



*Youth mobility:
Maximising opportunities for individuals,
labour markets and regions in Europe*

‘Growing Up’ in London: Young Italian and Romanian Migrants’ Partial Transitions to Adulthood

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The YMOBILITY project



- The focus of the ‘Youth mobility’ (YMOBILITY) project – how mobility shapes three key life-course transitions:
 - From school to work
 - From unemployment to employment
 - From ‘youth’ to ‘full’ adulthood (marriage, children, establishing a ‘home’)
- ‘Youth’ category: individuals aged 18-35 at the point of migration (max 39)
- Three types of young migrants
 - Students
 - ‘High-skilled’ (university educated)
 - ‘Lower-skilled’ (below university education)
- Mixed method study
 - The qualitative component includes in-depth interviews with migrants and returnees from multiple national groups in nine countries
 - This presentation is based on interviews with Italian and Romanian migrants in the London region

Paper outline



- Debates around youth transitions and the role of mobility
- Research questions
- The sample
- Findings
- Conclusion

- Traditional markers of adulthood: stable full-time employment, partnership formation and children, independent living
- Shift from linear, fast, and synchronous transitions to adulthood (in the areas of employment, family, 'home') to longer and 'destandardised' routes (e.g. Frändberg 2014; Benson and Furstenberg 2007)
- Choice, enjoyment, exploration (Arnett 2000) vs coping with insecure socio-economic conditions and reduced support mechanisms (Côté and Bynner 2008; Frändberg 2014; Mary 2014; Amit 2011)
- Traditional markers of adulthood vs individualistic ones, related to independence to make decisions, self-growth, assuming responsibility etc. – subjective understanding (Arnett 2000; Silva 2012)

Youth transitions and mobility



- Mobility as a strategy to delay transition to adulthood
 - ‘Gap’ years, working holidays, study abroad
 - Youth mobility – exploration and adventure, identity-searching, getting ‘life experience’ (and delaying ‘adult’ commitments) (Amit 2011)
 - Typically associated with privileged middle-class youth
 - BUT broader phenomenon with the EU freedom of movement
- Mobility as a strategy to accomplish or ‘accelerate’ (see Heath et al. 2015) transition to adulthood
 - Escaping difficult economic circumstances and seeking opportunities unavailable at ‘home’: to access (desirable) employment, develop professionally, build a ‘better future’ or enhance one’s status (Punch 2015; Mondain et al. 2013)
 - ‘Bringing forward’ family-related transitions, documented in the case of Polish migrants in the UK (Heath et al. 2015)

- How does migration shape young Italians' and Romanians' transitions to adulthood?
 - To what extent does migration contribute to accelerating or delaying transitions in the sphere of work, family and 'home'?
 - How does migration shape participants' understanding of adulthood?
- Focus on Italian and Romanian migrants, as examples of 'old' and 'new' European populations in Britain

The Italian and Romanian sample



<i>Participants:</i>	40 (20 male and 20 female)
<i>Mean age:</i>	28 (min 19 – max 39)
<i>Education level:</i>	10 students 11 below university education (lower-skilled) 19 university educated (high-skilled)
<i>Relationship status:</i>	about half single; only 3 married, most without children
<i>Occupations:</i>	architect, shop supervisor (retail), research assistant, facility manager, emergency repairs, pastry baker, chef, waiter, sales advisor, engineer, research analyst/developer etc.
<i>Recruitment routes:</i>	Facebook, personal contacts, snowballing

Earning one's independence



- Migration as a strategy to advance careers and build a 'better future', alongside 'seeing the world'
- Many participants working in full-time, relatively stable jobs, although often below their qualifications, aspirations or field of study
- Becoming independent from parents, despite sometimes living 'paycheque to paycheque'
- Important shift from financial worries and concerted efforts to get by at home to more security and a higher living standard in London

Even when I was on the minimum wage, I felt I was living well, I could buy what food I wanted, if I wanted oysters and what else, I could taste, I could try. In Romania, no, I couldn't, I don't know, such culinary adventures cost much more. (Female, 39, Romanian, university education, online marketing executive)

If you don't have a job, you can't have your independence, go out, have fun, just your independence. Here, at 19, I could live on my own already. It was a room, ok, but I was independent from my family... Now, at 22, I have a real flat. In Italy, I could have never afforded [renting] that. (Female, 22, Italian, secondary education, customer service representative)

'All-consuming' careers



- Strong focus on career and perception of wide opportunities for professional advancement – motivational role

This is what I like in England, the fact that you work but you are respected for your work and you are appreciated and you have the possibility to advance, as I became... from a simple driver I ended up selling cars worth hundreds of thousands of pounds. (Male, 31, Romanian, secondary education, car sales)

- Career mobility – decoupled from other transitions, e.g. family-related transitions, which tend to lag behind
- Seeking rewarding careers, which reflect migrants' identities (Arnett 2006) - trying to improve not only income but the nature of work, work conditions/atmosphere, chances for progression (see also Roberts 2011)
- *For the kind of work I presently want to get involved in, the shifts, there are some night shifts, and you study at the same time, you write a dissertation, and you do three placements at the same time, it would be impossible for me. On relationships, I do not know, I am not the kind of person who says 'no' because I focus on this. If it happens, it happens... But children, clearly no... (Female, 31, Romanian, university education(UK), left assistant manager job in a coffee shop to seek opportunities in her field)*

- Migration acting as a 'turning point' (Rumbaut 2005), leading to a series of changes and challenges that generate a sense of maturity, 'life experience', self-development

Getting to know so many new cultures in London, you learn to respect other people... then, considering all the difficulties that living in such a big city carries with it, in a place which is so different from yours, you grow up... I don't know how to express it... but... you psychologically grow up in a terrific way... (Female, 30, Italian, university education, customer service assistant)

- Contrast with the perceived stagnation or conventional trajectories to adulthood pursued by peers in the familiar, 'sheltered' home environment

They [peers from home] have not moved on, either physically or mentally. They have grown up inside the same patterns but haven't explored anything out of them. And it's a bit sad to see... The fact that these people still considered important this kind of things was really disarming for me. (Male, 30, Italian, university educated, PhD student)

Subjective perceptions of ‘growing up’



- Adulthood as an ‘interactional accomplishment’ (Silva 2012) – validated or contested by home-based family or peers

I did not see a future at home... I see friends who effectively stagnated... I managed to provide for myself, to go and study... I self-educated... I learned a lot, there are so many possibilities here... My mom is very upset that I don't have an office job... I tried to explain to them that this is not what I want to do, no, no, this is not my passion, why would I want to focus on an office job when I want to specialise further. And she tells me... about such and such, who have been away for two years and look at them, we see them on Facebook, what holidays they go on, what jobs they have and you? They perceive me as not ‘accomplished’, everyone told me...

(Female, Romanian, 31, university education(UK), recently left assistant manager job to seek opportunities in her field)

Conclusion



- Migration had an uneven effect on transitions to adulthood, advancing some (in the sphere of work and independent living), albeit partially, and delaying others (family)
- Combination of 'old' and 'new' understandings of adulthood – conventional future aspirations towards stable jobs, relationships and home vs the role of migration in generating a sense of 'growing up' and self-development
- 'Growing up' in transnational perspective
 - Claiming a more independent, versed, unique form of adulthood achieved abroad over home-based peers who stayed put
 - Obtaining 'validation' from home-based peers (see Silva 2012)
- Many shared experiences of transitioning to adulthood amongst 'old' and 'new' European youth

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