workers' and their fathers' occupations show that total rates of upward social mobility in Europe in the period of 1955-2008 were very high, while downward mobility was low: 59.2% of the total active population belong to a class higher than their father's, and 10.2% experienced extreme upward mobility (from D to A or from E to A/B); only 14.1% hold a class position lower than their father's, and reproduction rate is 26.7%. The correlation in intergenerational social class is therefore relevant but weak (0.286).

The 1970-1984 cohort shows a slight increase both in downward mobility (15.4%) and reproduction rate (27.6%). It is however important to remember that a substantial number of these workers are in the very early stage of their career (around 80% of them are younger than their father was when they were 14), so prospects of moving into a different class in the future are still considerable.

Reproduction rates are the highest in the Mediterranean and Eastern clusters, while nearing 25% in the remaining three clusters (Table 2). This difference appears to be associated mainly with lower levels of downward mobility in the former. Upward mobility rates are about 60% in all five regions, extreme mobility being greater in Scandinavia. Considering the 70-84 cohort only, reproduction rates are the highest in Eastern Europe and the lowest in UK & Ireland. However, downward mobility is higher in Scandinavia and UK & Ireland, while upward mobility is slightly higher in the Mediterranean cluster.

Table 2. Total mobility rate and relative mobility index

Clusters	Active population		1970-84 cohort	
	Total mobility rate	Relative mobility index	Total mobility rate	Relative mobility index
Scandinavian	75.4%	1.04	72.0%	1.06
Central	75.0%	1.07	72.4%	1.10
Mediterranean	72.2%	1.16	72.3%	1.04
UK & Ireland	75.8%	1.07	74.8%	1.11
Eastern	69.8%	0.95	68.0%	0.90

Note: Total mobility rate = % of population that holds a social class position different than their father's (when they were 14). Relative mobility index = total population in a class different than their father's / sum of differences in occupational structure from one generation to another. According to this index, a value higher than 1 means a social mobility flux that is greater than structural shift.

Two major fluxes in Europe can be discerned. Most descendants of class A moved to a growing class B; and most descendants from eroding class E moved to class D.³ Other fluxes vary between regions according to structural shifts. In Central Europe and Scandinavia, a move from classes C or D to class B is common. In the Mediterranean countries, class C has been more reproductive and it also “absorbed” many individuals from class D. UK & Ireland show an intermediate pattern with higher mobility only between “neighbor” classes, in particular from classes C to B, and D to C. Finally, in the Eastern cluster many children of workers in class C entered class B, while class D appears to be more reproductive.

A comparison between the occupations of the active population and their fathers' uncovers a huge increase of classes A and B (except for class A in Scandinavia), while classes D and E decreased all over Europe. Curiously, class C experienced a huge increase in UK & Ireland and Eastern Europe, a moderate increase in the Mediterranean and Scandinavian clusters, and a slight decrease in the Central one. Structural change in the Mediterranean cluster was smaller than in the other regions if the whole active population is considered, but it was especially high considering only the population born in 1970-84 surpassing all other regions except Eastern Europe. Such evidence confirms that the structural shift often associated with modernity occurred earlier in Central Europe, Great Britain and Scandinavia, apparently slowing down after the 70s crisis, while in the Mediterranean countries it took place in the final quarter of the twentieth century. Data from the *Eastern* cluster are more complex,

³ In regards to class A, it should be noted that property may be transmitted only to some of the descendants or in a later stage of life when parents retire or die. Moreover, it is a mistake to conceive this class as the “elite”. Members of the elite are surely comprised in this class, but so are small businessmen, some of whom live in hard and risky conditions. A move from class A to B may therefore imply an improvement in working conditions.

suggesting a double structural shift led by industrialization (60s and 70s) and the transition to capitalism (90s).

Taking this into account, relative social mobility appears to be slightly higher in the Mediterranean cluster, and lower in the Eastern one. However, considering the 1970-84 cohort only, social mobility increased moderately in the other three regions while decaying in Mediterranean countries and Eastern Europe, now clearly the less fluid cluster in our comparison.

A detailed analysis of each social class (Table 3) shows that reproduction patterns are higher in classes A, B and E, while class C is the most fluid. However, there are differences across regions. Class B is especially reproductive in Mediterranean countries, the same happening with class A in *Eastern* and class E in *Central*.

Table 3. Relative reproduction index by social class and region

	A	B	C	D	E
Scandinavian	1.69 (1.44)	1.55 (1.35)	1.04 (1.19)	1.19 (1.33)	1.59 (1.08)
Central	1.67 (2.10)	1.57 (1.49)	1.01 (0.94)	1.26 (1.47)	1.83 (2.00)
Mediterranean	1.67 (1.97)	2.72 (2.31)	1.19 (1.08)	1.08 (1.20)	1.42 (1.46)
UK & Ireland	1.65 (1.54)	1.63 (1.46)	1.03 (1.03)	1.12 (1.20)	1.25 (1.43)
Eastern	2.33 (2.42)	2.14 (1.93)	1.08 (1.09)	1.08 (1.17)	1.82 (2.02)

Note: Relative reproduction index = (current members of the class whose father was also in this class / n of this class in their fathers' generation) / (current n of this class / total n). In parenthesis, the same data is provided only for the active population born in 1970-1984. In this index, 1 would be a totally equalitarian class without reproduction mechanisms.

In what comes to the 1970-84 cohort, fluidity in the extremes (classes A and E) is the highest in Scandinavia, and the lowest in Central, Eastern and Mediterranean countries. In the UK and Ireland, classes A and B are more fluid, while D and E turn out to be slightly more reproductive. Two different interpretations are possible at this point: fluidity has actually increased since the 80s in Scandinavia while it decreased in Central and Mediterranean Europe; and/or career (lifelong) mobility is higher in the former cluster and lower in the latter. Unfortunately, the ESS lacks indicators for career mobility.

The impact of educational systems

Assessing to what extent educational systems foster social mobility requests a double-bind analysis: education should have an impact on the allocation of individuals in the employment structure; and education should allow similar opportunities to members of all classes.

Considering aggregate numbers, the share of population who is in the expected class according to their education is considerably high (64.5%).⁴ A higher education credential is particularly important to join the classes at the top level of status: 51.4% in class A and 62.3% in class B completed tertiary education. Such rate rises to 58.6% and 71.5% in the 1970-84 cohort, but since educational levels increased faster this correlation has slightly decreased (see Table 4). Regarding the other classes, education is more heterogeneous. Particularly in the 1970-84 cohort, access to class C (83.6%) and D (73.2%) became strongly dependent on holding an upper secondary diploma. Hence, despite the small size of class E (8.15%) this is where most of the early school leavers are now concentrated (51.3%).

Table 4. Impact of educational degrees in allocation of individuals in the occupational structure

	Tertiary educ/classA	Tertiary educ/classB	Upper sec/class C	Upper sec/Class D	Less than lower sec / class E	Correlation educ/class
Scandinavian	1.53 (1.25)	1.69 (1.66)	1.41 (1.49)	1.45 (1.68)	2.95 (5.24)	0.675
Central	1.58 (1.55)	1.74 (1.67)	1.35 (1.39)	1.37 (1.48)	4.31 (5.86)	0.661
Mediterranean	1.26 (1.20)	3.22 (2.43)	1.48 (1.30)	0.74 (0.98)	1.81 (2.25)	0.506
UK & Ireland	1.31 (1.24)	1.61 (1.45)	1.38 (1.41)	1.11 (1.61)	2.60 (3.79)	0.574
Eastern	2.55 (2.07)	2.33 (2.14)	1.24 (1.21)	1.15 (1.26)	4.82 (5.61)	0.790

Note: Index = (n with education y in class z / n in class z) / (n with education y / total n). So, 1 would be that education y is irrelevant to achieving class z. In parenthesis, the results for the 1970-1984 offspring are presented.

Variation across regions is considerable, and a link with governance frames (more than economic structure) can be established. The Eastern cluster shows a much stronger correlation between educational level and occupational position, especially in classes C and D, reflecting the central role of education in allocating individuals in the former communist system.⁵ Scandinavia and Central Europe also present a strong correlation in this respect, confirming the influence of socio-democratic systems with highly regulated, corporative and protective

⁴ Expected education is higher education completed for class A and B, at least upper secondary for class C, at least lower secondary for class D, and less than lower secondary for class E.

⁵ It is important to stress that a large number of workers in 2008 entered paid employment before the transition to capitalism, and even for those who did it later on some features of the organization of work are still influent.

employment systems (particularly visible in class D). In contrast, the UK & Ireland cluster exhibits a much more liberal pattern, with a lower association between educational credentials and occupational distribution except for the concentration of early school leavers in class E. In the Mediterranean cluster, tertiary education appears to be quite important to access class B but a secondary degree is not so relevant to enter classes C or D, which pulls down the correlation between education and class.

In the 1970-84 cohort, contrasting patterns are apparent. While access to higher classes for those with tertiary education became increasingly harder in Mediterranean countries (28.6% of them are now clerks or service workers), such access became actually easier in the Central, Eastern and Scandinavian clusters, and it remained stable in the UK & Ireland one. Meanwhile, the correlation between holding a secondary degree and entering classes C or D grew all over Europe.

The impact of social background on educational attainment is higher in tertiary than in upper secondary education, but such impact decreased in both (Table 5). Thus, the educational advantage of growing up in a privileged milieu or the handicap of those who did not are smaller in the younger generation, but curiously the same development is not observed for the children of workers in class D.

Social background is particularly crucial for academic achievement in the Mediterranean and Eastern clusters (in the latter, only for tertiary education). In these countries, having a father in class A seems to be an advantage even in comparison with those having a father in class B, suggesting a higher concentration of resources in class A and/or an easier conversion of such resources into educational advantage, in contrast to a slight advantage of class B descendants in the other regions. Meanwhile, social class became almost irrelevant to complete upper secondary education in Scandinavia and Central Europe, as well as tertiary education in the UK and Ireland. Unfortunately, this impressive progress in the islands is undermined by a lower correlation between education and destination class, and possibly a higher impact of different “schooling circuits” (horizontal differentiation).⁶

⁶ This latest thesis is based on influential studies (e. g. Gewirtz, Bowe and Ball, 1995) and unfortunately it can not be tested on the ESS data.

Table 5. Impact of social background in opportunities of completing tertiary and upper secondary education

Clusters	Degree	Social Background				
		A	B	C	D	E
Scandinavian	Tertiary	1.66 (1.39)	1.69 (1.41)	1.14 (1.03)	0.83 (0.81)	0.62 (0.74)
	UpperSec	1.17 (1.06)	1.15 (1.06)	1.07 (1.01)	0.99 (0.98)	0.84 (0.93)
Central	Tertiary	1.78 (1.58)	1.85 (1.70)	1.24 (1.16)	0.74 (0.68)	0.50 (0.61)
	UpperSec	1.14 (1.07)	1.18 (1.12)	1.06 (1.03)	0.99 (0.99)	0.79 (0.82)
Mediterranean	Tertiary	3.00 (2.41)	2.92 (2.17)	1.64 (1.41)	0.86 (0.81)	0.48 (0.58)
	UpperSec	1.76 (1.43)	1.83 (1.36)	1.39 (1.21)	1.01 (0.93)	0.65 (0.82)
UK & Ireland	Tertiary	1.40 (1.11)	1.50 (1.24)	1.13 (1.04)	0.91 (0.93)	0.74 (0.89)
	UpperSec	1.36 (1.17)	1.29 (1.11)	1.13 (1.06)	0.93 (0.95)	0.82 (0.90)
Eastern	Tertiary	2.75 (2.28)	2.74 (2.24)	1.61 (1.39)	0.84 (0.78)	0.50 (0.57)
	UpperSec	1.17 (1.09)	1.17 (1.10)	1.13 (1.09)	1.06 (1.01)	0.82 (0.83)

Note: Index = (n of certified from each social background / n of social background) / (n of certified / total n). In parenthesis, the results for the 1970-1984 offspring are presented. As in the previous table, 1 would be no impact of social class in educational assets.

Educational systems are a relevant factor in explaining lower class fluidity in Mediterranean and Eastern countries. In the UK and Ireland, social background is almost irrelevant for educational achievement but the influence of education in allocating individuals in the occupational structure is also lower. Progress in the Scandinavian and Central clusters appears to be more sustained: the impact of social background on educational achievement declined while the importance of academic degrees for occupational allocation remained high.

Gender and migration

In all five regions, the 1970-84 cohort confirms a considerable increase in women's educational attainment and participation in paid employment.⁷ Despite noticeable steps towards equality, the gender division of labor seems to have remained quite stable. Women are concentrated in classes B and C, while men are predominant in classes A and D, and such tendency appears to increase in the 1970-84 cohort except for class A. Only in class E is there a consistent trend towards gender distribution. This pattern is apparent in all regions, though

⁷ Such phenomenon was especially pervasive during the 60s and 70s in the Scandinavian, Central, Eastern and UK & Ireland clusters, and during the 80s and 90s in the Mediterranean one. Interestingly, the ESS data also suggest that in the last twenty years such trend has been almost absent in the UK & Ireland cluster and it is probably reversing in capitalist Eastern Europe.

less significant among the older generation in the Eastern cluster and the younger generation in UK & Ireland.

The concentration of women in intermediary classes contrasts with their current pattern of educational dispersion. Since the generation born in the 60s, the number of women in tertiary education surpassed men's, especially in Scandinavia; but they have also remained over-represented among early school leavers, especially in Mediterranean countries. It is important to stress that intergenerational reproduction appears to be higher for men, while women register more often upward mobility. However, this can not be attributed solely to women's educational attainment, but also to a general admittance of the daughters of factory workers into service occupations.

The impact of gender on the relation between education and class is not linear, but two overall patterns can be identified. First, the correlation between early school drop-out and holding a job in class E is much stronger for women. Second, the correlation between completing upper secondary education and holding a job in class D is only observed for men (see Table 6). This is a powerful reason for the current predominance of women in higher education and their lower enrolment in vocational tracks. Surprisingly, the impact of education on accessing dominant classes is higher for women only in Scandinavia, and it is actually lower in Eastern and Central Europe.

Table 6. Impact of gender on education-occupation linkage

	Tertiary educ/class A	Tertiary educ/class B	Upper sec/class C	Upper sec/Class D	Less than lower sec / class E
Scandinavian	1.27	1.25	0.92	0.80	2.24
Central	0.90	0.89	1.02	0.79	1.77
Mediterranean	0.78	1.25	1.10	0.38	1.34
UK & Ireland	1.02	1.01	0.72	0.59	1.46
Eastern	0.91	0.97	1.08	0.84	1.10

Note: the same formula of table 4 was used. 1 would be no impact of gender on education-occupation linkage. More than 1 means that such linkage is higher for women, and less than 1 the opposite.

The impact of gender on the correlation between social background and education is also far from uniform, with variations across both classes and regions (Table 7). For instance, women whose father worked in class E are the ones with the fewest chances of attending tertiary education in the Mediterranean and Eastern clusters; in the Scandinavian and UK & Ireland clusters, boys whose father worked in this class experienced more educational difficulties than girls. Girls from class D in Mediterranean and Eastern countries succeeded in

education more often than boys, probably because the latter are more attracted to follow their fathers' occupation (and there are more rewards to do so), but the opposite pattern is observed in the Central cluster.

Having a father in classes A or B is an important factor of educational achievement especially for boys in the Scandinavian, UK & Ireland and Eastern clusters. Since the advantage of women in education is stronger and many girls from unprivileged classes attend tertiary education, being raised in class A or B turns out to be a more important safeguard for boys. But in the Central and Mediterranean clusters, class B presents similar advantages for both sexes, and belonging to class A actually appears as a major factor of educational success for girls. Explanation may include an enduring strategy in class A to transfer property and/or authority to male descendants and compensate girls with higher educational opportunities in order to access class B.

Table 7. Impact of gender on social background-education linkage

Clusters	Degree	Social Background				
		A	B	C	D	E
Scandinavian	Tertiary	0.87	0.91	0.85	1.05	1.34
	UpperSec	0.99	0.96	0.97	1.00	1.04
Central	Tertiary	1.17	1.01	1.05	0.91	1.02
	UpperSec	1.06	1.03	1.04	0.97	0.96
Mediterranean	Tertiary	1.23	1.01	1.01	1.17	0.89
	UpperSec	1.04	1.05	1.04	1.00	1.02
UK & Ireland	Tertiary	0.82	0.90	1.07	0.94	1.25
	UpperSec	1.03	0.94	1.00	0.91	1.21
Eastern	Tertiary	0.89	0.92	0.90	1.19	0.95
	UpperSec	0.98	0.99	1.01	1.01	1.01

Note: the formula in use is similar to tables 4 and 6. 1 means no gender impact on background-education linkage. More than one means that such linkage is stronger for women.

If downward mobility was not a common experience during the last decades in Europe, immigrants have twice the chances of going through it than natives. Access to class B appears to be especially difficult for immigrants, whereas the possibilities of entering class E are considerably higher. Difference between migrants and natives is much greater in the Mediterranean cluster than in the Eastern or UK & Ireland ones.

Understanding variation across regions requires the number and profile of migrants to be taken into account. The share of immigrant workers is substantially higher in Central Europe and UK & Ireland than in Scandinavia and Eastern Europe. Besides, most immigrants in

Mediterranean countries have a secondary education credential, while they are highly educated in Scandinavia and UK & Ireland. In both Eastern and Central Europe, immigrants' background and educational profiles are more diversified: either low or highly qualified (Table 8).

Regardless of their background and educational degree, there is a major concentration of immigrants in class E in the Scandinavian, Central and Mediterranean clusters. In the UK & Ireland cluster, concentration is lower but still significant considering that migrants hold a higher educational profile. Importantly, the concentration of immigrant workers in class E regardless of educational level is correlated to relative upward social mobility among natives, particularly in small movements: from class E to D, D to C, C to B and B to A. This is especially the case in Central Europe and UK & Ireland, considering the greater share of immigrant workers, as well as in Mediterranean countries.

Table 8. Impact of immigration in education and social class by region

	Education				Social Class				
	L	LS	US	T	A	B	C	D	E
Scandinavian	0.33	1.05	0.87	1.18	0.61	0.88	1.13	0.90	1.93
Central	1.60	1.13	0.81	1.05	0.99	0.82	0.81	0.83	1.98
UK & Ireland	0.52	0.45	1.29	1.40	0.68	1.06	0.97	1.02	1.17
Mediterranean	0.55	1.32	1.56	0.94	0.99	0.38	0.90	0.83	2.36
Central East	2.11	0.99	0.88	1.36	0.74	0.69	1.11	1.20	1.11

Note: the index was calculated as the proportion of immigrants in each category, considering the total of immigrants in each region. 1 would be a social distribution of immigrants similar to native population. Less than one means a lack of immigrants in a particular category, while more than one means some degree of concentration.

DISCUSSION

The ESS data provides evidence to support the thesis that modernity allows a high degree of social mobility, especially due to massive structural shifts. In its early stages, it also generates high rates of relative mobility. This is likely to be related to more than just the dimension of different occupational classes. The shift from traditional rural societies to modern urban ones produces changes in the very nature of occupations, thus enhancing higher relative social mobility. Social mobility appears to be the lowest in the Eastern cluster. This pattern is observed for older generations raised under the communist regimes, but it has actually

increased among those who were born in the 1970-84 period and entered the labor market mainly since the 90s.

As pointed out in recent contributions (Breen and Jonnson, 2005; Breen *et al.*, 2009), education appears to have a positive effect on social mobility. Based on our analysis, the overall impact of social background on educational attainment has decreased across Europe challenging reproduction theorists, although Mediterranean and Eastern European educational systems remain more “reproductive” than the others. Thus, if internal differentiation and national standardization are important factors to understand systems openness (Van de Werfhorst and Mijs, 2010), our analysis suggests that other aspects shall be considered such as the investment in education, the degree of local decisions and the dominant culture within educational systems. For instance, although formal differentiation is not high in Mediterranean and British educational systems, there are pervasive patterns of horizontal informal differentiation (between schools and sometimes between groups within the same school). The impact of such feature is not possible to adress with ESS dataset, but it is probably an important constraint to social mobility through education.

Meanwhile, a major threat to the enhancement of social mobility is comprised within the erosion of the education-occupation linkage. As educational systems expanded faster than classes A and B over the last three decades, correlation between dominant classes and tertiary education has slightly decreased among the younger generation. One may still wonder whether a number of these workers will move to a different class in a later moment in life, also depending on coming economic and political developments.

Major differences across regions have been uncovered. They seem to be unrelated to development stages, confirming the “institutional thesis” (Muller and Karle, 1993). Considering only formal credentials, the most equalitarian educational systems are to be found in the UK & Ireland cluster, but their ability to allocate individuals into the occupational structure is lower than in the other regions. A higher inequality in prestige of educational institutions may be part of the explanation. Mingling both indicators, Scandinavian systems generate higher chances of social mobility *through* education, while Mediterranean systems present lower fluidity rates in both the background-education link (like Eastern countries) and the education-occupation link (like the UK and Ireland).

The coexistence of high rates of relative social mobility and reproductive educational systems in the Mediterranean cluster warrants closer examination. Two issues should be addressed. On one hand, the expansion of the educational system happened faster than in the other regions during the last three decades generating chances of social mobility to

unprivileged groups in spite of its reproductive character. On the other hand, relative mobility rates were also induced by the aforementioned shift in the ‘nature’ of classes, a process that is only partially linked to educational systems. Such process affected especially those who entered the labor market between the 60s and the 80s. The recent political mobilization of youth in these countries is probably an expression of resentment against the reduction of social mobility opportunities.

Despite the impact of educational democratization, our analysis confirms that gender and migration are important in the characterization of the mobility patterns under study. The massive entrance of women in paid employment fostered social mobility as newcomers fitted into expanding classes B and C, while access to classes A and D remained relatively restricted in all regions. Education was key in this transformation, enabling the access of women to class B through university degrees. Yet, educational credentials held by women have a lower value in accessing other classes. In particular, access to class C calls on the examination of symbolic constructions of skill and gender in the distribution of labor (Hochschild, 2000; Payne, 2009). Moreover, the employment of daughters of industrial and agricultural workers in service jobs is a controversial kind of upward mobility. Some of these jobs certainly mean gains in status, personal health and career expectations, but a different picture may arise concerning wages, unionism and solidarity, or employment stability (Esping-Andersen et al., 1993).

On the other hand, evidence corroborates and expands Reyneri and Fullin’s (2010, 2011) observation on the penalization of migrants in accessing more qualified occupations. For one, the impact of education on the employment trajectory of migrants varies across the five regional clusters under examination. At the same time, there is an overall correlation between the concentration of immigrant workers in class E and relative upward social mobility among natives, although this correlation is stronger in some regions than in others. The lower social mobility observed in Eastern countries should not be disentangled from the lesser impact of the “immigration factor”.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Our findings confirm that structural change should not be excluded from the analysis of social mobility, especially concerning the formation, ‘nature’ and dimension of each social class. By discarding it, different interpretations would be generated as to not only overall patterns, but

also difference across regions and time. Likewise, this paper corroborates the relevance of an institutional approach especially sensitive to difference in educational systems (Buchanan and Hannun, 2001; Breen and Jonnson, 2005; Andersen and Van de Werfhorst, 2010).

Some recommendations to public policies around Europe may be sketched from our findings. The systems for the recognition of immigrants' educational credentials shall be improved in many countries, in order to sustain equal opportunities and to boost economic productivity. Also, a better gender balance shall be granted in upper secondary (specially vocational) pathways, in order to enhance abilities and labor opportunities of girls who are not following to tertiary education. Educational (and employment) systems shall also reinforce their strategies to enable the access of women to class A and of men to class C, since both cases appear to rely specially on gender differentiation developed on primary socialization. Besides, some policies shall be developed in Mediterranean and Eastern clusters, in order to erode the 'reproductive' role of educational systems. Strong structural changes during the 70s and 80s may have generated a semblance of equality that current times are proving to be elusive, raising deception among youth. Meanwhile, especially in UK & Ireland, the erosion of education-occupation linkage should be tackled by public policies committed with both equality and development principles.

Two issues should be addressed in future research. One of them is that while features of employment and economic structure are certainly crucial to social mobility, the role of governance frames and welfare models deserves closer examination. Second, the ability of particular educational systems in allocating individuals in the occupational structure is far from uniform. Differences based on gender and ethnic origin are to be considered, and research design must certainly cover more detailed information in these regards. In addition, it should not be forgotten that individual mobility over the lifetime must be accounted for in future data collection.

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