The Role of Parental Social Class in the Transition to Adulthood: A Sequence Analysis Approach in Italy and the United States

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BACKGROUND

• During the second half of the twentieth century, life course became increasingly complicated and prolonged
  • Delay: Age at leaving parental home, age at marriage
  • Individualization:
    • The order of events became less clear
    • Timing and duration of events vary between individuals
    • Within this framework timing and sequencing of events are still strongly influenced by family background
    • Mechanisms are largely unknown, but parental social class is crucial in determining the individual resources that influence decisions in the early phases of adulthood
  • Role of parental social class may be context-specific

OBJECTIVES

• Evaluate the impact of social origins on the patterns of transition to adulthood as a whole (all the events)
• Parental social class based on parents’ education
• Apply a cross-national comparative perspective to evaluate whether the role of social class is context-specific
• Comparison Italy vs. United States, given the strong institutional and cultural differences

DATA & METHODS

DATA
• Italy: ISTAT Family and Social Subjects (2003): 1957-1964 cohorts, N = 6,002

METHODS
• Sequence Analysis (Abbott and Tsay, 2000)
• Life course trajectories represented by strings of characters

\[
\begin{array}{cccccccc}
S & SE & SEJ & SEJL & EJL & EJLM & EJLMP \\
24 & 25 & 26 & 27 & 28 & 29 & 30 \\
\end{array}
\]

• Contribution: this method allows to take into account the interdependence among all the events of the transition
• Compute sequences dissimilarities and derive typical patterns based on similarities of trajectories (CLUSTER ANALYSIS)
• Multinomial logistics regression to compute the predicted probability of being in one specific typology

RESULTS – Clusters and Predicted Probability to be in each Cluster

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEN</th>
<th>WOMEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Traditional and Early Transition: Early achievement of independence and a fast family formation through marriage and parenthood.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2) Modern and Independent Transition: Leave parents when finish school and find a job, but not necessarily to marry. Substantial delay of childbearing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3) Late Home leavers (with a job): Finish school and find a job early, but do not move out from parents’ home. Strong postponement of family formation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4) High Education: Leave their family very soon, usually to go to college. Find a job while studying and experience some delay in family formation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5) MEN - Slow and Late Independence: Still in school and with parents in their late 20s. Many never form a family. WOMEN - Housewives: Exit education and leave parents early, but never work. Leave to form a family.</td>
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</tbody>
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DISCUSSION

• A higher social class is associated with a postponement in the transition
• Patterns towards independence and family formation are more rapid and less standardized in the U.S., than in Italy, independent of social class
• The effect of parental background is context-specific in an unexpected way

U.S.: Modern trajectories more widespread among individuals with a higher parental status. In contrasts with existing literature

Italy: A more affluent family of origin is not only a protection factor in the presence of economic constraints, but also a golden cage that children are not encouraged to leave even if they have already completed education and started a job

FUTURE RESEARCH

• Need to extend the analysis to other countries to see how institutions, family and culture interact in different contexts
• Possibility to update the analysis considering more recent cohorts (born between 1980 and 1984) through NLSY97 – maximum age so far is 31