Getting Lost. Migration and the (d)evaluation of human capital

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An international discussion on adequate education and new forms of learning was embedded in post-1989 socio-political scenario, which increasingly pronounced a knowledge-based economy. The idea of a time-framed instruction restricted to initial life stages was outdated in a dynamic society, that had changed continuously due to socio-political, economic and technological transformations. The European Union reacted accordingly and suggested to make learning a lifelong and lifewide process promoting geographical mobility for educational and professional motivations in order to stimulate economic growth and personal advancement on the social ladder.

However, recent data shows that successful educational and professional integration and thus an adequate match of competences and occupational profiles is still unsatisfactory in numerous European contexts, especially when speaking of qualified mobility.

This volume tackles the issue of professional inclusion of knowledgeable migrants under consideration of the paradigmatic life course framework and aims to contribute to international research on human capital valorisation. It thus strives to investigate professional trajectories and corresponding skill utilisation of mobile workers in a highly heterogenous European labour market that constantly requires actions to combat unemployment, the waste of skills, the invisibility of (hidden) educational capital and the lack of needed qualifications of its potential workforce.

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Introduction[1]

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Population movements have occurred throughout human history, but it is in recent decades that they have become increasingly important: "there are more migrants today than ever before and their numbers are set to grow in the future. Almost every country on earth has and will continue to have migrants" (Koser, 2009: 13). However, migratory phenomena are not only relevant on a quantitative level: their impact is evident in the economic, political, cultural, and social dimensions. Population movements are inextricably linked with other important global phenomena, such as economic development, inequalities, human rights (ivi). Historically, migration flows have also shown their effect in supporting the economic growth of destination countries and in affecting the development of countries of origin. They intersect with nation-building projects, showing a variety of outcomes, depending on the different historical period and geographical area, and influence political transformations that affect states and regions. Migration, and specifically international migration, "has changed the face of societies

1. This chapter was written by Roberta Ricucci.

around the world" (de Haas, Castles, Miller 2014: 23) and can be understood as "a transnational revolution that is reshaping societies and politics" (Ibid.: 30). Therefore, migration flows form an integral part of the changes occurring in the contemporary world, all the more so since they will continue to increase in volume. To be more precise, migration is not just a part of the developments taking place: it is one of the main factors in social transformation, and even more so in the current period than in the past.

Hence, migrations and related developments can be analysed under several perspectives, focusing on various aspects and involving both the host and the origin countries. This study is focussed on a specific element linked to the migratory phenomena: the intertwining of population movements and the human capital they bring with them and/or build in the destination societies and use there. In other words, the circulation of expertise and skills across countries and borders. More specifically, this book is devoted to investigate the intertwining of the movements of highly skilled migrants, in and beyond Europe, and the ways in which they can use their educational capital abroad, building a career in the host countries.

In the present day, facing a rather challenging time in history, several countries of the enlarged European space are confronting the emigration of highly skilled professionals, having been educated and developed specialisations in their country of origin, to other European countries – within the European Union but also beyond. The issue about how knowledge and competences are used, and recognised, in the host country's labour market therefore continues to be of great importance. In this sense, already by the end of the 20th century, an international body of research had increasingly discussed the demanding, ambiguous, and paradoxical role that labour force skills and educational credentials are playing, both for sending and receiving countries. Just think of the branch of study that – in the mid-1950s – identified a crucial shift, now well known, revolving around the emergence of a new key figure: the "knowledge workers" (Drucker 1959) and the consequent modifications in the functioning of the labour market. A common thread can be traced between these early considerations and the current time, in which the debate around this issue overall

has increasingly been labelled the brain drain, brain gain, and brain waste – terms with which we are quite familiar by now. The currency of those concepts is then evident, making the interplay between skills and population movements particularly salient.

And this topic of talent waste is a crucial point to focus on, a need that in fact clearly emerges also from the scientific literature and from the overall public debate on these issues. Two main subjects stand out to this regard: firstly, the importance of ensuring adequate and sufficient recognition to the skills migrants bring with them to the host countries; secondly, the impact that wasting talent may entail for both the receiving and the sending countries.

In the first respect, it is also the political and socio-economic reframing of the European space that requires continuous structural adjustments to adequately assess competences and the efficient direction of the labour force. To cite but one example, Habti and Elo (2019), when referring to World Bank reports, point to the increasingly changing labour market dynamics, channelled by labour-saving and labour-linking strategies that had a significant impact on global mobility and human capital flows. The challenge for advancing a knowledge society thus entails solutions and answers to the crucial issues on how mobility and free circulation of capital could be increased to participate successfully in the international competition for progress and economic development. In consequence, the matter of talent and its distribution "has become a vital issue to understand and govern" (Ibid.: 2). The need for fair and sufficient, as well as widespread and easily accessible, competence recognition procedures is then becoming increasingly urgent – all the more so at the current time, where societal changes and, most recently, the public health emergency due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, have caused skill shortages in various sectors.

The second aspect refers to the more general consequences that a lack of recognition and an uneven distribution of capital and skills can have, both nationally and transnationally. It is worth recalling that the debate around the utilisation of educational capital and knowledge points to the discrepancy between incoming and outgoing talent flows and, thus, the resulting net losses in knowledge and

expertise, which has a strong socio-economic impact on all states involved, be they receiving or sending. So, when speaking of talent from abroad and hence highly skilled migration it is also crucial to focus on the distribution of human capital in the countries with a high share of incoming talent.

Not only the formal recognition and increased possibilities of utilising migrants' credentials and skills, but the opportunity to analyse push-and-pull factors influencing the migratory flows of highly qualified workers also emerges. In this regard, research on actual chances and barriers in the host and home contexts may be beneficial to both backgrounds, with the ultimate goal of putting policies in place that favour strategies to attract and maintain a skilled labour force. In that direction, just think of how human rights and democracy, as well as economic and political development in the sending country, provide a basis for attempts to profit from brain emigration and are, at the same time, triggered through direct benefits as remittances and the backflow of ideas, knowledge, and experiences. International peers (e.g., Nifo and Vecchione 2014, Straubhaar 2000) maintain that factors related to the quality of life and socio-political aspects in the destination country are essential in the emigration decision-making process of highly qualified migrants. Hence, social, cultural, and institutional issues play a prominent role.

Moving from macro and meso levels, to the micro one of the individuals, there is another point to underline. It should be considered that, in current population movements, we observe mixed forms of mobility where migrants can switch categories according to convenience from skilled to non-skilled, pushed by economic reasons, or lifestyle, or study purposes. Such a consideration calls into question the "double embeddedness of migration" (King 2002: 101), a crucial concept referring to the individual's or family's life course, on the one hand, and to the origin and host societies, on the other hand. In this regard, it is crucial to recognise the increasingly blurry picture of the mobile, highly skilled person in the European sphere that spans different and increasingly dynamic classifications. Their social morphology ranges thus from pre-millennium elitist expats to trainees of the 'Erasmus Generation' (Bettin Lattes and

Bontempi 2008), to 'Eurostars' (Favell 2008), to, increasingly, "ordinary middle-class professional movers" (Scott 2019: 1). In this context, we can easily acknowledge the rising significance of middle-class mobility for research, as it constitutes an important piece in the overall international migration scenario, where the middle classes are growing globally (ivi).

In such a complex context, this book thus intends to analyse the strategies and patterns of mobility of highly skilled migrants moving in and beyond Europe. Among those, it has been decided to focus on two different kinds of migrants: Romanian and German immigrants coming to Italy (more precisely to Turin, see below), northern Italian emigrants in Europe and in other countries outside Europe. The authors have favoured a qualitative methodology[2], making use of in-depth interviews and snowball sample technique. On a general level, three main analysis dimensions have been investigated, the first two common to all samples, the third one mainly devoted to the highly skilled Italian migrants. These are *i)* the decision to leave, with particular attention to the kind of motivations driving such a choice; *ii)* the experience of staying, focusing on the professional position achieved, as well as on the social mobility paths, and so the resources and constraints detectable; *iii)* the future perspectives, pointing specifically to the decisions to stay, return, or move further[3].

In all the samples, the metropolitan area of Turin (northwest Italy, in the Piedmont region) represents the geographical fulcrum. German and Romanian respondents left their countries of origin to move in Turin, whereas the vast majority of Italians emigrate from this area – or from other neighbouring localities. The research has been located in Turin for a variety of reasons.

Firstly, Turin represents one of Italy's main industrial centres with a long migration history[4]. Whereas in the

2. Better described in the sections presenting the analysis of the collected data.

3. Please refer to Ch. 1 and Ch. 2 for a more in-depth discussion on such a theoretical framework.

4. In 1955, Turin had an in-migration of 3.5%, which was further increasing until the mid-60s. This value was above average compared to other Italian cities, like Rome or Milan with a 2.5% rate (Bonifazi and Heins 2000).

1960s it was one of the main destinations for Italian internal mobility, the last decades turned the city into a destination of increased international migration (Bonifazi and Heins 2000; Vv. Aa., 2020). According to latest data provided by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) in January 2022[5], immigrant groups in the Turin Metropolitan Area amount to 208 812 persons, which makes up approximately 10% of its current total population. More than 170 nationalities are represented in the area (Vv. Aa., 2020). Furthermore, the immigrant population has increased at a very fast rate in the last three decades, eventually transforming the city and shaping it towards tangible forms of "everyday multiculturalism" (Semi and Schmoll 2013: 389) or to what Trenz and Triandafyllidou (2017) call a potential "laboratory of diversity".

Turin, nonetheless, also shows two different sides, which confirm it as a relevant case for conducting our study. First, it represents one of the leading business centres in Italy, having a significant network of international companies and a notable number of high-quality academic institutions. It hosts international organisations, including a UNESCO Center, an International Labour Organisation (ILO), a European Training Foundation (ETF), and a United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI). At the same time, however, Turin has one of the highest proportions of elderly residents in Italy, a factor affecting the labour supply available to immigrant groups. In fact, the area shows a high rate of immigrant workers employed in domestic and care work[6], an aspect influencing the labour market distribution of immigrant workers, regardless of their qualifications. In this sense, compared to other metropolitan cities of Central and Northern Italy, Turin attracts less (qualified) immigrant families and would therefore require effort to invest in strategies for attracting qualified labour. In such a context, the city faces

5. ISTAT - https://demo.istat.it/strasa2022/index.html (data retrieved on Jan. 2022).

6. See VV.AA. (2020), where among numerous data, it is also reported that the professional qualifications most in demand in the provincial labour market are "personal care workers" (addetti all'assistenza personale in Italian) and "domestic workers and assimilated professions" (Collaboratori domestici e professioni assimilate), which together account for more than 45% of total recruitment.

a continuously ageing general population and workforce, which is likely to have detrimental repercussions in the near future, even hampered by the Covid-19 pandemic (Davico and Staricco 2020).

Therefore, situating the study in this area allows to observe two dynamics, deeply connected to the intertwining of educational capital and immigration. Firstly, the ways in which two different groups of migrants can enter the Turin labour market, analysing the available possibilities to make use of their qualifications. As we will see, both German and Romanian participants possess strong educational credentials, but, in the second sample, we observe greater difficulties in accessing a qualified career. German respondents, in contrast, experience a smoother recognition of their skills. Hence, the analysis of such different groups makes it possible to identify the main resources and obstacles encountered by highly skilled migrants in their trajectories in Turin. Secondly, the difficulty of the city in attracting qualified workers leads to quite a high rate of emigration among Italians themselves[7]; therefore, analysing the paths of immigrants leaving this area allows us to observe the "other side of the coin" when it comes to the overall picture of migration flows.

Referring to the analysis chapters for a more detailed explanation of the theoretical framework, it suffices here to point out that Romanian and German respondents furnish initial comparative research that intends, primarily, to make use of the cultural dimensions of individualism and collectivism to carve out culture- and context-specific patterns in pursuing geographic and social mobility. Coming from different national backgrounds, the interviewees find themselves starting a new life, and building up a career, in the same context, thus making it possible to analyse their trajectories by identifying the differences that may be related to a different cultural background. It goes without saying that such a framework cannot be applied to the Italian emi-

7. According to the last report of "Italiani nel mondo" (Italians around the world), issued by Fondazione Migrantes (Licata, 2021), Piedmont has more than 5% of its citizens living abroad, while in Turin the same data accounts for 6%. It is a lower percentage than the national figure, which stands at 9.5%, but nonetheless Piedmont ranks eighth among the other Italian regions.

grants; coming from the same environment, the differences within the sample cut across different dimensions. And this is where the other aspects on which the analysis has been based, common to both pieces of research, emerge: the life-course perspective, the impact of the family dimension, and the social mobility strategies employed in the host countries.

Thus, the set of elements behind motivations, strategies, and prospects comprising the complex and delicate choice to move abroad have been investigated, as well as the factors shaping both the strategies employed to (re)gain social mobility in the host context and the perspectives on the future of one's emigration trajectory. To this set, a further element must be added that is related to both the context and the individual data retrieved. This refers to the religious dimension that, in Turin, has attained super-diversity (Vertovec 2007; Becci *et al.* 2017), generated by the growing change of religious demographics.[8] These demographics are a direct consequence of multi-faceted and diversified immigration and challenge the urban dynamics that had been shaped in the past by catholic hegemony. On the other hand, the authors had the opportunity to enlarge the data collection, including the impact of religious practices, beliefs, and individual developments in the analysis, thanks to "The Transmission of Religion Across Generations" project, financed by the John Templeton Foundation. In this other part of research, included in a wider comparative study involving five European countries (Italy, Finland, Hungary, Germany, and Canada), how religion has changed across generations, and the new forms of religious or non-religious beliefs and practices that have emerged, was investigated. Therefore, data from this analysis[9] has been used to broaden the scope of our study.

It is interesting to note that, although an influence, the religious sphere seems to play a limited role in the migratory paths investigated. There are more dominant factors

8. Becci et al. (2017) remark in this context that the number of religious communities has almost doubled in Turin in the last decades, with an increase from 120 to 200 communities.

9. Collected using a qualitative methodology, with in-depth interviews and focus groups. Please refer to Bossi, Marroccoli (2021) for further details on the overall project and first related findings.

playing a crucial role in the trajectories examined, as we will discuss.

This book is structured across two main parts. It will first present the main theoretical aspects connected to the study of educational capital and its circulation, as well as its intertwining with migratory flows on a more general level, focussing on the change in perspectives that this broad field of study has encountered over the years.

The second section of this work will be devoted to analysing in detail the empirical material collected during our research. An initial overview will be dedicated to discussing the main features of emigration and immigration flows in Italy, presenting the most significant dynamics the country has experienced in recent decades. Then, the book will get to the heart of the investigation, beginning by discussing the findings coming from the analysis of Romanians and Germans in Turin. The focus will be on the different motivations that can be observed behind the choice to emigrate, before proceeding to analyse the strategies employed to achieve socio-economic mobility and the main differences observable between the two samples. A typology of the working trajectories, as emerging from the collected data and their key features, will be also presented.

The last part will be dedicated to investigating the paths of Italian respondents, following a quite similar analysis grid. As for the first respondents, the authors will present the different kinds of motivations and the decision-making process leading to the choice to move. Then, the strategies employed will be shown, including the major obstacles faced, in building a career abroad, discussing the different types of employment pathways undertaken in the host countries. The study will end by analysing the future prospects linked to the interviewees' migratory trajectories, dividing them between staying, moving, and returning to the home country, highlighting the reasons behind each life project.

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