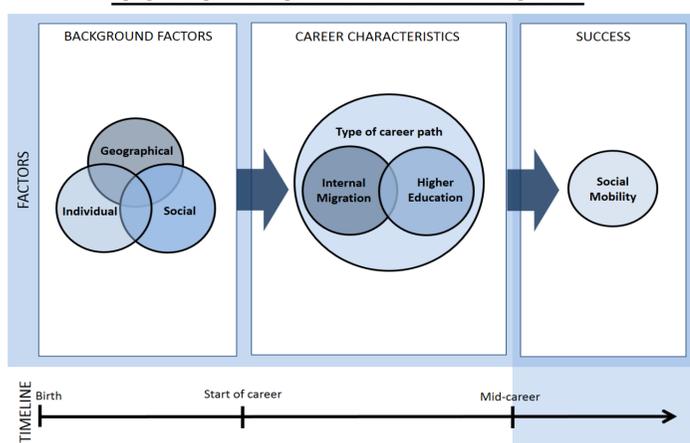


University Graduates' Social Mobility Trajectories: How Does the Route Affect the Outcome?

INTRODUCTION

The labour market has changed substantially over the past few decades. The main changes include destandardisation of life courses, occupation restructuring, and expansion of higher education. Career pathways have become more varied and complex, and a "job for life" has been replaced with a "boundaryless career" (Arthur and Rousseau, 2001). The aim of this project is to understand the relationships between the factors observable during early lives, characteristics of graduates' career pathways, and their outcomes in terms of their intra-generational social mobility.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



This study adopts the life course approach (Elder Jr, 1994). This framework summarises the investigated relationships.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are graduates' typical intra-generational social mobility trajectories, and to what extent can they be explained by different types of career pathways?
- Can the relationships between social mobility trajectories and career pathways be explained by the attributes and circumstances observed in graduates' early life?
- What is the role of internal migration in the context of different career types for social mobility?
- What is the role of higher education in the context of different career types for social mobility?

METHODOLOGY

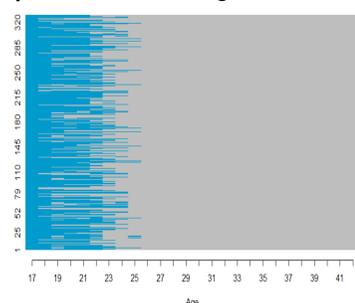
The information about a sample of 1080 graduates was extracted from the 1970 British Cohort Study, and their economic activity and social class histories were reconstructed. Sequence analysis was used to build typologies of these histories, and a set of logistic regression models was fitted in order to test the relationships between them. Having established statistically significant relationship, the investigation was expanded by incorporating social, geographical, and individual attributes observed in the to-be graduates' early life, as well as the characteristics of their higher education degrees (such as field of study, grade, institution), and their internal migration trajectories.

CAREER TYPE

Economic activity trajectories between age 16 and 42

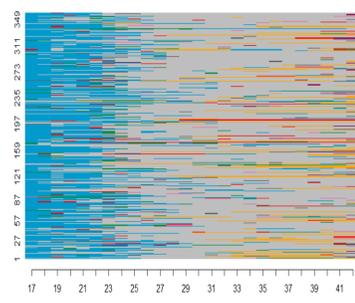
STABLE
(N=330, 31%)

Education was a distinct stage of early life, followed by continuous full-time paid employment.



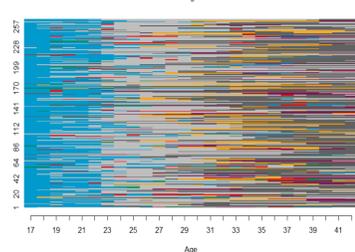
FRAGMENTED
(N=358, 33%)

Frequent and common changes between economic activities throughout whole life course.



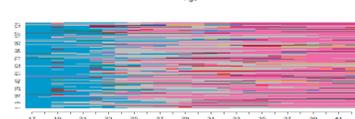
PART-TIMERS
(N=267, 25%)

Graduates intersected part-time work with other activities, mainly looking after the family.



SELF-EMPLOYED
(N=125, 12%)

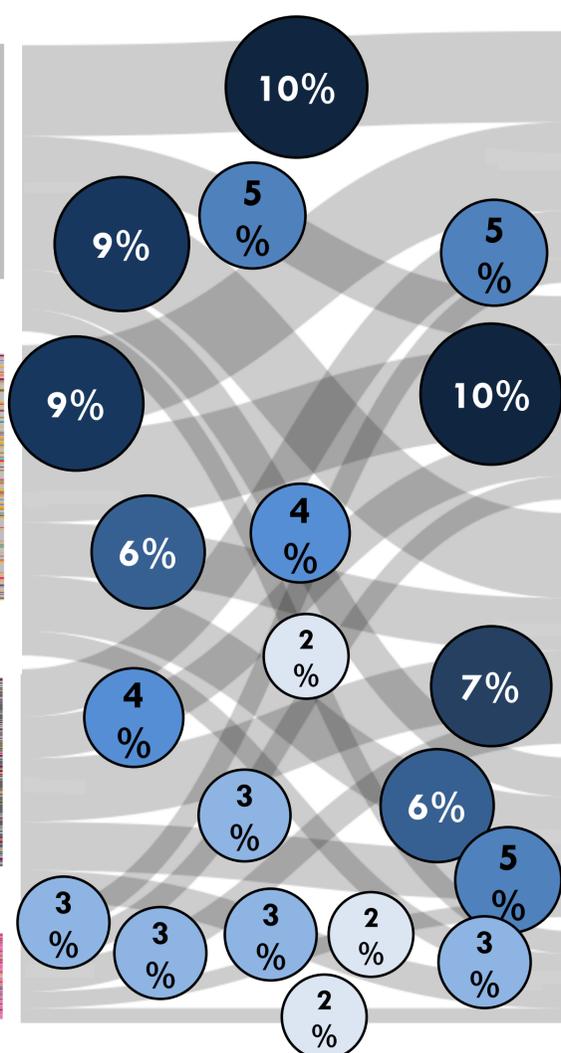
Substantial time was spent in self-employment.



LEGEND

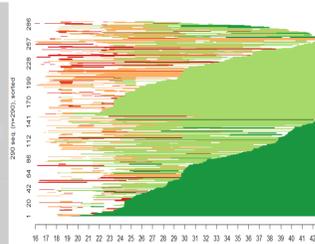
- Education
- Looking After Family
- Employment FT
- Employment PT
- Self-employment FT
- Self-employment PT
- Inactive or Other
- Unemployment
- missing

RESULTS



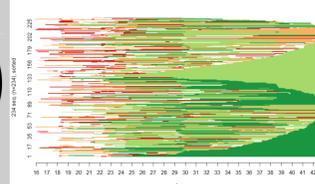
SOCIAL MOBILITY

Social class trajectories between age 16 and 42



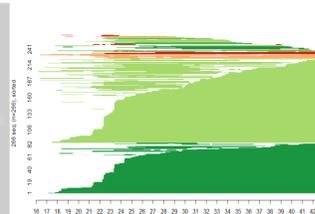
Every subsequent occupation was related to higher social class than previous occupation.

Upward Linear
(N=290, 27%)



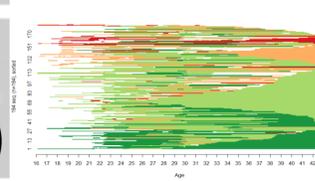
The most recent occupation was related to higher social class than the first, but progression was not always upward.

Upward Non-linear
(N=234, 22%)



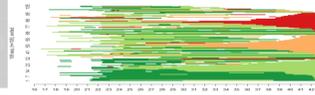
Graduates remained in the same social class throughout their life course. This type is considered as the most privileged.

Lateral Linear
(N=266, 25%)



The social class of their first and the most recent occupation was the same, but time was also spent in different occupations.

Lateral Non-linear
(N=128, 17%)



The most recent occupation was related to lower social class than the first occupation

Downward
(N=106, 10%)

CONCLUSIONS

1. **Social mobility is more complex than moving up or down.** Social mobility trajectories of this sample of graduates over their working lives between age 16 and 42 show that their mobility trajectories are characterised by many temporary jobs, and moves up and down, which are more frequent than was initially expected.
2. **The career type is the missing link in the understanding of social mobility,** as the type of graduates' career path is significantly related to their social mobility trajectories.
3. **Parental social class plays an important and persistent role,** contradicting the assumption of meritocracy. Graduates originating from routine and semi-routine backgrounds are more likely to enter the labour market via routine and semi-routine jobs, and climb up the social class ranks over their working lives. At the same time, those originating from higher social class backgrounds are more likely to enter the labour market via jobs related to higher social ranks, and remain in these jobs until age 42.
4. **Degree is the first "tick in the box",** and fields of study as well as the degree awarding institution play an important role. This shows that graduates are not a homogenous group, and offers limited support for education acting as an equaliser (Torche, 2011)
5. **Temporary migration to cities can be beneficial.** Previous studies ascertain that residence in the bigger cities can escalate one's social mobility (Fielding, 1992). However, temporary migrants, who are more likely to switch to part-time work or self-employment during later life, are also likely to remain above the 'glass floor', even after moving out of the escalator regions.

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