



ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Research in Social Stratification and Mobility

journal homepage: <http://www.elsevier.com/locate/rssm>

Education as a positional good: Implications for social inequalities in educational attainment in Italy



Moris Triventi^{a,*}, Nazareno Panichella^b, Gabriele Ballarino^b, Carlo Barone^c, Fabrizio Bernardi^a

^a Department of Political and Social Sciences, European University Institute, Italy

^b Department of Social and Political Sciences, University of Milan, Italy

^c Department of Sociology and Social Research, University of Trento, Italy

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 1 October 2014

Received in revised form 24 February 2015

Accepted 12 April 2015

Available online 18 April 2015

Keywords:

Social inequality

Education

Positional good

Trends over time

Italy

ABSTRACT

The article examines trends of social inequalities in educational attainment in the second half of the twentieth century in Italy, comparing two approaches. The traditional approach uses years of education as a dependent variable and implicitly looks at the absolute/nominal value of education. The second approach refers to education as a 'positional good' and it captures its possibly changing occupational value over time. In this article, following this second perspective, two measures are developed and used: the Educational Competitive Advantage Score (ECAS) measures the value of educational degrees on the basis of their incidence in the population (credential inflation perspective). The second is an effect-proportional scale of education based on the average occupational prestige attained by individuals in each qualification (demand–supply balance perspective). Using data with large sample size from three waves of the Istat Multi-Purpose Survey (1998, 2003 and 2009), the article shows that inequalities based both on social class of origin and parental education declined between 1940 and 1980 birth cohorts, but the effect of parental education reduced less and it is stronger than that of social class in recent cohorts. Considering education as a positional good does not change the main findings obtained using years of education as outcome in the Italian case.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

This article assesses trends over time of inequality of educational opportunity (IEO) in contemporary Italy. The importance of the topic is well-known, and the sheer size of the international literature on it, in both sociology and economics, might be sufficient proof thereof. Italy is no exception: IEO is probably the most extensively studied topic in social stratification research; and also research in

the economics of education has done much work on this matter.

This paper makes two new contributions to this stream of research. First, it exploits a new data source by pooling three waves of the Istat Multi-Purpose (*Multiscopo*) survey carried out by the Italian statistical office (Istat). We are thus able to include the cohorts born at the end of the 1970s in the analysis. Second, and more importantly, we compare two different approaches to measuring educational attainment. On the one hand, we consider years of education as a dependent variable, thus looking at the absolute, or nominal, value of education. On the other hand, we conceive education as a 'positional good' (Hirsch, 1977) and use two measures to capture its changing occupational value over

* Corresponding author at: Via dei Roccettini 9, 50014 San Domenico di Fiesole Italy. Tel.: +055 46852408.

E-mail address: moris.triventi@eui.eu (M. Triventi).

time. First, we measure the relative position guaranteed by a given educational qualification in the overall educational distribution. More precisely we consider how many individuals attained at least a given educational level in a given year (credential inflation perspective). Second, we construct a scale based on the average occupational prestige attained by individuals with a given educational level (demand–supply balance perspective).

The paper consists of five sections. Section 2 presents the existing evidence on IEO in Italy, while Section 3 introduces the idea of a positional measurement of education. Section 4 presents the data; Section 5 sets out the results of the modelling exercise; and Section 6 concludes with a brief discussion.

2. Educational inequality in Italy, between reforms and persistence

Despite some early pioneering studies produced between the 1930s and the 1970s, the modern study of social stratification in Italy began in the mid-1980s, when the first mobility survey (Italian National Mobility Survey, INMS) was carried out. The flourishing of studies that followed was probably due to the fact that the Italian educational system had undergone two major changes in a relatively brief period of time: the institution of a unified lower-secondary school (in 1962), and the liberalization of access to university education (in 1969). Both reforms were championed by the political Left and intended to de-stratify a previously relatively elitist system. The conventional wisdom was that de-stratification was the best means to expand participation, and that the latter would in turn decrease inequality. Thus, researchers set out to determine whether educational expansion had actually produced an equalization of opportunities across social classes.

However, the first studies fully exploiting the new data source did not obtain the results expected. Indeed, it turned out that class IEO, measured as relative differentials in educational attainment for different classes independently from educational expansion, had been quite stable over time, despite both reforms and expansion. The exception to this pattern was a (minor) increase in relative educational opportunities for the agricultural classes, especially the agricultural petty bourgeoisie. This result, first found by Schadee and Schizzerotto (1987), was confirmed by subsequent studies of both INMS (Cobalti & Schizzerotto, 1993, 1994; Cobalti, 1990) and census data (Schizzerotto, 1994). Furthermore, a more recent work by Pfeffer (2008) studied IEO by parental education with IALS data, and found it to be persistent, in Italy as elsewhere, even without controlling for social class. While all these studies modelled mobility tables (with log-linear or logit analyses), a study applying OLS models to a set of surveys collected in the International Stratification and Mobility File also found evidence of stability of IEO, and for women even evidence of an increase (Ganzeboom & Treiman, 1996).

The consensus for ‘persistent inequalities’ was first challenged by Shavit and Westerbeek (1998), who found decreasing IEO. While they also used INMS data, they estimated a more parsimonious model specification, using

occupational prestige instead of class¹ and including parental education as a measure of family background (see also the OLS analysis included in Cobalti & Schizzerotto, 1993). In the late 1990s new data sources became available, and the number of empirical works increased accordingly. First, in 1997 a second large-scale mobility survey (Italian Longitudinal Household Survey, ILHS) was carried out. While the early analyses based on logit models of the first wave of ILHS (1997) data still found persistent IEO (Pisati, 2002), the following work analysing a pooled INMS-ILHS (first wave) dataset by means of a cumulative logit model (ordered logit) found that class IEO had decreased not just for the agricultural classes alone (Ballarino, Bernardi, Requena, & Schadee, 2009; Ballarino & Schadee, 2006). When both class of origin and family education were included in the models, IEO related to the latter was found to be persistent (Ballarino & Schadee, 2008).

With the same data and a similar modelling strategy, the influential comparative work by Breen, Luijkx, Müller, and Pollak (2009) confirmed the decline of inequality also for Italy, albeit to a lesser extent than in other European countries, as regards males. Later, a paper by Ballarino and Schizzerotto (2011) exploited all five ILHS waves (every other year from 1997 to 2005) and found decreasing inequality with both cumulative logit and OLS analyses. However, IEO related to parental education was still found to be persistent when class of origin was controlled for. Marzadro and Schizzerotto (2014) have recently analyzed IEO by simultaneously fitting measures of social class, status and parental education. They find that the net effect of social class is small and stable, except for the disadvantage of the agricultural classes, which is strong but declining. The marked net effects of parental education and status decline over time.

Another new data source became available when Istat began including information on social origins in its Multi-Purpose Surveys (MPS). Barone (2009) analyzed the 1998 MPS wave with log-linear unidiff models and a stereotyped ordinal regression, finding persistent IEO for both parental education and class of origin, with the usual exception of the agricultural classes. However, in a later paper (Barone, Luijkx, & Schizzerotto, 2010) analyzing the pooled 1998 and 2003 MPS files by means of logit models and stereotyped ordinal regression, the same author found that IEO had diminished over time for both class of origin and parental education also when jointly included in the model. The present paper is, to our knowledge, the first one on this topic to add a third MPS survey, fielded in 2009.

As elsewhere, Italian studies have considered the different school transitions. Among the papers reviewed above, those using logit models in the frame of the educational transitions (ET) approach introduced by Mare (1980) typically found that IEO had diminished at the lower levels and persisted at the higher ones. But they then dismissed the former as a mere effect of expansion and interpreted the latter as persistent inequality (Cobalti & Schizzerotto, 1993;

¹ They also used dummies for self-employment and agriculture, two non-hierarchical aspects of the occupational structure that are more important in Italy than elsewhere.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/998567>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/998567>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)