

**LUISS Guido Carli University**

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**Rethinking Social Mobility through Life Chances: a Problem of Trust?**

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*To be a good human being is to have a kind of openness to the world, an ability to trust uncertain things beyond your own control, that can lead you to be shattered in very extreme circumstances for which you were not to blame.*

*That says something very important about the condition of the ethical life: that it is based on a trust in the uncertain and on a willingness to be exposed; it's based on being more like a plant than like a jewel, something rather fragile, but whose very particular beauty is inseparable from that fragility.*

*Martha C. Nussbaum, The Fragility of Goodness*

*For many young people social mobility means a bus down to the job centre.*

*Harriet Harman*

*I never trust people with no appetite. It's like they're always holding something back on you.*

*Haruki Murakami, Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*

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A Giovanni che l'ha reso possibile e meno gravoso.

Ad Alessandro che mi ha pazientemente sostenuta e mi rende ogni giorno fortunata.

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# Content

Introduction	6
I. Discussing Social Mobility: Squaring the Circle	
1.1 Introduction	9
2.1 What is Social Mobility? Definition and Patterns	9
3.1 Factors Influencing Social Mobility: State of Art and trends in Current Research	13
4.1 Why does Social Mobility Matter?	23
4.2 Economic Growth and Efficiency	24
4.3 Social Cohesion	28
4.4 Human Rights Empowerment	34
II. Looking Behind Mobility: Life Chances	
1.1 Introduction	39
2.1 Social Mobility and Social Justice	43
3.1 Looking for Just Life Chances	49
3.2 The Meritocratic Dilemma	50
3.3 Behind Desert	57
III. Rethinking Life Chances Through Trust	
1.1 Introduction	63
1.2 Social Capital: an Umbrella Concept	66
2.2 Development and Theoretical Dimensions of the Concept	69
3.1 The Idea of Reciprocity: a Founding Principle for Life in Society	77
3.2 How is Reciprocity Constituted?	79
3.3 From Reciprocity to Trust	83

4.1 To the Core of Social Capital: Trust	86
4.2 Trust as a Rational and Learning-by-Doing Mechanism	88
4.3 Generalized Trust	94
5.1 Movable because Trustful?	99
5.2 Trust and the Educational Choice	104
6.1 The Antagonism between Inter-Personal and Social Trust and its Consequences for Life Chances	105
 IV. Exploring the Relationship between Trust and Life Chances: a European Cross-Country Analysis	
1.1 Introduction	115
2.1 Operationalizing Life Chances: Not Simply Mobility	116
2.2 Assessing Generalized Trust and Limits	125
3.1 Exploring Expectations through Subjective Perceptions	130
4.1 Exploring Perceptions about Opportunities of Mobility: the ISSP Survey	135
4.2 Choice of the Sample: a European Focused Study	136
5.1 Exploring Data	139
5.2 Assessing Generalized Trust	147
6.1 Emerging Trends: Italy as an Outsider, a Brief Explanation	155
 V. Conclusive Remarks: Sketching new Horizons for Policy Makers	160
 Bibliography	166

## Introduction

Inspiration for this analysis flourished within the context of the profound crisis that Western democratic liberal countries have been called to face in the last decade. Nowadays we are literally bombarded with news on economic crisis: first, stock exchange market severely revealed its fallacies through the banking crunch, while now we are undergoing the unceasing attack to the euro currency. Nevertheless, it is more and more evident that economic institutions are not the unique to have been put under discussion. And, above all, they are not the most important. A serious debate is emerging concerning the necessity to revise radically our social institutions: the costs of organization for our societies appear on a long term unaffordable and welfare regimes show signs of strain under the pressure of ever growing fluxes of immigration and emerging countries present alternative model of social organization. In this context it is, firstly, vital to reflect about the principles that inspired the current social order: are they still valid and spread in society? To which extents existing institutions have concretely helped us to reach the aims fixed? How can we rethink them and adapt to our new contexts?

The etymology of the word crisis is pushing us exactly to reflect on these points: *krisis* is the Greek word used by Hippocrates to indicate the turning point in a disease. It is also extraordinary to think that the word crisis in Chinese language is composed by two ideograms which separately mean respectively “danger” and “opportunity”. Crisis leads us to review our certainties. It is, therefore, a duty to interrogate ourselves about the integrity of the principles which we put at the basis of our society, to look at the path we routed up to here and to make the effort to provide with some good sketches for the future.

I believe the idea of a society where individuals have recognized the right to develop and change in their lifetime their job, interests, places and way to live, independently from their social and economic origins and within the safeguard of the respect of other present and future members of the community,

is the real base of every liberal and democratic societies. This is also a crucial condition for the realization of what we can refer to as a just society. It follows that interrogating ourselves about the principles needed to implement this condition and to which extent these have been pursued so far, it is a duty and probably also the only way to get out from moral and economic crisis.

Moving my first steps with these ideas in mind, I firstly needed to recognize that this idea is not new in the academic debate and it is generally expressed by the concept of social mobility. In the first chapter, I interrogated myself about the cogency of current research on social mobility and the theoretical implications laying behind scholars hypotheses. In this perspective, I highlighted the importance attributed to social mobility by different academic strands.

In the second chapter I explain how the concept of social mobility implies, both in the academic and political debate, the idea that it operationalizes and offers a measure of the equality of opportunity offered to citizens within a certain society and, in this sense, they look at social mobility as a circumstances of justice and connect the concept to the idea of social justice. I discuss how it is, in my perspective, more appropriate to speak about life chances and, borrowing the concept from Dahrendorf, I affirm that the idea of life chances allows us to broaden the concept of mobility, since it aims not only at addressing the dimension of the achieved, but also to grasp that of the achievable, which should be the one relevant when focusing on a social justice debate. It is from this consideration that I also move my critique to the pure meritocratic principle and I argue that the precondition for a society aiming at ensuring the higher possible life chances to its citizens, it is a society where the principle of reciprocity found is application.

In the third chapter I bring my speculation to a dimension of reality and I identify social trust as the key mental disposition through which this principle of reciprocity finds its concrete application in social life, directing individuals' behaviors by shaping their beliefs and choices. In this chapter, I firstly frame the concept of social trust within the well-established academic literature of social capital, and successively I explain why social trust, understood in terms of individuals positive expectations of future gains, represents a key funding element to look at in order to explore mechanisms of life

chances creation and distribution. In particular, I clarify how the level of generalized trust has an important influence in educational choices.

At light of these considerations, in chapter four I ask myself which is the most suitable way to capture this alleged correlation between trust and life chances. My attempt to answer to this question lead me to introduce the different methodologies used by scholars to assess trust and explain why I have chosen to analyse a panel of data based on individuals perceptions of life chances and how trust is implicated. After this, I introduce a cross-country comparison analysis on five selected EU countries, based on the data gathered in 2009 by the ISSP (International Social Survey Program). Therefore, I introduce the details about the ISSP methodology and explain the criteria on the basis of which I decided to focus on a selected group of European countries. Then, I comment data and remark how Italy presents an anomalous trend in comparison to other countries involved in the study. In fact, respondents' perceptions show how expectations about the functioning of mobility mechanisms are weaker than in other countries since factors of ascription seem to have a stronger impact on individuals' life path and, most important, Italian people reveal much lower positive expectations whereas a serious lack of reciprocity is highlighted by a lack of trust toward the relations with others and how these are used to get ahead in life.

Finally, I draw my conclusions sketching few guide-lines of reform which would be useful for national policy makers seriously committed with ensuring the enlargement and empowerment of individuals' life chances.

# **I. Discussing Social Mobility: Squaring the Circle**

## **1.1. Introduction**

Social mobility occupies an important place in social science research. It inspired generations of philosophers, sociologists, economists, psychologists and even ethnographers interested to understand this phenomenon and to disentangle its causes and effects.

My primary task here is to comprehend and put in a proper perspective the existing body of thought in the field of investigation. This first chapter aim is two-fold: first, it defines borders and contents of the concept; secondly it develops the theoretical background needed to analyze its dialectical interactions.

## **2.1. What is Social Mobility? Definition and Patterns**

It is probably not possible to provide a definition of social mobility which is shared by all scholars dealing with this topic. Indeed, a careful comparison of available definitions in use would reflect the fact that different and several are the aspects or the academic domain within an analysis on social mobility can be conducted.

Nonetheless, one of the more general and comprehensive definition is the one coined by Aldridge which see it as “the movement or opportunities for movement between different social classes or occupational groups, and the advantages and disadvantages that go with this in terms of income, security of employment, opportunities for advancement and so on”. (Aldridge, 2003:189-193).

Although the statement does not give a full account of the concept, it is helpful to seize two fundamental features: first of all, the theory of SM is strictly interested to explain the movement or opportunities for movement. This means that it does not take consider other crucial questions about the pre-assignment of positions to individuals. In other words, the key question here is: why do individuals move or are likely to move in their life-course along a certain path instead of others? And, is this just? If not, what ought we to do to repair this situation? In this sense, SM research is interested within the larger topic of social selection theory.

The second key point of the definition is that mobility is not about addressing the movement of single individuals in empty spaces; rather it is *ex se* interested to understand individuals living within their society of reference. At a first sight, this point can turn out as commonplace –since we are speaking about social mobility- nonetheless, it is exactly this global perspective that offer us a precious tool to understand the topic. Movements of individuals in every society put in place an intricate interconnection of variables playing their own role to different dimensions. Taking all of them into account is a complicated; it not unachievable, challenge and it is what it explains the extraordinary variety and width of the literature in this field.

Another important feature about SM is that, depending on the theoretical approach adopted, it is possible to speak both of mobility with regard to single individuals and groups. Group mobility regards the study of changes in the position of cluster of people sharing relatively homogenous features. It is not a simply fortuitousness if this characteristic is highlighted by the Dictionary of Sociology, which refer to SM as “the movement – usually of individuals but sometimes of whole groups – between different positions within the system of social stratification in any society” (Scott and Marshall, Oxford University Press 2005). Indeed, it is in sociology that the study of group mobility has found his fortune and is largely predominantly.

Having clarified who is moving, it is intuitive to recognize that the movement of individuals and groups depends on the society we have in mind. The origin of the idea of SM is embedded with liberal democratic values and specifically, as we will argue later in detail, with the principle of diversity of human being and, together with it, with the necessity to recognize his right to self-determination. The whole research on the topic have been organized around these two pillars and it is, in this perspective, that the movements of individual(s) are conventionally conceived in vertical sense as upward and downward, when he/she occupies a position in society which can be considered as ameliorative or pejorative with respect to his/her starting point. It is the worth to note here that, though academic literature on vertical movements is dominant, the study about horizontal movements have a decisive importance to present evidence of hidden mechanisms of closure and discrimination. For instance,

many groups, having in common the same level of income, can adopt specific behaviors of distinction which make difficult for outsiders to take part of the group. It is probably not a case if the overwhelming majority of the researches on horizontal mobility have been carried out in US, where scholars are particularly focused on exploring mechanism of closure based on race with a strong emphasis on the black community (see Loury, Modood, Teles, 2005).

A crucial line of distinction in SM research is drawn by the temporal criteria adopted: it is indeed possible to study the movement of an individual putting it in comparison with the movement made by his/her parents one generation ago. In this case we speak of inter-generational mobility and differentiate between origin and destination of individual position in the society of reference. Nevertheless, it is also possible to study the movement of groups and individuals during their lifetimes and, in principle, it can be measured between any two points during their life. In the first case, researches are focused on variables aiming at monitoring socio economic characteristics of individuals or groups, which are understood as crucial to survey movements. While the latter measure mainly focuses on the assessment of changes in the income (Heath, 1981).

An additional level of analysis entails the distinction between the study of “the movement or the opportunity for movement”. It is in fact important to distinguish at the outset between “absolute “and “relative” SM<sup>1</sup> (Payne and Roberts, 2002:3). Absolute measurement of SM is referred to the proportion of individuals changing their group of belonging. For example, if we take a measure of intra-generational mobility based on income, which is just one of the several measures available, we should compare the average father’s income of an individual when he/she was born (i.e. € 30.000), with the one he/she will earn at the same age of parents’ survey, adjusted for inflation (i.e. € 40.000). In this case the person will have experienced some intra-generational absolute income mobility. Instead, in order to assess the intra-generational relative mobility we will need to put this change (in our example from € 30.000 to € 40.000) in comparison with other individuals which, on average, may have experienced lower or higher change in their income. It is, in this sense, relative to the rest of

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<sup>11</sup> Sometimes scholars also referred to absolute and relative mobility respectively as “structural” and “exchange” mobility.

society (Lambert et al., 2003). In this case the individual will have experienced upward absolute income mobility, but downward relative income mobility. Absolute and relative measures of SM are similar for inter-generational mobility, taking in consideration that the terms of reference here are between individual and his position in the family of origin. In general, the absolute mobility assesses the number of persons moving up or down in social ladder and it provides an aggregate measure of single individuals' movement. While, relative mobility assesses the probability of individuals in a given position to achieve a certain socio economic status. The first is of interest in order to account for structural shift in social organization, such as the erosion or the emergence of old and new social roles; whilst the latter addresses the disparities in the chances of movement toward a certain destination for individuals in different socio-economic position, regardless of changes in the distribution of the population. For this reason, scholars simply refer to relative measures of inter-generational mobility as “social fluidity”, due to its property to assess the inequality among individuals in different positions to achieve a position rather than another one. The expression was introduced in 1982 by Erikson, Goldthorpe and Portocarero as an indicator for social level of “openness” or “closure” of society<sup>2</sup>.

Schizzerotto and Marzadro summarize in the value of absolute and relative mobility in the following passage “in societies with a market economy and a democratic political regime, absolute SM depends jointly on changes over time in the dimensions of the various social positions making up the system of social stratification and the degree of openness of the latter. In its turn, the openness of a stratification system – that is to say, the pattern of relative social mobility – depends on the extent to which social inheritance counts in determining the social positions arrived at by individuals. The higher it is the net association between origins and destinations; the lower the degree of fluidity of both social stratification and society, and vice versa” (Schizzerotto and Marzadro, 2008:6).

Shortly, a “closed” or “rigid” society is a society with observed low level of relative SM where it is more difficult for individuals change their position throughout their lives. At the opposite, in a society showing high degree of relative SM, individuals are expected to have more chances to move vertically or horizontally from their familiar ascribed position. This will be named as “open” or “fluid” society.

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<sup>2</sup> However, Fields (2008) highlights the confusion in literature about absolute and relative mobility. Since this expressions are also sometime used by scholar to refer to other indicators.

This is also the most relevant measure of SM for my analysis. This research will mainly refer to an inter-generational and relative definition of social mobility encompassing socio-economic groups, educational and wealth understandings of social hierarchies.

### **3.1 Factors Influencing Mobility: State of the Art and Trends in Current Research**

It would be hardly possible to find a univocal definition of social mobility shared by all scholars who have treated this topic. A comparison of the most acknowledged definitions would show how different aspects would considerate relevant depending on the field of research within their analysis is developed as well as depending on the aim of the studies. This difficulty to reach unanimity around such a fundamental idea of the modern human though in social sciences is probably due to the fact that analysis on social mobility generally aim at resolving two different tensions between objectives not fully compatible the one with the other (De Lillo, 1996).

Here I firstly discuss the methodological tension, while the second one which I can call “teleological” is discussed in the next chapter where I discuss the relationship between the idea of social mobility, social justice and merit.

A first aim of the social mobility research agenda is the analysis of the movements that individuals or groups make within the social domain. In this perspective, as already noticed, we can distinguish between inter or intra generational mobility. This typology of analysis firstly entails the definition of the social domain and, in addition, it requires as a basic assumption that, within this domain, the basic structure mostly remains stable, this in order to allow meaningful analyses.

On the other hand, another basic goal of the mobility study is to describe and understand social change. Research about individuals’, families’ and, classes’ movements are not only able to disentangle hidden behavioral mechanisms, but they also tell us something about the social structure within these different actors live. A real social system, on a certain historical age, can be characterized by a higher or lower level of openness or closure which strongly limits the access to other positions or, rather, enhance social fluidity.

The level (higher/lower) and the type (intra/inter) of social mobility observed in each community can be interpreted not only as the result of individuals' isolated actions, but also as collective actions of classes or more or less cohesive groups able, in turn, to influence the same social structure. This bilateral and continuous action between the micro and macro social dimensions is, in circle, affected by other variables. For instance inequality or degree of steadiness and flexibility of the social systems are factors that are not only affected by mobility, but also they act on mobility patterns in a complicated systems of inter-dependence. In this sense the study about social mobility requires – depending on the main aim of the analysis- to assume that social structure remains stable meanwhile individuals or groups move or, rather, these movements can be interpreted as a tool to explain social change. In this case, it would be perfectly incoherent to study the mechanisms on the basis of which something has changed (which is, social system), assuming that –in order to carry out your analysis- that thing would have to remain unchanged.

A first conclusion to draw analyzing the impressive amount of study dedicated to this topic is, therefore, the identification of two different approach of study either focused on the understanding social mobility as movement, either to explore social change.

The idea to connect the concept of mobility with human society arose directly from the emersion of other genuinely political notion such as the idea of a social order and it can be seen as directly connected with the liberal and democratic value. It is not a chance if Alexis de Tocqueville in one of the most influential book of the liberal and democratic thought remarked the capacity of democratic societies to guarantee to every citizens a position according to their capacity. De Tocqueville compared the American cities, crawling with economic activities and social relations, with the French aristocratic system cemented in immobile structure, in his words (1835-40 [1862]): “Among aristocratic nations, as families remain for centuries in the same condition, often on the same spot, all generations become, as it were, contemporaneous [...] Among democratic nations [like the United States], new families are constantly springing up, others are constantly falling away, and all that remain change their condition.”

Similar concerns can be found also in the words of some economists persuaded that advancement of the free market would progressively broken all obstacles to the realization of a fluid society. From this perspective, it is easy to understand how social mobility is not considered by scholars as a phenomenon to focus on, but rather a proper feature of the social functioning characterizing liberal and democratic societies.

Throughout the XIX century and in the first decades of the XX, social mobility is not considered as a proper topic of study, although some scholars deal with it as result of their interest on affine subject. This is the case, for instance, of the great contribution given by Vilfredo Pareto and the other scholar belonged to the “Italian school” which introduced in the academic debate the concept of “elite”. In particular, Pareto has mainly focused his interest on the processes of creation and recruiting of élite. His tough stems from the idea that the organization of every human society is based around an “elected class”, the elite, which is composed by a nucleus of people originally endowed with “exceptional qualities” and, therefore, able to emerge and exercise its power over other members. In his words: “The diverse natures of men, combined with the necessity to satisfy in some manner the sentiment which desires them to be equal, has had the result that in the democracies they have endeavored to provide the appearance of power in the people and the reality of power in an elite” (1971). As it emerged, Pareto advanced a strictly merit-oriented idea of elites which has as basic assumption the non homogeneity of human nature both from moral and physical perspective. Elites are persons that have an ability to invest, produce knowledge, and shape values and vision of the rest of population. Nevertheless, Pareto does not conceive the belonging to the élite on a hereditary basis, while he advanced the inevitably circulation of the élites and, while revising history describe it as the “cemetery of aristocracy” (ibid., 538). But it is exactly this circulation, he noticed, to ensure the maintenance of social order: since, every time that an élite make an opposition to this “natural” order, it needs to face social disorder and it is inevitably designated to loose, soon or later, its power.

From the end of the XIX century and since the beginning of the XX century social mobility progressively becomes a topic that interests academic debate, although always as an epiphenomenon studied within other topics of study. Nonetheless, this situation is destined to change with the

publication of the work “Social Mobility” of Pitirim Sorokin which lay the theoretical foundation of the topic opening the path to the begin of systematic research devoted to mobility. The great value of the Sorokin’s work is to have gathered and systematized the fragmented hypotheses on the topic, indicating the profile of the most promising field of study in the field. Largely criticized for his strict functionalist approach, Sorokin’s thought shares with Pareto an elitarian idea of society and he is persuaded about individuals’ inequality as well as about the impossibility to purse an egalitarian society. In addition, Sorokin also recognizes mobility as a fundamental need for the functioning of every society and as a value that all human community should aim at and encourage<sup>3</sup>.

What Sorokin theorizes very clearly is that in each social group there is always a more or less marked stratification, a distribution of its members among a social space organized on the base of a hierarchy. But it would be a mistake to think that only one principle of stratification exists, while social stratification has several dimensions, variable in spaces and time. This specific consideration grasps a crucial feature of the mobility destined to influence the whole literature: since there is not a unique principle of stratification the mobility can be observed and, hence, measured, using different criteria of stratification, related but not overlapped the one to the other. Following this consideration it is possible to divide the academic research on mobility in three macro-categories, as follow:

- economic: mobility is measure on the base of income variation within a certain time or two cohorts. This dimension of mobility is mainly studied by economists which try to catch movements within individuals’ life-course or between two generations comparing complex panel of data based on income or on other variables useful to trace the economic life pattern of individuals.
- professional: in this case, mobility is assessed on the base of movements from a certain profession to another to which it is attributed a certain lower or higher hierarchical condition.

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<sup>3</sup> Developing a linear functionalist though, Sorokin beliefs that in complex society, the more the kind of work is related to the fulfillment of functions of social organization and control, the more it requires a higher level of intelligence and, therefore, the higher will be the status this job will occupy in the social professional hierarchy (op. cit. 103-104). His functionalist approach clearly emerges also in the way he describes the mobility process: the mobility is in general controlled by what he calls “agencies of selection” which varies depending on spaces and time (e.g. army, church, corporations) and ensure the maintenance of the social equilibrium. However, Sorokin also highlights the fallacy of the mechanisms: agencies may not be able to follow these principles or, however, they may apply principles in contrast the one with the other. Moreover, Sorokin is also the first to remark the negative side of mobility: enhancing competition among individuals , it favors social atomization, isolation and, ultimately, discourage solidarity and sense of belonging. In this sense, he and other scholars have noted a positive correlation between social mobility and the rates of suicides.

- political: here the concept of mobility is mostly related to the cultural and educational status that, in turn, society recognizes you with respect to a cluster of attitudes, tastes and network.

Both the professional and the political field of mobility study has been widely developed by sociologists through the use of the concept of social class (Cobalti e Schizzerotto, 1994; Erikson e Goldthorpe, 1992).

In general, it exists a strong correlation between the three dimensions: for instance, who stay in the higher economic strata has, on average, also retains an elevated political and professional status. However, the correlation is never perfect and in several situations there is only a partial overlap between the three level of analysis. It is the purpose to deal with this complexity that lead scholars from different field of study to make an attempt to proposed an inter-disciplinary approach with the attempt to integrate the different dimension of analysis. For this reason, when approaching a concept –such as social mobility- it is first important to recognized that it is a complex and integrated conception, which cannot be limited to a single aspect without losing an important part of it. This multidimensionality is acknowledged by all the scholars which have attempted to propose a comprehensive approach to the problem from Sorokin on. Nevertheless, the academic research has progressively focused on very specific aspects, looking at one single dimension (economic/professional/political) and devoting a specific attention to the methodological aspects. Shortly, the debate on social mobility has been dominated by a very detailed research on the operationalization of the concept. This development is also understandable if we think that scholars interested to study this phenomenon had to deal with an extremely poor availability of national data<sup>4</sup> and, where available, the differences in the methodology of collection among states were so strong to not allow cross-countries comparisons. It is also for this reason that scholars have chosen to focus their research on one specific aspect (mainly depending on their field of study of origin) and developed it through quantitative research. In this view, economists are generally dealing with measuring mobility through individuals' income and wealth; sociology are most interested to assessing

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<sup>4</sup> It is important to remind here that mobility studies, focusing on a phenomenon which entails a process that it is observable in one (intra-generational mobility) or two (inter-generational mobility) generations, present particular difficulties in data gathering and their elaboration.

mobility by looking at societies as divided in social class; while an ever-growing inter-disciplinary academic debate has lead scholars to look at the mobility level as based on the level of education achieved by individuals, assuming that education represents, par excellence, the means through which people move within the social latter.

From the 80's, thanks to the contribute given by John Goldthorpe, the methodology of the research on mobility studies adopt a unified model based on the so-called "matrix of mobility". On this method, scholars have developed successive research and, one general trend emerged: long-range mobility is quite rare, especially the intra-generational one, since in a life-course most of the people tend to move (upward or backward) not so much from their position of origin due to a series of social and economic obstacles (Heath, 1981). In this years, scholars approach the topic of mobility trying to explore the correlation between national rates of mobility and social features, in this context Lipset and Bendix propose the existence of a casual relationship between the economic development and social mobility. They theorize the existence of an ongoing trend of convergence according to which all industrial societies move toward a standardization of their social structures which also encompass a high level of social and geographical mobility. Scholars also observe how the countries where there is a democratic organization offers more chances of mobility and that, education is the most important means to achieve it. In their study there is a strong ideological element based on a continuous convergence toward an ever-growing process of mobility for all individuals, parallel and enhanced by the industrialization. Nevertheless, criticalities have been moved on the methodological side and, moreover, successive studies have also clearly shown the existence of serious socio-economic obstacles to the concretization of such hypothesis (Coleman, 1964). Nevertheless, Lipset and Bendix's study is important, not only for their effort to providing a comprehensive cross-countries analysis, but also because in their study it is openly clarified a theoretical point which is observable in all the literature about the mobility topic, which is the fact that all the studies about mobility are animated by the basic idea that social mobility is something desirable, good for the realization of a society which guarantee the concrete implementation of the democratic values of equality and freedom.

To sum up the current academic literature on mobility, I set up a function ( $f$ ) of social mobility (SM) where the phenomenon is a dependent variable of four main term:

$$f(\text{SM})= \text{IE}+\text{EK}+\text{CK}+ \text{SK}$$

The first term is the one I called Individual Endowment (IE). This express the basic intuition which lay behind one important branch of study on mobility dominated by the idea that mobility is achieved by the “best individuals”, which –on the basis of a meritocratic ideal- are generally defined as the most motivated and intelligent persons. This hypothesis, especially during the 70’s, has inspired many research based on the assessment of the linkage between individuals’ intelligence rate (generally operationalized by looking at the school grades or IQ tests) and the mobility measured in term of income or status (Taylor, Gibson, 1978). Nevertheless, more recently this hypothesis has been strongly narrowed, especially due to criticisms moved to the real value of the IQ test as a means to assess intelligence rates, as well as due to the recognition of the fact that individual endowment –also understood as personal motivation and ambition is, in turn, highly influenced by other terms of the function<sup>5</sup> (see Saunders, 2010).

The second term of the function is the Economic Capital (EK) <sup>6</sup> and it expresses the intuitive idea that the individuals’ economic background is inevitably destined to play a role over possibilities of future mobility; richer people have the chance to buy better services and provide their children with the best available means useful to help them to arrive wherever they want to. As I already noticed, the economic linkage is the one which gathered most of the interest of economists. In general the economic capital is quantified through family income and, where data are available, integrated or substituted by data on individuals or family wealth. The amount of the studies aimed at grasping this intuitive relationship is enormous and, since the existence of the link is not denied by any scholars, recent research are mostly focused to understand, through a cross-country analysis, the relationship

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<sup>5</sup> For instance, important evidences have shown as children coming from more-advantaged background tend to have parents that spend more time and resources with them from the early years, encouraging and providing them with material and non-material resources that shape their ambitions (see MacLeod, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> I want to clarify that the use here of the word “capital” is not a Marxist echo, but it is rather referred to the concept of capital itself, meant as a variable background on which every individual can count depending on their origins and personal circumstances.

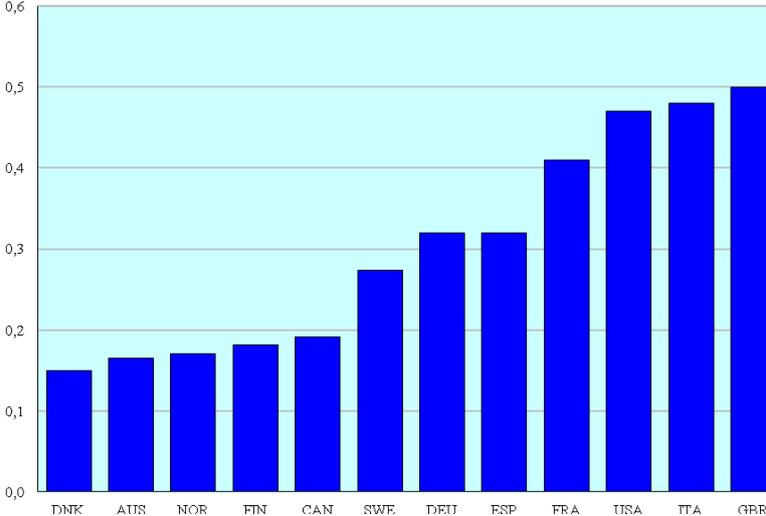
between the effect that public policies have on the interaction between income inequality and social mobility (Bjorklund, Jantti, 2002; Andrews and Leigh, 2009).

The third term of this function is the CK, which stands for Cultural Capital. The cultural capital is referred to the hypothesis, mostly developed by sociologists and social psychologists, that the social milieu plays –in different ways- a role on individual's possibility to be mobile in his/her life-course (or compared to his/her parents). As it is evident, here the theoretical refer is to the concepts of culture understood not as a monolith, but rather fragmented in various sub-cultures, categorized in terms of social classes, religions or ethnicities or even geographical origin, and related values which might have an influence on individuals' opportunities of future mobility (see Matthys, 2012). Developed from Pierre Bourdieu's theory of culture reproduction, these studies generally aimed at understanding how values and habits critically influence individuals' choices and opportunities and, so doing, their fluidity within society. Today, one of the most prolific academic branch studying cultural capital is interested to understand how values and habits related to these sub-cultures influence educational choices (Sullivan, 2001; Jaeger, 2009).

The last crucial variable included in this SM function is the Social Capital (SK) one. The concept of social capital will be explained more on detail in the III chapter, since the idea of trust and its relationship with individuals' life chances is the core of this research. Nevertheless, in this short overview it is the worth to highlight how the concept of social capital and its relationship with social mobility has progressively grown in the last decades and represent today an important branch of study within the mobility academic debate. The idea is that social relations among individuals represent a veritable resource at the individuals' disposal: extension and frequency of social relations influence our possibility to move within the social ladder. In this field of research both sociologists and economists are active. One of the first and most influencing theoretical paradigm has been proposed in 1985 by Mark Granovetter who, with his theories of weak ties, has open the path to a new way to look at social relationship: the most important social links useful for providing with opportunities of

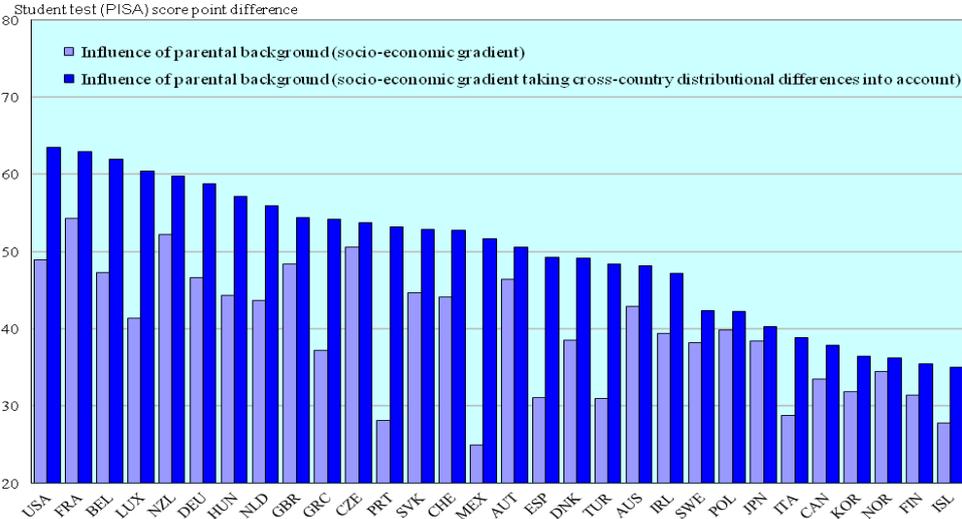
mobility are not the one we develop with close friends, but rather the relationship we have with people that are not strictly related to our social entourage, since they tend to be the expression and to function as a bridge toward different milieu.

The elements of the function of mobility are all connected the one with the other: an economic advantage background is in general accompanied by a rich social network as well as a culture which encourage social dynamicity. All these ingredient are, in fact, strictly connected the one with the other and this complex entrenched relation constitutes a major problem for scholars interested to understand mechanisms and the weight of a single variable instead of another. This difficulty, together with the lack of data availability already mentioned, makes particularly difficult even to provide with a clear orientation about which country is more or less mobile compared to another , since outcome vary depending on measurement, methodology, panel of data. Nevertheless, generally speaking and looking at the Western countries, scholars found Scandinavian countries as the most fluid countries, while UK and US, together with countries of the south Europe as the less mobile. This tendency has also been recently confirmed by the OECD, as shown in the following table where the height of each bar measures the extent to which sons' earnings levels reflect those of their fathers (D'Addio, 2007: 185).



**Figure.1.1 Strength of the link between individual and parental earnings (D'Addio, 2007)**

This trend becomes more clearer if we integrate the table above with the one gathering average national PISA scores (Programme for International Student Assessment of the OECD) on science taking cross-country distributional differences into account. The two bars in the table below account for the change in PISA science score due to an improvement of inter-quartile change in the PISA index of student socio-economic background. Looking the table at glance it is soon evident as in certain countries (Greece, Spain, Ital, Portugal) the influence of parental background is much more wide rather than in others (Austria, Sweden, Czech Republic).



**Figure 1.2 Influence of parental background on student achievement in secondary education**

After having given an account of the wide literature and the main trend on the topic, I should now try to better clarify the reasons why SM raised such an enduring attention among the academic community.

**4.1 Why does Social Mobility Matter?**

Some have argued that enhancing mobility is a valuable goal *ex se*, since trends in social fluidity have been understood to have moral/normative significance for different reasons. The concept of fluidity in society can and, indeed, have acquired various meanings for scholars; nonetheless the general idea which lies behind SM is the fact that it can be considered as a measure –although inevitably partial and

incomplete- of individual life chances. Theoretical aspects will be treated more in depth in the next chapter, here I consider the direct and positive implications that SM is reputed to bring to society.

In this section I will briefly underline the reasons because SM is considered crucial:

- i- as a stimulus to economic growth;
- ii- as a factor increasing cohesion in communities;
- iii- as a prerequisite to the social rights enjoyment.

As it is intuitive, all the three implications –under different perspectives- are crucial and have put SM at the centre of academic research agenda of many scholars and in political debates. Before explaining them in detail, it is interesting to notice that, although the topic of selection of elite and social distribution is a very old one in political theory, more general theories specifically focused on mobility mainly sprang from the attempt to take into account both strong economic and social changes faced by modern societies. These attempts can be easily retraced in those researches that root mobility as a safeguard for economic efficiency or, in the theories that value mobility as necessary for specific social purpose, such as maintaining society stable and cohesive.

#### **4.2 Economic Growth and Efficiency**

Scholars –mainly economists- have supported SM as a useful tool for pursuing economic growth. In short, the attention of economists mainly lays on the fact that higher rate of SM will bring to a higher economic efficiency (D’Addio, 2007:11). The link between SM and economic efficiency can be easily grasped stressing its relationship with the human capital theory. Indeed, fluidity within the society is interpreted a sign of dynamicity. A recent OECD report highlight that greater IGM will allow “the aptitudes and abilities of everyone in society [...] to be used more efficiently, thus promoting both growth and equity” (OECD, 2008:214). In a mobile society individuals will be stimulated to acquire new technical and professional skills which will enable them to a full development their human potential. In short, the outcome of this process will produce a positive impact on the entire system

which, in turn, will result more “productive” and, therefore, efficient. In Blanden words: “If most individuals’ socioeconomic outcomes are strongly related to those of their parents, this means that children from a poor family are likely to be relatively poor as adults and consequently that inequality will perpetuate. This has implications for economic efficiency if the talents of those from poorer families are underdeveloped or not fully utilized, as those from poorer backgrounds will not live up to their productive potential” (Blanden, 2011:1).

If this tradition has founded its supporters mainly among economists, its paternity ought to be tracked in one of the keystone work on the subject: *Social Mobility* published in 1959 by the Polish scholar Sorokin. Its pioneer study has been defined the first modern work on SM, opening the path for a new and rich generation of researches (Heath, 1981, 22). Sorokin was a son of his time, since he captured the functionalist perspective<sup>7</sup> which was in fashion at that time, but its great critical thinking lead him to a theory which was for many aspect not only innovative, but also precursor of others theory which will be introduced only after several decades from its publication. He proposed a general theory of SM based on social stratification and on two fundamental principles: on one hand, the importance of a certain occupation for the existence and the prosecution of a society; on the other hand, the degree of “intelligence and abilities” necessary for the obtainment of a good result in that occupation. In other words, Sorokin argued that certain occupations, which assign larger benefits, require carrying out activities which are more complex compared to other more “routine job”. Sorokin arguments with a perfect functionalist approach the upward mechanism of mobility sustaining that distribution of talents and abilities among professions is determined by the functioning of specific “vertical channels of circulation”: these channels act as a mechanism of selection “sifting out” individuals and assigning them to occupations which suit most their talents and capacities (1959:181-182). Beside this pure

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<sup>77</sup> Refer to functionalist in social science is very broad and the term is adopted in several diverse contexts: in general what it distinguishes a functionalist approach is the focus on needs that a society has to satisfy in order to perpetuate itself. What it varies in different functionalist approaches is prediction about the future: since some authors argues that, based on the assumption made, society will evolve to adapt to changes and continue to exist, while other argued that where the needs won’t be satisfied, society will collapse and need to be re-funded on new criteria emerged –the latter approach is also the one shared by Sorokin. For a comprehensive retrospective about functionalism see Paul M. Churchland, *Functionalism at Forty: A critical Retrospective*, *The Journal of Philosophy*, 102, 1, 2005.

functionalist formulation, he also introduced some relevant critiques about the process he described: in particular, he highlighted the fact that there is not a perfect direct relation between individuals' capacities and the functional importance of their occupation, since in general people that assumes the most relevant positions tend to use their power to perpetuate it. Sorokin went forward in his analysis and also introduced a critique about education considered in general as a mean to guarantee mobility within a society. These last affirmations are particularly acute and they will largely anticipate similar critiques moved by many scholars only in 70's. Leaving aside the relation between education and SM which will be treated in another part of the thesis, it is significant to observe that the growing interest about SM has also gradually brought scholars to focus on mobility alleging a direct relation with inequality, which is –in turn- considered as a variable having a negative impact on economic growth and efficiency. This additional aspect adds a further explanation of the importance devoted by economists to mobility: it is the alleged linear relationship that most of them recognize between SM and inequality. In other words, a more fluid society will probably tend to be more equal than a less fluid one. This is seen as possible since a high level of social fluidity from one generation to the next or even within the single individual life course, inevitably entails a continuous redistribution of economics and cultural resources in society. In this way, the continuing redistribution of resources will make much more difficult for individuals to cumulate enormous amount of resources which cause growing inequalities.

An alleged corollary to this hypothesis also advances the existence of a direct relation between SM and economic inequality, stating that a *certain* level of inequality is not only acceptable, but greatly desirable in order to provide motivation to human development. This consideration stems from the conception that achievement is what distinguishes mankind and the mainspring that make progress possible. In this perspective, a high SM represents the mechanism which, while providing for a redistribution of resources, balances inequality and provides a positive stimulus for growth, since it incentives people to apply their energy and talent to move up the social ladder.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, recently scholars have also noted that the link between SM and inequality is more complicated than what appears to be. The relation among the two variables appears non-linear, with SM playing a positive effect on inequality only in societies with high incomes and level of human development, while in poor societies SM is not playing any role on inequality since the depressed environment hinder any concrete possibility of

As Davis and Moore (1945:242) pointed out: “As a functioning mechanism a society must somehow distribute its members in social positions and induce them to perform the duties of these positions. It must thus concern itself with motivation at two different levels: to instill in the proper individuals the desire to fill certain positions, the desire top-perform the duties attached to them.”

This position was supported later on by von Mises which sustained: “Inequality of wealth and income is an essential feature of the market economy. [...]It makes competition work. He who best serves the consumers profits most and accumulates riches. Inequality of wealth and incomes is the cause of the masses’ well-being, not the cause of anybody’s distress” (1949, chap.9). Where there is a “lower degree of inequality, there is necessarily a lower standard of living of the masses.” (Mises, 1955, 6.XXVIII. 5)

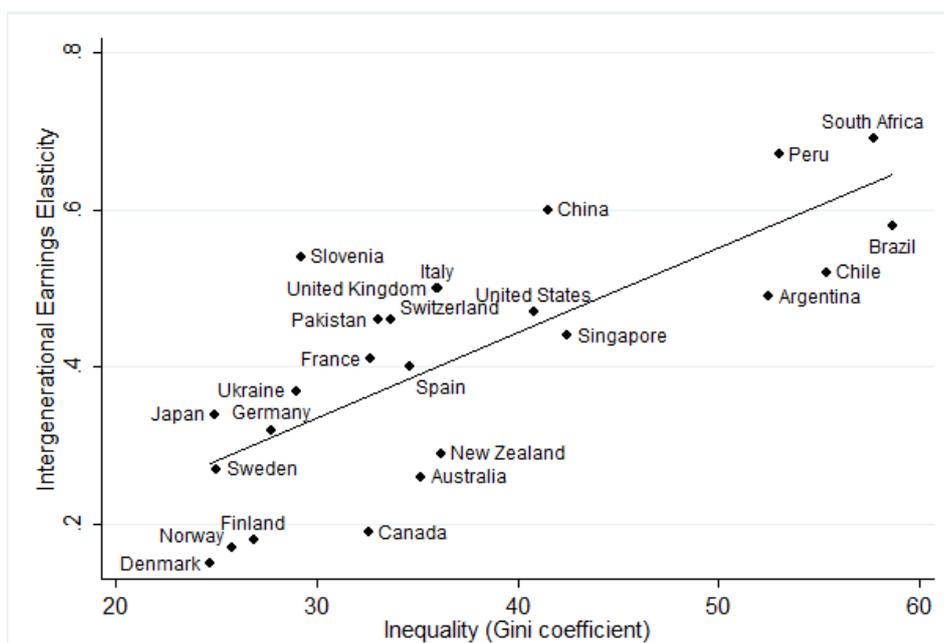
This argument has raised several critiques, among others scholars since, as it has been noted, it completely ignores the role of power and privilege, which may impede inequality to act as a proper incentive on individuals’ motivation. Secondly, and in relation to the first, power and authority found in general their most visible form in privileges which are often transmitted from father to son, causing evident distortions on the mechanism<sup>9</sup>.

The following picture represents the relation between SM –here accounted as earnings, as it is usual in economics studies- and the Gini coefficient as measure of inequality for twelve OECD countries:

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mobility. Moreover, other commentators stressed that the relation between SM and inequality change depending whether we consider measures of absolute, as it is the case for the studies just quoted, and relative mobility. In this last case it seems to exist a positive relation between relative SM and narrower wage distributions (see, Wilkinson and Piketty, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> For a more detailed review see Breen, (1997).



**Figure 1.3 Source OECD - Corak, 2011**

The movement on the horizontal axis toward higher degrees of Gini coefficient represents an increasing in inequalities. Similarly, the shifting on the vertical axis from bottom to top accounts for lower levels of earning mobility among generations, estimated through correlation between father's and son's incomes. This graphic reveals a clear logic about the distribution of the countries along a unique line which indicate the existence of an inverse correlation between the two variables: since higher degrees of inequality correspond to lower chance to for sons to ameliorate their earning in comparison to their family background.

Interconnections between economic growth-inequality-social mobility are not easy to disentangle. However, as it is evident from the huge amount of academic papers focused on the topic, few doubts are raised about the fact these three variables are influencing each others. In particular, as Breen (1997:429) highlighted, the problem is that: "While it is widely assumed that high levels of sm are necessary to secure economic growth [...] it is also assumed that high levels of inequality will tend to restrict rates of SM. Yet inequality in occupational rewards is thought to provide a necessary incentive structure which promotes growth. Thus there is a paradox: both inequality and mobility are good for growth, yet one militates against the other." The transmission of advantages, and the existence of

forms of other disadvantages (e.g. ethnic, gender, illness) from one generation to the next one reduces efficiency and, hence, economic growth although they do not always diminish the extent of sm.

Nevertheless, recent data underpinned evidences about the fact that in societies performing high levels of SM, this has a negative impact on citizens' well-being, if and only if, SM is accompanied with high level of inequality (Council of Europe, 2011:15). Although in same condition of strong inequalities more mobile societies show a higher level of well-being (World Survey Value, 2007). Pushing forward this argument we can assert that: if strong inequalities provoke a deprivation of individuals' well-being, then the reduction of well-being will also cause tensions within that society undermining the basis of social cohesion. At the light of the above, it is, hence, reasonable to assert that, whereas SM ameliorate this situation, it also increase social cohesion. This reasoning is useful not only to add a piece to the intricate puzzle among SM and inequality, but also to gather another crucial aspect of mobility.

#### **4.3 Social cohesion**

SM is acclaimed by scholars not only for its affirmative influence on economic efficiency, but also due to its supposed capacity to enhance cohesion within the members of a community. This argument unsurprisingly acquires an extraordinary appeal in our historical period. Today old and new democracies are called to take into account increasing levels of inequality as one of the most serious threat for their social cohesion within and between communities and it is probably not a mere coincidence if academic and, later, political interest toward SM studies has gradually emerged, in parallel to increased observed inequality. Nevertheless, the topic is present in Western political theory reflection since ancient time -see Platoon, although many scholars have dealt with the topic only transversally or in a rather fragmented way. This argument is also applicable for what it concerns the wide bibliography of Karl Marx which, anyway, has been able to sketch a rather complex theory of mobility coherent with his system of thought. He sustained that an upward mobility reinforces the influence of the ruling class acting as stabilized and anti-revolutionary means: "Although the

circumstances continually bring an unwelcome number of new soldiers of fortune into the field and into competition with the already existing individual capitalists, it also reinforces the supremacy of capital itself, expands its base, and enables it to recruit ever new forces for itself out of the substratum of society [...], the more a ruling class is able to assimilate the foremost minds of a ruled-class, the more stable and dangerous becomes its rule" (vol. III –part V)<sup>10</sup>. It is in this perspective that Marx's idea about the possibility of a class struggle in United States can be comprehended: the alleged high level of SM existing in this country avoids the creation of a diffused and strong class conscience needed presuppose for the struggle of class which, therefore, would have been easier to reach in the ancient continent having a much more stable class turn-over (1852, II:324)<sup>11</sup>. Briefly, it is therefore possible to affirm that although he has not developed a full theory on the topic, from his works it emerges the idea that SM works as a stabilizer of the society. In Marx's idea this stabilization is, anyway, not positive: since it perpetuates the power of the dominant class slowing down the class revolution<sup>12</sup>.

A somehow similar argument –although hinged in a completely different theoretical frame- can be found in the analysis of the influent Italian social scientist, Vilfredo Pareto. Without aiming at providing a full account of his wide research, I will recall here a well-known passage of its *Traité de Sociologie Générale* where he affirms that “Revolutions take place because – either following a slowdown in the circulation of the elite, or for some other cause –, elements of inferior quality accumulate in the superior strata. These elements no longer possess the residues capable of maintaining themselves in power, and they avoid the use of force. Meanwhile within the inferior strata elements with superior qualities develop, who possess the residues necessary to govern, and who are disposed to use force” (1917:2057). From these words it is clear that also Pareto assigns a role of

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<sup>10</sup> For a more detailed analysis about Marx and SM see Goldthorpe, *Social Mobility and Class Structure in Modern Britain*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1980. Although also modern Marxist frequently refer to the problem of SM (see Westergaard-H. and Resler, 1975, 280-285) it seems that the topic does not constitute a priority in their research agenda, since mobility is a consequence of the real focus of their research: the existence of social classes and the division of workers from owners.

<sup>11</sup> A similar analysis about US society can be founded in Engels', see Karl Marx, Friederich Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, 1846-1895, 324.

<sup>12</sup> Marx saw social mobility more as a phenomenon applicable to single individuals, rather than to the social structure. This is also a plausible explanation to explain the reason why Marxist sociology have been disinterested to the topic for long time. For further detail see Goldthorpe, 1984 and Puolantzas, 1974.

stabilizer to the circulation of elites –in other words, to SM. In fact, he sees turn-over in elite composition as a way to introduce capable people where the descendants are less talented of their parents. In case this mechanism comes to a standstill then there are chances for a revolution to arise (Nielsen, 1972)<sup>13</sup>.

The two scholars I have recalled are not the unique ones to have treated, within a more complex theory of society, the topic of social mobility, interpreting it as a sort of stabilizer of society. with regard to this, a more complete and explicit theory joining together social mobility with cohesion is due to the studies carried out by Ralf Dahrendorf in more recent times. In 1958, the scholar theorized clearly that social conflicts directly depend on the level of SM and affirmed: “Under conditions of conflict, two kinds are immediately conspicuous: the degree of social mobility of individuals (or of families) and the presence of effective mechanisms for regulating social conflicts. If we imagine a continuum of intensity of social conflict among interest groups, ranging from democratic debate to civil war, we may conjecture that the presence or absence of social mobility and of regulating mechanisms has considerable influence on the position of specific given conflicts on this continuum” (Dahrendorf, 1958:179). This specific aspect, inserted within a broader theoretical paradigm aiming at explaining the origin of conflicts, also received scientific support by the simulations carried out by social psychologist Burton Silver. He showed as in the same two situations of antagonism –involving or not the structure of mobility system- the former systematically introduced further dynamics of conflict (Silver, 1973).

Stagnant societies do not offer a hope for change, in this sense they create feeling of exclusions among disadvantaged groups which will tend, as a response, to select common elements and reinforce or set up strong group identities in contrast with the better-offs. The assertion of sub-group identities set up in contrast with other groups is at the basis of dangerous tensions and marginalization within society,

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<sup>13</sup> According to Pareto there is also another situation which may bring societies to a revolution. It is the case when a rapid circulation of the elite exists, but the selection made bringing individuals to the governing class is based on criteria which do not correspond with the one needed to maintain the power, this could happen, for example, in case the elite is composed exclusively by industrials able to manage economic and financial activities, but not prepared to use legal or ideological persuasion or force to maintain their power.

often gathered and reinforced by cycles of poverty which are particularly complex to eradicate, since they become integral part of group identity<sup>14</sup>.

On a completely different level, the same relationship is advocated by politicians in order to conciliate the claims for fairer opportunities and strong inequalities. This appeal, as we just explained, it is not supported by scientific evidences, nevertheless it appeared to work well for electoral purposes. SM furnishes the perfect balance required to maximize appeal and capture the so-called median voter, which in general determinate the elections. In this context, it is worth to remember the continuous recall to SM in US where the cohesion of the melting pot is precisely founded on the so-called American Dream, according to which US citizens are recognized to have an opportunity to pursue happiness finding their own place in society. In Barack Obama words: “Throughout the country, it’s sparked protests and political movements [...] I’m here in Kansas to reaffirm my deep conviction that we’re greater together than we are on our own. I believe that this country succeeds when everyone gets a fair shot [...] It’s heartbreaking enough that there are millions of working families in this country who are now forced to take their children to food banks for a decent meal. But the idea that those children might not have a chance to climb out of that situation and back into the middle class, no matter how hard they work? That’s inexcusable. It is wrong. It flies in the face of everything that we stand for.” (6 December 2011, [whitehouse.gov](http://whitehouse.gov)).

However, the recourse to SM is spread also among European leaders, in the electoral campaign in UK of the liberal leader Nick Clegg, current Deputy Prime Minister and Lord President of the Council, which put strong emphasis on SM in all his political speeches and centered his whole mandate on this challenge. In one of his recent speech, he affirmed: “I think social mobility is the mark of a good society, the badge of fairness.[...] Fairness means everyone having the chance to do well irrespective of their beginnings. Fairness means that no one is held back by the circumstances of their birth. For me, an important strand of liberal ethics is that opportunities are detached from origins. As a liberal, I am optimistic about the capacity of people to shape good lives for themselves and deeply committed to tearing down the barriers –whether they are barriers of class, attitude, wealth or bureaucracy- that

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<sup>14</sup> As I will explain in the section dedicated to the determinants of SM group theory constitutes a valuable paradigm to approach the topic of SM.

stand in their way. [...] For too many, birth and destiny are closely intertwined. This is not to say that everybody's life is determinate from day one. But it is clear that the odds are stacked against some of the newborns, and in favor of others. And when that is the case, we are not just talking about inequality, but about what amounts to social segregation” (18 August 2010, cabinetoffice.gov.uk).

Apart from the patent success that the concept enjoys within the political arena, the link between mobility and cohesion in society is also recognized by the international institutions that carry on researches focused on understanding the possible implications for policy. For example, the Declaration on Social Progress and Development proclaimed by UN General Assembly with the resolution 2542 of 11 December 1969 recognizes among the methods to be pursued in order to achieve these objective: “the adoption of measuring for increasing rate of popular participation in the economic, social, cultural and political life of countries [...] with a view to achieving a fully integrated national society, accelerating the process of SM and consolidating the democratic system” (Art. 15, Resolution 2542,1969)<sup>15</sup>.

Also OECD recognizes SM as a factor hitting social cohesion arguing that: “We call a society “cohesive” if it works towards the well-being of all its members, fights exclusion and the marginalisation of people, creates a sense of belonging, and offers the opportunities for upward mobility to all its members” (Brillaud, Jutting, OECD Development Centre, 2011).

As I stressed, the explanation of the link between mobility and cohesion is related to the idea that individuals which recognize the existence of higher chances to progress up during their life course, will probably perceive social organization as fairer, than it would happen for individuals living in opposite situations.

Another aspect to take into consideration when exploring the relations between the two factors is that enhanced levels of SM theoretically entails a more frequent redistribution of resources not only among citizens with different economic background, but also coming from different social groups and environments. These continuous exchanges will inevitably augment the contacts among groups,

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<sup>15</sup> More recently, UN has confirmed their commitment to safeguard SM as a means for social cohesion and fairness in the publication of its Department of Economics and Social Affairs: “Analysing and measuring social inclusion in a global context”, 2010 (available on [www.un.org/esa/socdev/publications](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/publications)).

strengthening the sense of belonging to a unique community and, hence, supporting authentic integration. In the words of the Council of Europe: “As such it appears that SM is related to social cohesion: a more cohesive society is one where people are not divided on socio-economic or other grounds and they accept that the division of rewards in society is achieved fairly and from equal starting points.” (Council of Europe, 2011:16). The commitment of the Council of Europe in this field has a long-standing tradition as the Warsaw Declaration, approved in 2005, witnesses: “We are determined to build cohesive societies by ensuring fair access to social rights, fighting exclusion and protecting vulnerable social groups. We acknowledge the importance of the European Social Charter in this area and support current efforts to increase its impact on the framing of our social policies. We are resolved to strengthen the cohesion of our societies in its social, educational, health and cultural dimensions.” (Council of Europe, 2005:23).

The recognition of SM as a major independent variable over cohesion is also at the centre of a new project launched by the Council in 2009 which have established a Committee of Experts on Fostering Social Mobility (CS-SM). The Terms of Reference of that Committee range from the acquisition of the data suitable for cross-national comparison among the different European countries in order for the identification of barriers to SM, up to the promotion of the concept in order to enhance cohesion between generations and to develop an action plan with policy guidelines.

If this is the framework to understand the relations between cohesion and SM, what it appears already clear is that SM is, in turn, determinate by further variables. As I will clarify, multiple explanations have been envisaged to account for the murky mechanisms which regulate SM and its interaction with other macro-phenomena: human behavior and his rationality, culture and individuals’ interaction, institutions. All these factors have been put forwarded to extricate the SM conundrum although often lacking of a comprehensive approach of study.

#### **4.4 Human Rights Empowerment**

The reflection concerning the mechanisms regulating inter and intra generational transfers of advantages and disadvantages among individuals also provides a good ground for the investigation between their interactions with the role of rights.

The key concept is that the existence of striking differences, among members of a community, in inherited socio-economic positions cause a limitation to the enjoyment of individuals' chances to move within the social ladder during their life. This gap, it is said, need to be compensated and mediated by institutions which are called to redraw individual patterns finding means to redistribute advantages in order to guarantee that worst-offs have as equal chances as the better-offs to achieve same social and economic positions<sup>16</sup>.

In this context it is worth to remind that the notion of human rights has been progressively enlarged in modern and contemporary discussion. When speaking of human rights we traditionally refer firstly to civil and political rights. The original core of these rights include all rights associated to the Habeas Corpus, which includes – among others- the individual liberties of speech, election, religion, movement, thought, association and so forth. Nevertheless, to this first “generation” – as Karel Vasak has defined it in 1979- of human rights has come a successive one which has been classified as socio-economic rights: this category comprehend for example rights to education and to health. However, the temporal distinctions of human rights in generations is exclusively formal since the prevalent trend within the academic community is seriously questioning the fact that an individual with only a limited access to education is truly enabled to participate to democratic life and to exercise his civil and political rights, since he/she get offered only limited means and information to understand political life or elaborate personal and original wishes. This approach, in a sense, rejects the distinction between a

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<sup>16</sup> The careful reader will notice that in this paragraph I will frequently speak about life chances and equal-opportunity, two concepts that –as I clarify in the next paragraph, are interrelated. I am using these terms here referring to their intuitive and common sense contents.

“first” or a “second” class of rights and it affirms instead the need to guarantee socio, economic and cultural rights in order to empower civil and political rights<sup>17</sup>.

The same logic seems to be also in line with the one embraced by the European institutions. The defense of the socio-economic rights is primarily affirmed in the European Social Charter where the protection of rights to education; equal treatment in employment; to housing is asserted. Moreover ad hoc Directives, already approved or under discussion, have been proposed with the aim of guaranteeing the real protection of these rights in the States Members (on equal treatment see Directive 76/207/EEC, amended by Directive 2002/73/EC; 2006/54/EC).

Along this path of reflection, we can go a step forward to realize that the concept of SM is not only directly related to the fulfillment of socio-economic right, but that enjoyment of socio-economic rights –and therefore of SM- becomes a pre-condition for the full access to political and civil rights and, therefore, for the realization of an authentic democratic society (see Held, 2002).

I believe the best way to clarify this point can be useful to recall the enlighten notion of “capabilities” formulated by Sen. Indeed, although human rights cannot be considered equal to capabilities, the two concepts share a common motivation (Sen, 2002:153). In this perspective, I believe the importance of the concept of opportunity entailed in freedom and human rights can be better understood when applying to it the idea of human capabilities. In its simplest formulation, Sen defined capability as the “opportunity to achieve valuable combinations of human functionings” –where this last expression “functionings” can be simply explained as “what a person is able to do or be”. Now, as Sen pointed out, the idea of opportunity is quite vague and the recourse to the concept of capabilities can be useful to clarify the relationship between opportunity and human rights. Following Sen’s analysis, the analysis of opportunity in terms of capabilities allows making a crucial distinction between two

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<sup>17</sup> Second-generation rights are traditionally considered as collective rights and they are distinguished from the first-generation rights which are reputed to be referred to single individuals. These rights have been codified in 1966 by the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), and also in Articles 23–29 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). Some scholar has been reluctant to define them as human rights for the impossibility to enforce them on states, making them resembling more to aspiration rights. Another criticism concerns the fact that first-generation rights are negative in the sense that they just refrain institutions and other individuals to behave in a certain way; second-generation rights, instead, are distinguished for its implementation which requires a direct affirmative action from the government, as they obligate others member of community to contribute in order to concretize these rights, for example, by fiscal contribution.

different cases: whether an individual is able to do things, which he would like to do; from the case where he/she owns the instruments or he/she is allowed to do things he/she would like to do. The latter approach is the most relevant when seeing opportunities through the concept of capabilities: since it allows overcoming the traditional focus on means, while stressing the fact that two individuals owning almost equal instruments might have significantly diverse opportunities. Sen distinguished different reasons which might explain how differences in capability to function can co-exist also in individuals sharing an equivalent set of means: differences in biological features –such as properness to a certain mental or physical pathology- are a first example; but the reason can also attain non-personal variables, as it is the case for particular conditions related to the environment where the individuals live (is it may be the case, for example, for population living in desert or particularly isolated areas or afflicted by epidemic illnesses or spread crime). Moreover, *ceteris paribus*, also having dissimilar relative positions within the community of belonging (i.e. ethnicity, social extraction) , as well as due to features related to the community where people live (i.e. diverse health care or education systems) also have an impact on human capabilities development.

What it appears evident is that Sen's approach refers to substantive opportunities rather than formal one. This is also the vision I share in my analysis. A main problem with this approach, it has been said, concerns the possibility to recognize what, in concrete, fully enables individuals' capability and it causes an over-extension of the individual freedom<sup>18</sup>. The recourse to the concept of capability provides individuals the possibility to choose (therefore, having opportunity to make a choice on it) to develop a combination between a certain set and a particular level of functionings instead of others. Sen's theory, therefore, correctly takes into account what an individual is free to have, rather than what he/she has in reality, which is something that I think also a good theory of mobility needs to consider, although this might be not easy to assess. Sen has articulated this intrinsic difficulty with the following words: "While the idea of capability has considerable merit in the assessment of the opportunity aspect of freedom, it cannot possibly deal adequately with the process aspect of freedom, since capabilities

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<sup>18</sup>Although this is the approach I am sharing, it is important to remind that strong criticisms have been moved against Sen's idea of guaranteeing freedom to individuals' ensuring substantive opportunities to be valued in terms of capabilities (for a complete analysis see Sen, 2000). One of the most substantial critiques to Sen's idea is probably that moved by Susan Okin. She argued that Sen's focus on freedom as substantive opportunities causes a stretch of the concept making it too inclusive and, therefore, overextended (see Okin, 2003).

are characteristics of individual advantages, and they fall short of telling us enough about the fairness or equity of the processes involved, or about the freedom of citizens to invoke and utilize procedures that are equitable” (Sen, 2002:155-156).

Therefore, a theory of rights is useful to define the horizons of the individual freedom to move within a society. Nevertheless, substantive contents of these freedom might imply different ideas about the contents of rights, concrete services and measures that are connected to freedom implementation, such as it is the case, for example, for education, income redistribution, healthcare etc..

What it emerged in the discourse carried out here it is that the idea of socio-economic rights –which also in their general formulation also are aimed at enhancing SM- can be retraced in the recognition of equal-opportunity as the key principle in the current democratic and liberal tradition. Nevertheless, its implementation may assume multiple forms, which vary according to the idea of equality of opportunity that the single communities decide to embrace.

A common, I add unsatisfying, interpretation identifies diverse kinds of equal opportunity according to the importance given to individuals and to their freedom in different communities. In other words, the debate concerning the potential contents of the equal-opportunity principle and, therefore, about the introduction of institutional means aiming at revising inherited disadvantages, has been commonly justified as different depending on the importance assigned to individuals over community and the reverse: where the first option prevailed, this has often brought to a univocal celebration of individuals’ utility, avoiding all interventions. While, in other cases equal-opportunity has been interpreted as a principle to be implemented frequently as a means the social cohesion over individuals’ liberty. I argue both options are only partial and unsatisfying theoretical approaches of analysis which provides an incomplete understanding of the social phenomenon.

Equality of opportunity is reputed a priority objective in all democratic states, since its affirmation is natural consequence of acknowledgment of the equality of all citizens. It follows that if all citizens are equals, they do not also need to have equal rights and liberties in their engagement and contribution to the political life of the community. But they should also get the right to enjoy similar opportunities in

their social and economic life within the community: better or worst offices, conditions of life, status as well as incomes and earnings they get in their life-time are justified if and only if the differences among citizens are attributable to their free choices and behaviors. This statement is clear and unambiguous only at a first sight. A less superficial analysis shows how much difficult it is to make a distinction between actions and behaviors that are attributable to free or rather limited individuals'. In fact, nobody lives and takes its choices in a social *vacuum*: the direct and indirect environment in which all are immersed shapes individuals' thoughts and identities. Nonetheless, on the other side, it is also true that in a democratic and liberal community, persons are meant to have a margin of free choice (without this condition, we would not be justified to define this community democratic, nor liberal). Therefore, the main issue is not to ask whether affirmation and implementation of socio-economic rights is or not a condition to the enablement of a full acquisition of civil and political rights. But rather, which is the concrete content and implementation that these rights should have in order to make the enablement of civil and political rights possible. Although this question is only partially addressed in this thesis, it represents a crucial interrogative which should interest all political philosopher and social-science scholars, since lack of engagement to "traditional" political channels is a reality consolidated in all democratic countries. Instead, in order to identify the mechanisms which explain the movement of SM in a human community it is necessary to proceed with a more accurate analysis of the content of "life chances", a concept which is often used in SM researches without providing any further clarification. In this context, I will return to and develop the binomial relation between SM and social justice.

## II. Looking behind mobility: life chances

### 1.1 Introduction

The notion of social mobility was born and spread within the broad domain of social science theory. The topic has interested many experts and covered aspects studied in different domains: from economics, to sociology, psychology, anthropology and ethnography. I have already identified three key points on the base of which SM is generally considered important, but how comes that this topic has generated the interest of so many scholars? I believe the answer to this question is probably two-fold. On the one side, a reason for this can be easily found in the will to explain the change in social organization that the passage to industrialization and modernization has brought in many Western countries. The passage from a society mainly based on agriculture and handicrafts production to a division of work where highly technical abilities and knowledge were more and more required has probably stimulated such reflection among scholars. But on the other side, there is also the progressive emergence of new ideals and principles of social organization: the French and American revolutions experience and the affirmation of related principles of human freedom and equality, the birth of modern states and the subsequent affirmation of citizens rights lay the foundation for a new sensitivity and conscience: if men are born all equal and free, then it follows that to all them should be recognized the opportunity to realize their ambitions, to develop their talents and abilities independently from their background. This principle becomes a *leitmotiv* of all liberal and democratic societies. It has been profoundly internalized by all citizens, introduced in national constitutions -although adapted by the different societies according to their culture and history- as well as reported in international covenants, and frequently exported also behind the borders of Western civilizations.

It is undeniable that the great success of the SM topic is ascribable to his direct connection with the same essence of Western civilization: the possibility for all individuals to find a personal realization during their life-time, the idea that their life-course would not be determined by their birth. These are,

evidently, very broad concepts, but I believe they constitute the basis of what, in a contractarian view, it would constitute the founding agreement among citizens.

As I have clarified, SM has mainly been studied through the assessment of the movements that single individuals made, during their life-courses or compared to their parents, on a social/occupational latter which is most of time set up dividing the population in classes or on the basis of individuals' income or wealth or/and combined with status of their occupation. In addition, there have been many other researches focused, for example, on cultural tastes or on races or, yet, on group interaction and other groups features which have been tested in order to understand whether and to which extent these variables could have hit the life paths of individuals. Nevertheless, all these studies, even if enriching our understanding of the problem, missed a very important point of the phenomenon, which is the fact that it is essential not only to measure movements, but also to get a deeper comprehension of which are the reasons which bring people to achieve a certain position or another in life-course. In other words, our aim should be to provide a better understanding of opportunities individuals feel to have to move away from their original social and economic starting point. This is, I argue, a critical problem of academic research about SM: it is undeniable that current concept of SM address the normative issue of "opportunities" –it is not a case if in use definition of SM, quoted above, speaks about "movement and opportunity for movement"–, nevertheless scholars have almost exclusively focused on a quantitative measurement of movements and on weighting the role of diverse resources in individuals' path rather than on clarify the meaning of opportunities for movements. In several studies, in fact, a rather confused refers is made to the idea that mere estimation of movements from one position to another fully coincides with opportunities to move assigned to individuals (Swift, 2002: 4). Shortly, this last aspect has been highly undervalued or, in practice, neglected by the academic community. It follows that such a change of analytical horizon would also entail a new operationalization<sup>19</sup> however; in order to do this it is firstly necessary to reconsider our understanding of the problem. At this stage it is of first importance to define the new boarder of a notion of SM

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<sup>19</sup> This weakness in current literature on mobility has obviously also consequences in the operationalization of the concept. Although the attempt of a new methodology of assessment of SM is out of the scope of this thesis, I have tried to deal with this limit using a panel of data based on individuals' perceptions.

which could include the idea of opportunity, since a good exercise of operationalization can be done only after its content is fully clarified.

Including the notion of opportunity within the concept of SM would practically involve switching the analysis from the level of what individuals achieved (mutation of positions) to the level of what it would be possible for them to achieve (life-chances). What I am trying to say is that all individuals are called to take choices that, one after the other, shape their life-course. These choices require making a complex calculus about what we have, what we want and what we could obtain, choosing one thing instead of another.

In order to give a less vague content to the concept of chance a couple of questions should be answered: which is the context within to analyze chances? Which are the main characters?

The answer to the first question comes, I believe, from Max Weber. He has made use of the concept of “chance” and referred to it in many contexts, among the others, the most significant in our analysis is the definition of chances he gave to indicate opportunities provided by the social structure. Weber’s idea of chance is the one we are trying to develop here and it concerns individuals conceived within a community (1956:20). People have life chances in their society and take their decisions and act in response to them. It follows that life chances can be considered as a concept which applies to individuals and express the opportunities granted to develop his/her wishes and hopes. In this sense, we could argue that each individual is son of his/her time; for instance, it would have been highly improbable for a man living in the Middle Age become the first man to land on the moon. This example might sound exaggerate, but it gives the idea of what I am referring to. Moreover, the argument should not be understood as *a priori* limitation of human liberties: change constitutes the essence of life chances, nevertheless, since men are living in a certain context at a certain time, their life chances will be dramatically influenced by the society within they live in.

This point brings us directly to answer the second question I raised: using Dahrendorf terminology we could affirm that life chances are what it results from the intersection of two different sets, the first containing “options” while the second includes “ligatures”. Both sets are independent the one from the

other and are dimensions of social structure which means that they are “given as elements of social roles rather than objects of people’s will or whim” (1979, 34). Options represent “possibilities of choice, or alternative of action”, while ligatures are “allegiances; one might call them bonds or linkages as well” (30). Options are for individuals what we would define, with refer to the society, as opportunities: they include, after all, all the possibilities which individuals could consider when taking a choice. Dahrendorf said that options and choices are two faces of the same coin and that “choices are the subjective side of options” (31). Ligatures are given by social positions and roles: they may be restrictions, but at the end of the day they are the values which fill up individuals assigning to them a context of reference (i.e. family, religion, local origin are all typical element of linkage). Scholar sees life chance as a function of these two elements: “a maximum of options is not by itself a maximum of life chances, nor is a minimum of options the only minimum of life chances” and he adds “ligatures without options are oppressive, whereas options without bonds are meaningless” (31). Dahrendorf interprets phenomena such as citizenship and economic growth as factors widening the horizon of choice and, hence, of chances. On the other side, ligatures have an influence on personal patterns and tie individuals to certain social positions. Options and ligatures do not share an inverse relation: this means that it is not the case that an increase of one determines a decrease of the other, but it influences its content.

Dahrendorf argues that it exists a function of ligatures and options which express a maximum of life chances. He recognizes that the maximization of life chances is a central challenge for our societies, since they are called to deal with profound contradictions, such as the incapacity to eradicate unemployment or inequality, which hit the core of social contract itself and I think his reflection even applies more and more properly nowadays. Anyhow, he sees ligatures as a necessary result of every social contract; hence, their demolition could firstly help to enhance options, but after it would constitute a threat to the social contract itself. In fact, every action we carried out is done in the attempt to attest our identity, therefore the possibility to choice without having a distinct position from which to choice is simply meaningless.

The analysis does not lead Dahrendorf to support a restriction of liberty, while he sees liberty as a fundamental and permanent task which is expanded by life chance without being related to the destruction of ligatures, but “There may thus be a progress of liberty. There may be societies which give more space than others to the desire of men to reduce unnecessary constraints; there may be more open and more developed societies in which life chances are enhanced and extended further. And since this is so, we must never rest in our quest for advancing the frontiers of freedom.” (20).

He unfortunately does not clarify further how this could be possible. Nevertheless, I argue Dahrendorf’s conceptualization of life chances provides a solid basis to push a step forward our analysis. It is clear, at this stage, that increasing life chances has to do more with encouraging the creation of norms and re-constituting social contract.

Hereinafter, when referring to SM, I will allude to this comprehensive meaning of the concept which takes in consideration both changes and opportunities for change, which represents, in other words: life chances.

In the next paragraph, I will try to disentangle the tension that exist between SM, understood as life chances, and social justice. At the light of these reflections I will, therefore, argue the need to rethink the common approach of research in the mobility field, in order to achieve a deeper comprehension of the problem. In this context I will reflect on the relationship between mobility and reciprocity among the members of community. In the attempt to give a contribution to the academic debate I will identify trust as a variable which could express the idea of reciprocity in modern society.

## **2.1 Social Mobility and Social Justice**

Before starting this reflection about the relationship between justice and mobility a preliminary consideration is needed. The idea for this thesis arose from the profound crisis which is overwhelming Western civilization and, first of all, European social model. For this reason the work also proposes an applied analysis based on a compared study. Nevertheless, it is crucial in my perspective to give

account of a more theoretical approach to society based on justice. To use a famous expression: an approach based on theory is of interest also when proceeding with an analysis based on real data, since it provides an “Archimedean point” (Rawls, 260) which offers an orientation to evaluate the phenomenon of interest. Certainly, approaching a phenomenon as it is SM starting from a general reflection to issues such as equality and social justice can hardly be considered as an original approach. The aim here, however, is not that of establishing a general theoretical orientation to social equality and justice, but rather to arrive to a certain conclusion about which is/are the institutional presuppose(s) for a community in order to enhance life opportunities to its member. This interrogative rose from the observation of a phenomenon which is affecting all Western and industrialized countries: the ever growing number of individuals achieving a university degree, once ago considered as a means to access different positions, is accompanied by a continuous increase of unemployment rates. This phenomenon, more and more accentuated by the economic crisis, is destroying a key belief diffused in all democratic and liberal countries: the fact that, despite individual’s origins, it would have be possible, through effort and acquiring selected abilities and knowledge, to climb the social latter. This ideal has probably been the tacit compromise on which modern liberal democracies underpinned. Its functioning has been guaranteed by a complex and structured system of education which differs from country to country in its rules of selection and distribution of resources but which is, nevertheless, reputed able to safeguard this general principle. I will be back in this thesis on the educational topic which constitutes, in my perspective, a striking example of how life chances deserve new paths of distribution and I will propose some point of reforms to strengthen the foundation of our social state.

As I have previously clarified when defining SM: an ‘open’ or ‘fluid’ society is one where individuals are able to move freely within the social ladder, as a result of several factors, regardless of their social background (Heath and Payne, 1999). According to this definition, it is intuitive that SM is often used as one proxy measure of societal fairness. Even if, as I explained, scholars have not fully reported the content of the concept in their researches, the measurement of SM clearly constitutes the attempt to assess individuals life-chances and, in this perspective, it can be considered as one aspect of the

concept of equality of opportunity, which itself is, in turn, one of the foundational principles of social justice (Miller, 2005).

As pointed out by an eminent scholar: “The level of intergenerational mobility in society is seen by many as a measure of the extent of equality of economic opportunity or life chances. It captures the extent to which a person’s circumstances during childhood are reflected in their success in later life, or, on the flip-side, the extent to which individuals can make it by virtue of their own talents, motivation and luck” (Blanden et al., 2005:4).

In recent time, the interest about the concept of SM, as a measure of social fairness, has augmented. This evidence finds an unsurprisingly justification when considering that after several decades of social reforms specifically aimed at enhancing opportunities for individuals, expected outcomes have been largely disappointed and scholars, together with policy makers, are called to face exponential growth of inequality rates and, indeed, as I have already noticed, SM is at the center of the debate as a factor boosting economic growth and social cohesion.

But when coming to SM as measure of life chances the crucial question is the following: might, equal opportunity, understood in term of SM, matter? And, moreover, why should we care about it?

We can provide two possible answers to the first question: one is founded on what I will call “instrumental” reasons, the second one, instead, is simply based on justice.

The first argument is *sic et simpliciter* reconnected to what I have sustained above concerning the association between SM and social cohesion and economic growth. In fact, the logic lying behind this justification is that SM is an important instrument to guarantee fair mechanisms of selection and, therefore, it is crucial in order to pursue a multiplicity of valuable social objectives such as: on one hand, optimizing the development of individuals’ talents and, in doing so, maximizing the amount of human capital available; on the other hand, diminishing the level of conflicts inside the communities.

The justice-based argument is built on a rather different assumption. It sustains that, even if a mobile society would be unsuccessful in achieving the social goals just mentioned, mobility matters *ex se* and it would be still ethically just and, therefore necessary. Further clarifications here are needed. As it is clear, all moral theories are developed around a defined scope, on which a theoretical apparatus

postulates the normative principles subject to judgment: Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas advocated virtue, mainly seen as concerning intrinsic character of individuals; utilitarian aimed at the maximization of happiness for the greatest number; Kant in its Categorical Imperative entrenched morality to human rationality and so on. However, in modern moral theories final scope mainly lays on determinate the principles which regulate the distribution of resources: distributive justice is concerned about the possibility to establish universal principles of justice able to order the cooperation between individuals on the basis of -in Rawls' words- a "well-ordered society"<sup>20</sup>. These principles should be valid in every space and time and they have been conceived as "the circumstances of justice".

The definition of these conditions of justice is also what it is asked to every theory of social justice, an idea which first appeared in the latter XIV century and became prominent throughout the successive century. Although social justice is often recognized as a sort of synonym of the concept of distributive justice, a more careful analysis shows that social justice is rather meant to indicate something more specific. In fact, distributive justice generally concerns situation among a certain and defined number of persons. In particular, no doubt arises on the fact that problems of distributive justice are applicable to every group, from couple upwards. The refer to problems of social justice, on the contrary, generally requires two further conditions: first, it necessarily involves people on the basis of the belonging to a large community; secondly, it figures out the functioning of some kind of institutions – such as supply of public services, fiscal system, structure and division of work. It follows that in the current debate, the idea of social justice is mostly connected to questions of a fair distribution of resources, rights and opportunities of citizens living in a certain country. However, when the horizon of this discourse is further shifted to a higher level and it encompasses the single states and it includes the whole humanity, it is correct to speak about global justice. The need to take into consideration the whole mankind as a unity of analysis has progressively increased at the light of the striking inequalities observable at the same time in different places. The wide differences in opportunities

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<sup>20</sup> The justice based approach is traditionally based on a contractarian view which imagines a society which stays together on the basis of a voluntary "social contract". Justice here is referred to the consideration of whether, and in case how, certain differentiation within this society causing advantages and disadvantages, can be justified or corrected.

available to individuals living in different communities has dramatically encouraged a debate focused on establishing universal principles and institutions which should be tailored to face problems of distributions at a global level.

Unfortunately this approach proved to have some limits in its application within a world highly heterogeneous, where different models of social organization and principles of morality exist. The point here is to recognize that a meaningful theory of justice has to be entrenched in the context which it is called to fit. The final aim's cannot be exclusively to provide a unique -or a set- pivot principle(s) applicable to all times and in every place in order to generate Justice. At the contrary, it is also required to define a cluster of guidelines to implement. Indeed, seize and procedure of distribution will depend on the nature of the resources to distribute; its recipients and, moreover, on the interaction among resources: considering all these three elements is essential for every good theory of justice.

A reflection concerning mechanisms and procedures of life chances distribution is on the ground of our duties towards others. Whether or not the chances granted to all individuals during their life-time are equitable is a crucial interrogative. It rises problems concerning the moral relation in which we stand to our fellow human beings and it also constitutes a means to re-think about our rooted certainties on social organization and to understand that better alternatives may not only exist in our ideas, but they are always possible.

In the attempt to clarify the reasons why a fluid society is more just than a closer one, both reasons of morality and rationality are in place. In other words, I sustain that a fluid society, through the enhancement of individuals' life chances, represents one of the "circumstances of justice". Moreover, the argumentation supporting this statement is two-fold and based both on a moral and a rational justification.

Morality is what makes us judge and compels us to act on the basis of reasons of justice. Some have affirmed that reasons of justice are not the unique to move human beings to actions and that it is well possible that we are mainly moved from a humanitarian motive. In this case, judgments and actions will be primarily explained by an argument based on help others. Nevertheless, also in such situation the idea of justice is still presents: humanitarianism in fact, strictly entails the use of a criteria of

justice. The acceptance of all human beings, regardless all differences, as well as the idea of equal moral significance of individuals, contemplate the necessity to guarantee some degree of fairness and this generally implies some forms of equality of opportunity. In particular, it is very easy to sustain that in every democratic and liberal society will be universally reputed as unfair for less competent candidates to be chosen over more qualified candidates, or for individual sharing the same inborn talent to face diverse obstacles in competing for preferential positions. Of course, as I will shortly consider, this does not mean that moral speculations regarding criteria of distribution to adopt in order to guarantee equal life-chance necessarily lead to the same conclusions. Conversely, contents and borders of what it falls in the categories of just and unjust can vary widely depending on the assumptions adopted and priorities. Nonetheless, what I believe it is undeniable at this stage, recognizing freedom and equality of their individuals as the two pillars holding up all modern moral theories, it is that the combination of these two principles necessarily presuppose the provision of some equality of opportunity, in other words, they presuppose some principle as security for adequate life chances for members of the community.

While, when coming to rationality we can reasonably feel at ease affirming that life chances are based on what I shall define as *expected results*. Where individuals are free to grow up and to develop themselves in a fluid and open community, then the normal result will be individuals cultivating interests and occupying positions which are not pre-determinate by their socio-economic origins. How does this argument involve rationality? I state that if this presuppose is true, then in every liberal and free society rational individuals will be encouraged to pursue their interests and to develop their ideas, making investments and act on the basis of the fact that all these behaviors are based on rational expectations to obtain some adequate rewards (the nature of the rewards meant here is, of course, not just economical, but in a broader acceptance it also includes nonmaterial rewards such as gratification or public recognition). If these expectations are disregarded, then serious distortions of individuals' behaviors arouse and public interventions can be only partially successful in avoiding or changing them. I will come back to this aspect later on in the next chapters.

Therefore, for different reasons, it seems plausible to affirm that in a society where individuals are firstly defined as equal and free, some sort of additional corollary aiming at balancing the two is needed. This further principle is, in fact, present in every modern political theory dealing with the problem of distribution and it is generally referred as equality of opportunity.

SM is directly linked to these circumstances as representing a direct consequence of the principle of equality of opportunity which is present in every theory of distributive justice –although assuming strongly different content depending on the approach used. Intuitively, we can feel at ease affirming that it would be particularly unjust not to offer to individuals the opportunity to take a certain position due to differentials obstacles.

The principle of equality of opportunity, although intuitively simple to grasp, entails a number of complexities on which we need to dwell upon in order to fully clarify his relationship and implications with SM theory. To begin, I will restrict my analysis to few key points that are significant for my discussion.

### **3.1 Looking for Just Life Chances**

*In primis*, equality of opportunity, in its minimal formulation, has a rather narrow scope: it is only concerned with equalizing a certain type of opportunities. In pre-modern time most of societies were organized on the basis of a criterion of inheritance of positions. While modern societies are notably distinguished for a social organization based on job division. In this context every position – from a managing role to public officer or educator– has a certain limited number of places available regulated by reasons of efficiency. This also determinates their scarcity; in fact, the positions cannot be distributed to all who wish to occupy them. It follows that a *competition* will be necessary among all persons that aim at occupying that place. Moreover, not all the positions are similar in term of *rewards*: according to their specific characteristics, every position provides specific benefits and

advantages which can be judged as more or less attractive. Hence, one or more criteria must be set in order to regulate the selection which gives access to these positions<sup>21</sup>.

### 3.2 The Meritocratic Dilemma

The process determining distribution of occupation has a very long tradition in social sciences. It is central, for example, to Republic where Plato lets Socrates affirm that “everyone must practice one of the occupations in the city for which he is naturally best suited” (433a4–7, recalling 369e–70a). While in his Nicomachean Ethics Aristotle affirms “if the persons are not equal, they will not have equal shares; it is when equals possess or are allotted unequal shares, or persons not equal equal shares, that quarrels and complaints arise.” (1131a23-24). Interpretations of this argument have somehow lead commentators to define Aristotle’s position as a “meritocratic” concept of distribution<sup>22</sup>.

The academic debate on the topic has never been closed and it has rather intensified since the beginning of 60’s and currently counts research in the field of psychology, economics, political science and sociology. Moreover, the idea of a meritocratic society is extremely in fashion nowadays in the political debate and on newspaper, although not many of them seem to use this word having previously interrogated them about its real meaning. Leaving apart inappropriate use of the concept, not many doubts exist about the evidence that also in modern and political thought, as much as it happened with Aristotle affirmations, the mere refer to the concept of merit or of a meritocratic society has not lost is vague content and deemed as groundwork for social theory and analysis. But what do exactly we mean with meritocracy?

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<sup>21</sup> Some will argue that to attain social justice we shall not try to introduce equal opportunity, but rather equalize positions. This is a more radical and interesting view which cannot be discussed here.

<sup>22</sup> To a broader glance, it is instead evident that this statement gives an incomplete overview of Aristotle’s thought of the problem. In his Politics, in fact, he affirmed that “it is evident that the best *politeia* is the arrangement according to which anyone whatsoever might do best and live a flourishing life” and that “it is the job of the excellent lawgiver to consider, concerning a city and a class of human beings and every other association, how they will partake in the flourishing living that is possible for them”.

The etymology of the word is Latin, *meritum*, the meaning is “that which one deserves, just deserts”, neuter of *meritus* pp. of *merere* “to earn, deserve, gain, acquire”, its root comes from Greek words *mer-* “to assign” (in Greek *meros* “part”; *moira* “share, fate”). The acceptance as “worthiness” aroused from early XIV century and it evolved during the period as a “condition that deserves either remuneration or castigation”. The expression meritocracy added to the word merit the suffix *-kratos* from the Greek “strength, power” to describe a society where rewards and status are assigned through competition.

In more recent time the first scholars to show interest on the topic have been political theorists and sociologists: the first, as I just mentioned, tried since ancient age to provide with rules of distribution of offices and rewards within citizens; while the latter have started to focus on topic at the light of changes observed in modern society and tried to catch general mechanisms on the basis of which diverse societies distribute positions and occupations and benefits correlated to them. Roughly speaking, it is possible to argue that in modern age the two traditions of study, within which the interest on the topic have grown, are: liberal –mainly including political and economic theorists; and functionalist -mostly sociologist. Beyond this first distinction focus on the topic has been continuously renewed throughout the two last centuries and it has practically extended to the whole spectrum of social sciences<sup>23</sup>.

Most of the researches carried out included an underlying idea concerning the impact of industrialization process on social structure. In short, the concept standing behind this academic debate is that the process of industrial development, mainly observed in Western countries since the nineteenth century and spreading ceaselessly behind national borders, was the key cause of radical changes observed in these societies (Parsons and Bales, 1956; Blau and Duncan, 1967; Kerr 1960). For instance, the stratification process, until that moment exclusively based on the possess of certain “ascribed” characteristics mainly owned on the base of birth or inherited by parents and relatives, starts to be regulated by “achieved” features which are the results of the free actions and achievements

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23 The literature on merit is broad, I report here a non comprehensive references list on the topic in different fields of study: Arrow, Bowles, Durlauf (2000) for an economic approach; Bell (1972) and Geoff (2006) for political sciences; Goldthorpe (2005) for sociology; Lemann (2000) for an history of the tests as proxy of the individual merit; Mcnamee, Miller (2004) and Longoria (2008) for the representation of merit in public opinion; Mccrudden (1998) for a review on “affirmative action” tradition.

of individuals (Levy 1966). The change is revolutionary: in a merit-based society the unique principle of occupational and reward allocation is achievement, while ascription is viewed as inappropriate. In Bell words: “the meritocracy is thus the displacement of one principle of stratification by another, of ascription for achievement” (Bell, 1973:427).

Despite its diffuse use in social sciences, the consecration of the concept, and its following circulation in academic and political life, is due to Michael Young which in 1958 published its book *The Rise of Meritocracy*, coining also for the first time the expression “meritocracy”. Young’s work was an authentic success under the point of view of its diffusion, insomuch as it became one of the most influential novels for modern social thinkers. Nevertheless, Young’s dystopia was unfortunately misunderstood and mainly distorted by its commentators<sup>24</sup> (Barker 2006:44). The book is set in the XXI century and the author retraces the history of the English society in the last one hundred fifty years. The narrator is a fake Michael Young, PhD student, living in England, which it is alleged to have become a perfect meritocratic society. Nevertheless, popular unrests are distressing the country. In the text Young highlights the emergence of four different political and social dynamics which brought to this situation: the first is the progressive, but definitive transaction from ascription to acquisition of positions through competition. The second trend he highlighted is the growing importance attributed to the ideal of equality of opportunity in English society; and, according to Young, it is exactly the affirmation of this principle to support and make possible the change in social organization: ascription and family inheritance are substituted with free competition and merit. In the book, the conception of equality of opportunity which emerges is not simply formal (positions and offices that reward greater advantages should be open to all applicants), but substantive. Young imagines that in England it has been realized a substantial equality of the initial conditions among citizens: this goal has been achieved through the creation of a fiscal system characterized by capital

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<sup>24</sup> One for all, as an example of how the work of Young has been frequently recalled not carefully by other scholars: the economists Gary Becker in its well-known “Human Capital” (1964), mention “the Rise of Meritocracy” when speaking of the equality of opportunity principle. In his theory about human capital, the principle is approached in a quantitative and rather abstract way: Becker sustained that marginal costs needed to finance added units of human capital are equal for all individuals. Doing so, supply curve became undifferentiated and all investments in human capital depend on the individuals’ capacities and, finally, remunerations would rightly reflect, according to Becker, the correspondence between merit and social position. As I explain in the paragraph Becker literally overturns Young’s message.

levy and estate tax (1958:77, 136). This system realizes the merger between the two stronger political ideas of the modern human history: liberal and social approach reaches a synthesis. The first accepting egalitarian principle as presuppose for competition; while the second one abandoning, for the sake of this compromise, the idea to pursue equality of outcomes. But there is another crucial point that Young stress in its false apologia of the merit: it is the way how the need to maintain a compromise between merit and equality has progressively reversed the role of education in society. Young explains how the strength to combination merit and equality of chances caused its strongest distortion in the education system.

The system that, in practice, describes the process of differentiation from initial position to outcomes is exactly the mechanism of meritocracy which is determined –Young says- by a combination of intelligence (the so-called IQ becomes something to assess and measure through tests and exercises) and effort. In particular, while effort can be equalized depending on personal motivation and inspiration, IQ is something endowed and unequally distributed among individuals. On this assumption, the education system is re-organized in order to guarantee to most and less talented to follow adequate paths to develop and use accordingly their own potential.

Meritocracy is therefore established in England through the attribution of the power to the most intelligent: the system is reinforced the education system which select from the childhood the most adapt to occupy the different positions. The IQ test ensures that the selection is impartial from other social influences –familisms and nepotisms- and independent from economic power. In this way, the elected people will be adequately educated and will occupy most prestigious positions and this social hierarchy will be justified by the whole society and inequality is not anymore valuated as immoral since it is rooted in the principles of merit and equality of opportunity (Young, 1958:130, 166). But, at the end of the day, Young evidences a clear flaw in this mechanism: In fact, on the base of merit, differences between individuals justify differences in their outcomes. But, for the reasons just explained, the individuals seem to be distinguished on the base of their innate endowment. Therefore, if these assumptions are true, after all, once the most talented are in the elite and the less are in the working class, which is the meaning of the principle of equality? (Young, 1958:122).

Young stresses how the paradox result is that egalitarian ideals are abandoned in the name of the equality of opportunity principles: since intelligence seems to be transmitted one generation after another from parents to sons and the positions occupied by each individual in the social latter seem to be established since their birth date, therefore, the revolutionary fulfillment of the principle of merit is concretized by the return to a new immobile system of new caste justified on the base of merit<sup>25</sup>. The underway protests in the country are carried on by the population which is reclaiming for the affirmation of a new principle of equality of opportunity, not based on the measurement of the intelligence, but rather aimed at providing to individuals' with the chance to develop their own talents and inclinations and finding a full realization of themselves as human beings not just as a means of production. In this perspective, the emergence of a society without classes is favorite trough the establishment of a universal system of education where differences among individuals are cultivated and integrated to create enrichment and tolerance (Young, 1958:174-176).

Briefly, in Young's idea equal opportunity and the attempt to realize a perfect SM has caused a new form of aristocracy without offering a chance of redeem. As affirmed by Young in one of his last interviews: "Much that was predicted has already come about. [...] It is hard indeed in a society that makes so much of merit to be judged as having none. No underclass has ever been left as morally naked as that" (Young, 2001). As I have just clarified, Young's judgment about meritocracy is not positive. Despite of this, the expression encountered a great success and assumed, behind the author's will, a general positive meaning (Goldthorpe and Jackson, 2008, 32-33) indicating a system of allocation and distribution of offices and social and economic rewards based on individual's capacity and skills rather than on heritage and other.

The reason to explain this conceptual overturning is to be searched in its lack of clarity, indeed, as Sen pointed out: "Meritocracy, and more generally the practice of rewarding merit, is essentially under defined, and we cannot be sure about its content – and thus about the claims regarding its 'justice' – until some further specifications are made (concerning, in particular, the objectives to be pursued, in term of which merit is to be, ultimately, judged). The merit of actions – and (derivatively) that of

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<sup>25</sup> The book also contains gender evaluations and role of the women in the alleged meritocratic society which we cannot considering here.

persons performing actions – cannot be judged independent of the way we understand the nature of a good (or an acceptable) society. [...] The promotion of goodness, or compliance with rightness, would have much to commend it, and in this basic sense the encouragement of merit would have a clear rationale. But given the contingent nature of what we take to be good or right, there would inevitably be alternative views regarding (1) the precise content of merit, and (2) its exact force vis-à-vis other normative concerns in terms of which the success of a society may be judged. This problem would be present even without the difficulties raised by rigid and inflexible conceptions of what is to be seen as merit” (Sen, 2000:5-6).

The vagueness of the concept is, hence, caused by the fact that its content depend on values and opinion which may change for each individual. The English language allows a further distinction and it divides merit, which is referred to a natural characteristic, from desert, which indicates the posses of certain skills necessary to carry out a services. Nevertheless, the distinction does not resolve the problem, as some scholar affirms that meritocracy includes both merit and desert (see Lucas, 1995), while some other sustains that a meritocratic society should just involve desert (Miller, 1999) since if merit would be based on natural qualities, then it would resemble a beauty contest: but which is the merit to be born more beautiful than others? An important problem emerges here, related with the role of luck in the merit system of distribution: the fact to own or not a certain character at the birth is not a matter of individual merit *ex se* and it seems, instead, more related to luck. In this case, would it be possible to affirm that luck is a more just criterion of social distribution rather than family inheritance?<sup>26</sup>

As I said, the notion of desert recognizes a key role to abilities and competences which individuals acquire during their life-course. Nevertheless, in real life this distinction is more problematic than in theory: beauty, for example, could require an effort and, similarly, effort seems to play a crucial role also in the process of acquisition of abilities and skills. Moreover, as far as our genes influence our inclination to develop a certain skills, the notion of desert is not shelter from luck.

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<sup>26</sup> The question is not easy to solve and it raised a lively debate, which it is not possible to propose here. For a review on the topic see: Norvin Richards, 1986, Luck and Desert, *Mind*, 198-209; Hurley, Justice, Luck and Knowledge, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003 and Carl Knight & Zofia Stemplowska (eds.), Responsibility and Distributive Justice, Oxford University Press, 2011.

Another problematic aspect concerns the fact that neither merit nor desert provides the possibility to include, in their evaluation process, the fact that certain individuals put more effort to convert their ability in performances, nor the motivation which lies under their performances. Since the first, *ex se*, does not have any value in case results are unsatisfying. While motivation can be valuable only under a moral point of view, but a virtuous motivation is totally irrelevant for a merit purpose. Last but not least, it is highly questionable the fact that the distribution process is based on the transitory value assigned to natural abilities or acquired skills within the community of reference: under these circumstances the distribution of rewards becomes also very arbitrary since it is left to what a certain society in a particular moment decides as having a value to the disadvantage of others abilities and characters which are instead disregards. A glaringly example is the extremely lucky status which is assigned in our society to famous singers or foot-ball players. Moreover, as a complement on what affirmed, the arbitrariness of reward distribution in society is two-fold: it depends firstly on a “lottery” of the distribution at birth of a talent or the acquisition of an ability rather than others and, secondly, on the fact that society can have recognized –or not- the value to that talent or ability. In both case, luck still plays a crucial role.

These simple but powerful argumentations highlight the main critical points which arouse from a careful reflection on meritocratic system as “the Answer” to our interrogative concerning the roots and the real meaning of individuals’ life chances in contemporary society. After all, at the light of the above, why should we recognize as fairer a system mostly assigning to individual luck and random genetic distribution, life chances?

It is here the worth to give account that it is from a completely different presuppose that Friedrich Hayek moves his strong critique to meritocracy. Although it is not possible to explore his thought in details here, I try to restrict the note in order to provide an alternative critique to the concept of merit. In his *Constitution of Liberty*, Hayek dedicated a significant part to the reflection on merit asking which it would be its role in a free society. Starting from the ambiguity of the concept, he recognized how behind the affirmation of merit in modern society lies the intention to establish it as a principle of

social justice indicating the rule on which resources need to be redistributed in society. In his view, the whole perspective is erroneous: since an open society is regulated by a free market. Hayek's claim is, however, not conceptual: he just affirmed that refer to distribution of wealth as just or unjust not only is meaningless since distributive justice is not possible within such society. Therefore, Hayek's idea crashed, in general, with the possibility to introduce in society one or more criteria of redistribution. His idea is that in market societies the distribution is regulated by prices, which represent an indication about people's preferences reflect in relation with the scarcity of resources. This spontaneous mechanism is not compatible with a criterion of redistribution based on individual merit or desert. He sustained that "social justice" has come to mean "distributive justice", but that distributive justice is "irreconcilable with a competitive market order. [...] The whole idea behind distributive justice – that each individual ought to receive what he morally deserves – is meaningless in the extended order of human cooperation" (Hayek, 1988:118)<sup>27</sup>.

### **3.3 Behind Desert**

After having analyzed the limits of a merit based approach as a just principle of distribution, I take a step backward to recall that –as previously stated- all liberal and democratic societies, after all, share a minimal conception of merit which can be shortly summarized in the motto: the most talented and highly motivated candidate for each position. At the light of what explained above, this statement is merely concerned with the safeguard of the formal procedure through which a position is assigned to a person, regardless of former distribution of benefits which certain individuals can own in spite of other members.

However, application of this minimal principle does not imply the respect of a principle of justice in society. Indeed, in all human societies specific circumstances play, to a certain and variable extent, a role which influences noticeably individuals patterns. Therefore, it has been argued, limiting the

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<sup>27</sup> De Mucci has instead moved a critique to the idea of meritocracy on a rather different ground: since in communities that embrace democratic organization, the rule of meritocracy seems to be not fully compatible itself for those principles of selectivity and exclusiveness that it entails, whereas the democratic rule is instead based on the idea of inclusiveness and the promotion of a principle of majority (2011:8-9).

application of equality of opportunity to the selection procedure cannot be considered as a satisfying guarantee just distribution of chances to individuals. Since striking evidences show that to be born within a certain family or environment –or, in a global perspective, in a certain country or region– gives access to a cluster of advantages or disadvantages, in comparison with other members of the same community, that ought to be taken in consideration when aiming at establishing some fairness in the distribution of the position.

Briefly, society must offer a “level playing field”<sup>28</sup> and it is exactly from this evidence that arouses the necessity to overcome an approach based on desert and to introduce a formulation of the principle of equal opportunity which requires that circumstances do not have to affect individual prospectus for outcome or paraphrasing Rawls (1971:63-64) that individuals with equivalent effort face “the same prospects of success regardless of their initial place in the social system” since inborn talents are “affected by all kinds of social conditions and class attitudes”.

Natural and social lottery – the good or bad fate of being born in a rich or deprived country or family, with or without certain talents and biological character– is simply a matter of luck and it has nothing to do with justice. Justice has, instead, to be understood as what communities choose to do about these unequal distribution of chances.

As it is well-known, Rawls proposes a system of justice based on fairness which is founded on two principles which ought to be adopted in communities based on cooperation: the first, genuinely liberal, supports the safeguard of same basic liberties for all the members; while the second sets up borders of acceptable inequalities within this well-ordered society. He define these borders advancing two conditions: one address the need that the assignation of more privileged positions is subject to fair equality of opportunity, while the second condition proposed entails that more privileged positions and existing social and economic inequalities go to the benefit of the least advantaged –so called difference principle (see Theory of Justice - TJ, 266-7 and Restatement, 42-43). Although it is out of the purpose of this work to deal with interpretations and critiques of this theoretical paradigm which has been

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<sup>28</sup> This expression has been introduced by John E. Roemer which tried to redefine the concept of equal opportunity on the basis of individual’s responsibility which should be assessed through a distinction between circumstances under his control and those which falls out of their scope. See Equality of Opportunity, Harvard University Press, 1998.

undoubtedly the most influencing of the last century, here a couple of clarifications follow<sup>29</sup>. *In primis*,

I share the idea that individuals' life prospects are basically influenced by three contingencies:

- i- the kind of social environment within he/she has born and raised: parents, relative, close friends and all the others "relevant others";
- ii- the heterogeneous distribution of inborn talents among human beings;
- iii- the role of the good or bad fate in life-course.

Having recognized these variables the basic structure of society can be described as having: "various social positions and men born into different positions have different expectations of life determined, in part, by the political system as well as by economic and social circumstances. In this way the institutions of society favor certain starting places over others. These are especially deep inequalities. Not only they are pervasive, but they affect men's initial chances in life" (TJ, 1971, 7) In TJ he sustains that unequal opportunities are justifiable only if their elimination would lead to an even more severe restriction of the opportunities for the less advantaged for the consequences that this elimination would have caused over social and economic structure. But, how is this feasible?

In his late work, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, Rawls affirms: "fair equality of opportunity is said to require not merely that public offices and social positions be open in the formal sense, but that all should have a fair chance to attain them. To specify the idea of fair chance we say: supposing that there is a distribution of native endowments, those who have the same level of talent and ability and the same willingness to use these gifts should have the same prospects of success regardless of their social class of origin, the class into which they are born and develop until the age of reason. In all parts of society there are to be roughly the same prospects of culture and achievement for those similarly motivated and endowed." (43-44)<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> In particular I share with Rawls and others liberal thinkers the fact the our society is currently organized on a division of labor based on occupations which are considered from less to more complex, where the complexity correspond to a level of abilities and skills needed to cover that occupation in a good way. Secondly, I recognize that on the base of this division of labor, each individual is born with a different native talents and inclinations that make easier or more difficult for them to develop that skills and abilities which are considered as more rewarding within existing division of labor. The last basic assumption concerns the importance for individuals' to receive incentives when making an effort, for example when deciding to invest their time, effort or money to acquire information or develop skills.

<sup>30</sup> An equivalent quotation was present in TJ where he stated that fair equality of opportunities "requires equal life prospects in all sectors of society for those similarly endowed and motivated" (265).

This last statement, I think, is however arguable for two reasons: first of all, with regard to endowment it is not fully demonstrated that –apart from serious physical constraints- the extent on which endowment, understood as natural talent, plays a real influence on life-prospects. It is, in fact, actually not possible to provide conspicuous evidences about it, since it is very hard to disentangle “inborn” from “acquired” endowment obtained through socialization or other forms of external interaction<sup>31</sup>.

The second point concerns motivation: since Rawls himself affirms in TJ that cultivation of abilities is difficult and it requires having a “superior characters [...] (which) depends in good part upon fortunate family and social circumstances in early life for which we claim no credit” (89).

A contradiction arises here, since from one side it seems not possible to attain complete equality of opportunity, at least until the basic social structure is unchanged and family continues to exist. But, on the same time, in the liberal frame within we are moving in our reflection; it is widely questionable to prospect a destruction of the best established and spread social institution such as family. Indeed, it is very reasonable that best-off parents try to do their best in stimulating their children and, in fact, to deny such behavior in order to give an advantage to worst-off children, would basically represent a gross violation of better-off parents’ liberties. Similarly, every plausible solution aiming at restoring the balance between favored and disfavored children –such as banning heredity transfer or minimizing contacts with their environment would discourage parents’ motivation to get ahead and pursue cross-generational continuity, as well as their desire to transmit knowledge and experience in a wide sense. At the same time, removing children from family’s influence also has a negative impact on children’s right to live within his/her social environment of reference.

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<sup>31</sup> I remember, once more, that endowment as being completely random distributed among human beings can not constitute *ex se* a reasonable benchmark of justice for a well-order society. A different criticism to the idea of distribution based on endowment comes from a more profound skepticism about current social organization which, in this case, is accused to be unable to offer flexible paths of personal development to stimulate alternative individuals’ potentialities, for an interesting point on this see Gomberg, 2007. In this perspective, it is also enlighten to recall here Adam Smith’s words: “The difference of natural talents in different men is, in reality, much less than we are aware of; and the very different genius which appears to distinguish men of different professions, when grown up in maturity, is not upon many occasions so much the cause, as the effect of the division of labour. The difference between the most dissimilar characters, between a philosopher and a common street porter, for example, seems to arise not so much from nature, as from habit, custom, and education.” (Smith, 1776:19-20).

If a society does not avoid inequality of outcomes it should also accept parents try to influence positively their children in the distribution of advantages. We can imagine a society which blocks the mechanisms of transmissions that affect equal-opportunity and are not legitimate by parental partiality: for example banning private schools or economic inheritance and doing investment which try to compensate children for their parents' incapacity, such as offering help to parents to learn how to empower their children, introducing free nursery school to parents and so forth. Nonetheless, these provisions would not be sufficient to cancel relative advantages. At the same time, a society that denies to parents the possibility to motivate their sons and daughters presenting them well-to-do friends or introducing their children in interesting conversations or reflections would certainly be unjust, even if this would increase equal opportunity equalizing levels of cultural capital. In this sense this parental partiality, some scholars said should be considered as a more relevant aspect of social justice (Swift, 2002:19)<sup>32</sup>.

Moreover, the problem about how to eliminate this parental partiality also calls for considering the issue of incentive. Suppose that for the sake of justice we decide to block parental transmission avoiding bequests and passage of property. Then parents would certainly lose a strong incentive to create wealth and this would create some problem –even if we are not concerned with economic problems of efficiency- under the normative point of view, since it would reduce our possibility to help the worst-off. Therefore, it might be the best thing to do under a moral point of view, but after all it is not fully morally justified (Cohen 1995).

However, excluding such radical social changes here, the central question about how to enhance individuals' life chances is still at stake.

Once again, in my analysis I shall recall Rawls thought. He has dealt with inequality of life prospects when explaining the meaning of the difference principle<sup>33</sup> and he tried to square the circle

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<sup>32</sup> Swift highlights the lack of a theory of justice able to encompass this aspect. At this regard he said: "There is, as yet, little serious work attempting to identify which transmission processes are justified, which objectionable, and which morally required. What we need, on the normative side, is a theory of the family that tells us what parents are and are not justified in doing for their children, and what kinds of intergenerational transmission within the family we, as citizens, would be justified in permitting and preventing." (2002: 16).

<sup>33</sup> In TJ and Restatement, Rawls use the expression "life-prospects" as a synonym of "expectations". I am sharing this approach and, I will explain shortly, consider individuals' expectations as a key concept to analyze SM and life chances.

distinguishing two cases of application of the difference principle: in the first, the expectations of the least advantaged are maximized such as “no changes in the expectations of those better-off can improve the situation of those worst off”. In the second case “expectations of all those better-off at least contribute to the welfare of the most unfortunate” (1999:68). While the first case is defined as a “perfectly just scheme” and it seems to represent more a theoretical ideal, the latter is, according to Rawls, only a second best just arrangement, but it depicts –in concrete- the effective realm within which social analysts are generally called to operate (Gershuny, 2001:8). Indeed, when dealing with SM scholars are mainly focused on this aspect: inspired by a normative impulse, they devote highly technical studies to the analysis of the impact that affirmative acts and economic growth have on mobility as well as to assess how much a certain policies or event hit social stratification and income distribution over one or more generations. Nevertheless, what I argue is that too little attention is dedicated on exploring the fundamental mechanism on which the idea of SM and life chances are embedded, which is –as Rawls noticed instead- *expectations* which, in turn, depend, I believe, by an imperfect application of the principle of *reciprocity* in our society.

Reciprocity between other individuals and toward the community in which individuals live is a pillar of the liberal and democratic tradition: it deeply influences all the other principles which regulate what Rawls would call “well-ordered” society. In the next chapter I will retrace the theoretical foundation trying to clarify why reciprocity constitutes a *condition sine qua non* for a mobile society. I will argue that principle of reciprocity represents the normative basis from which arise a concept more frequently applied in social science, that of trust. I will therefore define the concept of trust and explain why it has an influence enhancing or depressing life chances and, hence, mobility. After this, I will pass to the study cases on selected EU countries in order to assess, through the appeal to individuals’ perceptions, the level of individuals’ trust towards distribution of life chance in their societies.

### **III. Rethinking Life Chances through Trust**

*Among the traits characteristics of the human being is an impelling desire for fellowship that is for common life, not of just any kind, but a peaceful life organized according to the measure of his intelligence with those of are of his kind.*

*Hugo Grotius, On the Law of War and Peace*

#### **1.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapters I tried to clarify the concept of social mobility giving account of the great importance assigned to it within academic and political debates, both for the positive consequences that it is alleged to bring, as well as for its intrinsic value of indicator of life chances in a liberal and democratic society where freedom and equality of citizens are reputed founding principles. Social mobility can be interpreted as a theoretical instrument attempting to capture the way and the extent to which these two founding principles find a concretization in our societies and, therefore, to give some account of the process of life chances distribution.

As recalled elsewhere, scholars devoted significant efforts in theorizing complex hypotheses able to grasp inner mechanisms of social mobility. On my account, what it is of some relevance here it is that, although the impressive amount of research carried out in this field, after a first and fertile period which has seen the emergence of the topic within more extensive theoretical paradigms, later on the overwhelming majority of the studies have mainly limited to two objectives: on the one hand, developing comparative studies; on the other, refining methodological problems related to the operationalization of the concept. Instead, limited attention has been dedicated so far to a more comprehensive approach aimed at grasping the more founding principle laying below the concept. Far from pretending here to propose an original theory of social mobility, I wish to offer some new

material to rethink about patterns and mechanisms of social mobility. In order to achieve this goal, I believe, it is firstly necessary to analyze the conditions that make social mobility possible. To this regard, I make appeal to the concept of social capital. This notion, I need to admit, it is not mysterious for scholars committed with the topic of mobility: the idea that our relationship with others have a meaningful impact on our future fluidity within society is –I would say- almost intuitive and it has been inflected in all possible ways: a widespread literature about the relationships with others, with a special consideration for the influence played by the so-called “relevant others”<sup>34</sup> (e.g. family members and relatives, friends, neighbours, classmates, professors and so forth), and an increasing interest on the mechanisms of creation, entrance to and exit from social networks (e.g. associations, party, social category and so forth) testifies a ceaseless attention to the concept. Moreover, the bond between social mobility and capital is a well-established one: many researches have been devoted to the various aspects of social capital and its possible impact on social mobility. We know, for instance, that weak social ties have shown to be the most useful when looking for a job (Granovetter, 1973) or that strong family relations tend to have negative effects on mobility for children coming from less advantaged background (Hutter, 1970). Nevertheless, while a great attention has been dedicated to the study of micro dimension of social capital (*micro*), scholars have not concentrated their analyses to reflect how the funding principle of social capital interacts with opportunities of mobility. In other words, social capital is considered, depending on the content given and on the related phenomena observed, to play a positive or negative influence on individuals’ life chances; nevertheless, I believe, a more profound reflection about the content of social capital can enhance our understanding of individuals life chances’.

On this assumption, in this chapter I reflect about the funding principles of social capital theory. In particular, I argue that reciprocity represents the primary norm of social capital and it is from its

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<sup>34</sup> For an individual, “relevant others” are “people who are close to him/her, i.e. the member of his/her social network. [...] the term “close” refers to a distance that may represent a spatial distance (i.e. neighbours are potential relevant others), but might as well represent a distance in terms of kinship, age, education, professional occupation, and so on” (Billari, 2007:63) or, in Coleman’s words, they are whom with “the power, collectively, to enforce the right” (Coleman, 1990:58) .

recognition and entrenchment in society that trust arises: trust represents, in my view, the ingredient to look at when analysing the distribution of individuals' life chances in democratic societies. Therefore, I assume trust as being a key element of social capital. In particular, I propose to focus on an enlarged conception of trust based on the beliefs that individuals develop through their interactions with other people (either close to them or unknown/anonymous), as well as with local and central institutions (such as public schools, officials, public offices and so forth). This generalized trust shapes individuals' expectations, sketching into their minds inner borders of their own aspirations and, lastly, reducing his/her life chances.

The chapter is organized as follow: I firstly focus on the concept of social capital and explain how its conceptual content stems from the principle of reciprocity. Reciprocity, I say, finds its direct form and concrete realization in trust: it follows that trust is the key element of social capital and that, despite classical theory focuses on trust as springing from a connection between two individuals, its nature is strictly social and individual's trust is applicable toward other individuals, as well as toward society in general. The centrality of element of trust within the social capital theory brings me to enlighten a new aspect of social mobility theory: social capital does not only influence individuals' life chances through the impact that his/her group of reference exercises on his/her "tastes" –Bourdieu would say-; or affecting individual's possibility to develop weak or strong social ties –according to Granovetter- useful to find a better job or to enter a certain close group. Instead, it is the level of trust that individuals, on the basis of the inputs received, develop along their life to influence dramatically their fluidity within society. Trust is based on expectations and these are determined by a precipitate of rationality and cognitive elaboration of personal experiences.

As I will clarify, this approach of analysis is far from excluding specific interventions and redistributions aimed at supporting social mobility. While, in my perspective, trust also become an element to take into account and, therefore, reinforcing individuals' mobility should also entail the establishment of specific conditions that provides trust to rise up.

## 2.1 Social Capital: an Umbrella Concept

I have already mentioned the theory of social capital and synthetically described the related hypotheses establishing a correlation between social network or ties and the probability for an individual to move within the social latter. However, I will now try to give a full account of this theoretical paradigm and to explain why, in my opinion, its heuristics extent and impact on individual life chances has been only partially considered and it deserves a greater attention from scholars and policy makers.

Social capital theory has focused an increasing interest of academic community in the last decades and in particular starting from 1980's<sup>35</sup>. Its great conceptual implications have been efficaciously noticed by Adam and Roncevic (2003:177) who said that “social capital has facilitated a series of very important empirical investigations and theoretical debates which have stimulated reconsideration of the significance of human relations, of networks, of organizational forms for the quality of life and of development performance”.

Crossing from the very beginning the boarder of a single academic discipline, it has captured the interest of economic theory: Becker, for instance, considered social capital as a good playing a role in the production of resources which have an impact on the agents' curve of utility, or in their productivity function (Becker; 1974, 1966). A social environment with high opportunities of participation and interaction reduces the average cost of transactions (Zak e Knack, 2001), similarly to what happens when efficiency of production is augmented thanks to human capital.

At the aggregate level, this mechanism has been considered a factor influencing the whole macro economic performance, providing a convincing justification whereas areas with other analogous

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<sup>35</sup> Despite the debate on social capital is recent, scholars widely recognize that the concept dates back to the beginning of the century (1916). Its birth is attributed to L. J. Hanifan, a pastoral education reformer. In his words social capital represents the empathy and feeling of reciprocal sympathy among members of a group or families. In particular, he recognized the fact that when there is this type of interactions among individuals “there will be an accumulation of social capital ... which may bear a social potentiality sufficient to the substantial improvement of living conditions in the whole community”.

features show significant growth differentials in their process of development (Cole, Mailath and Postlewaite, 1992, Johnson and Temple, 1998; Guiso, Sapienza and Zingales, 2004)<sup>36</sup>.

The relevance of the concept, however, has overcome the academy and found a fertile ground within international organizations: both OECD and World Bank, in fact, recognized social capital as a key component for a positive turn-out of every development projects and, on a macro perspective, social capital is considered a determinant ingredient to achieve economical and political objectives<sup>37</sup>: “it encompasses institutions, relationships, and customs that shape the quality and quantity of a society’s social interactions” (Grootaert and Van Bastelar, 2001).

Despite its popularity and due to its interdisciplinary application across the whole social sciences, the concept has deserved the qualification of “fuzzy”: “social capital provides a technological umbrella from grouping together an extraordinary diverse range of casually constructed illustrations” (Fine, 2001: 78). It follows that an agreement concerning the definition of social capital has not been reached yet, while different peculiar aspects of the concept are stressed depending on the context and the peculiarity of the analysis (Robinson et al., 2002). For instance, a scholar interested on organization focuses on the network a firm is embedded in and the resources this network provides, while political scientists will be more interested on different types of networks such as associational activities.

Under a different perspective, the difficulty to provide with a unique definition of the concept stems from its multidimensionality, given from its composite nature (Hean, 2003) and in order to give a full account of this complexity it is necessary to recognize these different dimensions.

For what it refers to other forms of capital, the social one has the peculiarity of being a type of capital which needs the others to be used. As Grootaert and van Bastelaer (2002) argued, it is the unique form of capital that cannot exist in a Robinson Crusoe economy, at least until Friday arrives on the island.

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<sup>36</sup> The social capital argument has thus been broadly used to explain the growth delay of post-communist countries in transition to a market economy (Raiser, 1997, Raiser, Haerpfer, Nowotny and Wallace, 2001, Rose, 1999, Marsh, 2000, Paldam and Svendsen, 2002, Evans and Letki, 2003), and to analyze the underdevelopment of poorest African countries.

<sup>37</sup> In 1996, the World Bank has also launched a “Social Capital Initiative” having as its first aim the reduction of poverty through a monitoring and an increasing of the stock of social capital. See Grootaert and Van Bastelar, 2001.

In other words, while other forms of capital, such as the natural or human ones are located with a particular actor and they possess them independently by their interaction with others, social capital exists in virtue of the interaction with other actors (as the word “social” specifies): “Whereas economic capital is in people’s bank accounts and human capital is inside their heads, social capital inheres in the structure of their relationships. To possess social capital, a person must be related to others, and it is these others, not himself, who are the actual source of his or her advantage” (Portes, 1998). Furthermore, since it exists on the base of repeated interactions, reciprocity represents a social norm on which social capital is built and shaped. Since a norm can be thought as a shared belief that actors should or should not to act in a certain way (Gibbis, 1965: 589), it follows that social norms, therefore, reciprocity, is a sources of social capital which is, in turn “(Social capital is) embedded in social structure and has public good characteristics” (Narayan, 1997).

At the light of the above, it has been asked whether it is correct to classify it as “capital”. Although the answer to the question is not so unproblematic<sup>38</sup>, we can affirm that the recognition as a form of “capital” seems to be justified by its specific function of facilitating certain actions of individuals within the social structure<sup>39</sup>. This aspect of the social capital has been firstly stressed by Coleman who pointed out that “The function identified by the concept “social capital” is the value of those aspects of social structure to actors, as resources that can be used by the actors to realize their interests” (Coleman, 1990:305). Similarly, Furstenberg (2006: 20) effectively remarked that social capital can be understood as the “stock of social goodwill created through shared social norms and a sense of common membership from which individuals may draw in their efforts to achieve collective or personal objectives”.

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<sup>38</sup> For instance, eminent scholars proposes to substitute the term “capital” with a more appropriate “community”, since it “explain social capital’s popularity, as it focuses attention on what groups do rather than what people own” (Bowles and Gintis, 2002, 422). A similar consideration has been raised by Arrow (1999), who highlighted the alienability of the “capital”, that is, its ownership can be transferred to one individual to another.

<sup>39</sup> Despite all that, as it has been noticed, social capital shows some negative effect. For instance, a dense network may offer crucial resources, such as richer information or ensure a higher compliance to shared values and norms reducing the transaction costs. However, as a consequence, a similar linkage can repress the individual liberty and reduce flexibility and restrain social changes (Nooteboom, 2002). Another negative aspect regards its tendency to develop bonding ties between homogenous individuals/groups, opening the path to phenomena of clientelism/corporatism (see Welsh, 1979; Christopulos, 1998; Putnam, 2000).

## **2.2 Development and Theoretical Dimensions of the Concept**

As it has been remarked, it is possible to distinguish three “dominant strains” of social capital theory (Lewandowski, 2006:16) which gather the work of Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman and, Robert Putnam. Despite the number of scholars who contributed to the development of the concept of social capital is much higher, the academic contribute of these three scholars have been extremely important for the development of social capital theory (the table 3.1 provides with a synthetic review of the concept according to the three scholars).

A classical dichotomy distinguishes social capital between the micro and macro level. The first one has as its precursor eminent scholars, such as Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman, in the words of the latter (1990: 302): “Unlike other forms of capital, social capital inheres in the structure of the relations between persons and among persons”. In the micro analysis the attention is on single individual or small groups and the “capital” is referred to the network within the individuals is embedded which generate certain benefits, generally referred as “instrumental sources of network”. Indeed, the network facilitates access to and exchange of information; moreover, it enhances enforcement of written and oral contracts, and strengthens the sharing of common vision and collective goals (Goshal and Nahapiet, 1998).

<b>Social Capital</b>	<b>Bourdieu</b>	<b>Coleman</b>	<b>Putnam</b>
<b>Tradition of thought</b>	Conflict	Functionalist	Functionalist
<b>Approach</b>	NeoMarxist	Rational Choice Theory	Communitarian
<b>Focus</b>	Social class (micro)	Network (micro)	Society (macro)
<b>Consequence of</b>	Individual strategy	Individual rationality	Social cooperative action
<b>Producer</b>	Shared Habits	Social Networks	Civic Engagement
<b>Who benefit?</b>	Individuals	Interconnections between individuals	Whole society
<b>Meaning</b>	Negative	Neutral	Mainly Poisitive

**Figure 3.1 Theories of Social Capital: an Overview**

The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has been the first leading scholar to provide a systematic analysis of the concept. In its well-known work *Reproduction* he noticed the existence of various forms of capital: economic, linguistic, scholastic and cultural, as well as social. His research focused mainly on the cultural aspect of capital: according to Bourdieu the culture represents the judgement of a dominant group that through culture tries to become universal and to impose it to the other group,

and –as a consequence- legitimizing its authority. However, it is in *Distinction* and, later on in his article *The Forms of Capital* (1983), Bourdieu clarifies better the concept and classifies the economic as the one from which all the other forms can be derived and have their origins.

Drawing on a neo-Marxist strand, he is concerned with disentangling the mechanisms through which the interactions among the various forms of capital produce inequality and move a profound critique of institutions as source of social capital and responsible of the reproduction of social inequality between groups and individuals. He sees social capital as composed by social relations that are not neutral: the amount and quality of them represent a resource and they are a product of a deliberate individuals' strategy. According to Bourdieu, social capital consists of social relations, developed in a more or less institutionalized context (family, group of friends, school and so forth), and linked to rights, duties and obligations involved in performing roles. "Social capital is the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1986: 119). Therefore, it is not by chance if individuals having a high level of other forms of capital are keener to set up more useful network of social capital.

At the end of the 80's, James Coleman revised the Bourdieu's conception, offering a rather different approach to the debate. As a supporter of the rational choice theory, his focus on the concept of social capital has mostly derived by his interest on exploring the linkage between education and social inequality. In his words (1990: 302), social capital has "a variety of entities having two characteristics in common: they all consist of some aspect of a social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure". Coleman clarified that social capital can take multiple forms, including obligations and effective sanctions, expectations, authority relations and social organization; moreover, certain aspects of the social structure can facilitate its development (e.g. the degree of closure and the density of a network of social relations). His rationalist approach allowed him to re-positioning the concept within the frame of the neo-functionalist tradition: in this perspective social capital becomes an important resource –composed by social relations- which permit actors to

achieve their goals. In this last point, his analysis is not too distant from Bourdieu's one. But contrary to what Bourdieu affirmed, Coleman considered social capital as by-product of other activities rather than a deliberate individuals' strategy and he also introduced the idea that it encourages the achievement of positive and collective goals, although he does not seize the negative side of close networks (Portes, 1998: 5).

When moving to the macro level the focus is switched to a whole society as unit of analysis, in particular, scholars mainly refer to a nation and they affirm that a different stock of social capital affects, for instance, economic growth, level of democracy and crime rates. In this view, social capital is an attribute of the society rather than an individual asset and it is positive since it reinforces the efficiency of local government thanks to the civic engagement of the citizens. Without any doubts Robert Putnam has been the scholar who more contributed to the development of the concept of social capital<sup>40</sup>. He explored the concept, under a communitarian view, as an asset of large aggregates<sup>41</sup> referred to "features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions" (1993: 167). Putnam's analysis (1995, 2000) focuses on the linkage between civil society and democracy. Social capital is "civic community" and consists of human interactions and connected norms, these two together affect the productivity of the community. In his first work the scholar started developed a hypothesis on social capital formation on the Italian regions. He observed higher level of social capital in Northern compared to Southern regions: on this evidence, Putnam advanced the idea that affirmation of municipality in the North of the country favoured cohesion among its inhabitants and with close municipalities, while in Southern regions the administration of the power based on feud and latifundium has discouraged interaction and mutual recognition. Putnam also tried an operationalization of the concept based on a *proxy* composed

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<sup>40</sup> The publication of his *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (1993), which linked the performance outcomes of 20 Italian regional governments to the horizontal civic associations, is the work that gave the major contribution to the development of a political and academic debate about the social capital topic. Similarly, the publication of *Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital* (1995) provided new strength to the controversy.

<sup>41</sup> Another influential author that approached the concept of social capital through its macro dimension of analysis is the well-known historian Francis Fukuyama. In his work, *Trust* (1995) he depicts social capital as an informal norm of trust deeply rooted among individuals and able to guaranteeing cooperation. However, this concept has been accused of being a history-dependent variable, a result of an ensemble of religion, tradition and customs that individuals' action can hardly influence.

by four indicators of the level of social capital observable in every society that are: vitality of associational life, newspaper readerships, electoral turnover and preference voting. The firsts two, in particular, are directly borrowed from Alexis de Tocqueville work on *Democracy in America* (1831). Unlike Coleman and Bourdieu, Putnam has been involved in the measurement of the social capital. Although he tried to integrate the micro approach -based on individual- with a larger communitarian one, his work has been widely criticized, not only for not considering at all the role of gender and ethnicities, but especially for drawing from not comprehensive indicators a generalized measure of social capital and –in so doing- improperly narrowing the extent of concept (Portes, 1998; Foley and Edwards, 1999; Fine, 2001)<sup>42</sup>.

This conceptual debate between a micro and macro approach leads to the creation of two literary strands which has generated confusion and a stretching of the concept which risked undermining the explanatory value of the concept itself. In fact, two major problems arouse: the first is the difficulty to distinguish between causes and effects: while at the individual level the study of the network can, to some extent, allow an assess of the effects of the concept in different social contexts and situations, in a macro approach the distinction between what it is exactly caused by social capital or not becomes much more difficult and some doubt of circular reasoning arose.

An even more crucial critical point of the concept concerns the competition between the two levels of analysis. Since, in some cases, individual social capital may threaten the macro one: this is the case, for instance, when personal social connections allows the individual to get access to a certain office or gain a contract or rather when being part of certain close and strong community assign benefits to its component but not to the society as a whole, as it happens in the case of Mafia or other racquets built on strong bonds.

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<sup>42</sup> The role of Putnam's study in the field is, however, significant. Although the weakness in the methodology of his studies, many scholars followed his path of research and replicated a similar operationalization of the phenomenon, introducing the topic into new disciplines.

How is this debate linked to the analysis of social mobility and individuals' life chances? The answer to this question is two-fold and it requires an effort in order to overcome the division between micro and macro and to focus exclusively on the content of the concept.

First of all, to our purpose it is useful to disentangle social capital dividing the *structural* from the *normative* component. The former is in fact referred to elements which are relatively objective and observable into social structure, such as associations, institutions, and networks. The latter, instead, deals with subjective and insubstantial elements, as it is the case of pro-social norm and behaviors that shape social organization. In other words, social capital involves *objective* associations between individuals and *subjective* type of ties: reciprocal, trusting and emotional (Paxton, 1999).

As I previously clarified, social capital is not a new concept for scholars interested on social mobility. Nonetheless, until now the topic has been approached only limiting the analysis to the structural level, while the cognitive one has been incongruously ignored. In other words, the notion of social capital has been understood as one of the variables of social stratification and its perpetuation within society, but its exploration has been reduced to the study of network of individuals and households and their associated values. It is crucial, instead, to complete the analysis of social capital, as factor influencing social mobility and individuals' life chances, looking at what we could define the normative element as opposed to the structural one (which is represented by more or less institutionalized network) and, therefore, considering that it is composed by "norms and values people hold that result in, and are the result of, collective and socially negotiated ties and relationships" (Edwards, 2002). In this view social capital is not reduced to the study on networks, while it derives from a concentrated of all those norms and human values orienting individuals' behaviour in his/her interaction with someone else. As it is presumable, these represent the result of structured and long-term social interactions among members of the community and they are also subject to a continuous renewing operated by its members as well as change of the social context.

The introduction of this level of analysis rises, without doubt, the complexity of the study, since it requires switching from the analysis of tangible to that of intangible; nevertheless, the mere study of the structure is inevitably incomplete if it is not supported by an understanding of the reasons why it is structured in that specific way instead of any other. Briefly, scholars' analytical focus on structure and its consequences has also hid the exploration of the origin of social capital (Glaeser et al., 2002), which is essential in order to enrich our understanding related to the analysis of individuals' life chances. As already clarified, in order to move some step forward and to enlarge our understanding about the normative element of social capital, we are required to abandon the micro-macro division: since social capital exists through participation and interaction in group(s), it can be considered neither as an individual nor as a communitarian attribute. Instead, it is useful to approach the concept at its meso level.

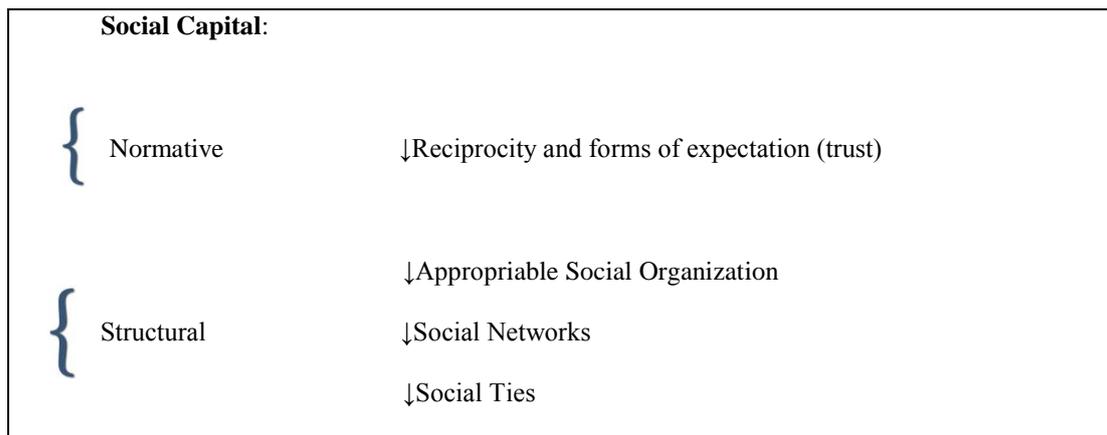
The meso conception of social capital has been introduced by Nan Lin, who has described the social capital as something inhering "interacting units", rather than individuals or communities. As she affirmed social capital "is the resources embedded in social networks that are accessed and/or mobilized in purposive actions with expected returns" and it "has two important components; it represents resources embedded in social relations rather than individuals, and access and use of such resources reside with actors" (2001: 24-25). This perspective has the merit to analyse the concept at a broader level in the forms of institutional, political and environmental capital which are the framework of individuals' life. Moreover, this approach allows us to overcome the criticisms of path dependency and persistence moved to the macro approach of the analysis where social capital seems immutable and determines the course of history, leaving to actors a limited margin of action<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>43</sup> See Bagnasco, Piselli, Pizorno and Trigilia (2001) for the critique to this conception of social capital. In particular to this regard Piselli wrote: "His (*Putnam*) vision of the culture and moral and civic traditions is pre-determined and static and it does not take into account the active role of actors. [...] The concept of social capital has been over-dimensioned and the history tailored on its basis" (2001: 66). Another eminent scholar who focused his attention on social capital, mainly understood as trust, his famous historian Francis Fukuyama (1995), likewise Putnam, he adopts a sort of deterministic view where history determines social capital and so the course of development, leaving to individuals a passive role of "super-connectors", using the term coined by Granovetter.

Sociologist Mutti has also moved some step in this direction and proposed a useful definition which focus on the analysis of individuals within groups, but considers their existence also at the aggregate level. In his view, there is no gap between the micro and macro level, since social capital is seen as based on cooperative relations which can be evaluated both as a resource or a constraint. Social capital is defined as “a network of cooperative relations (ascribed and achieved, formal and informal, inclusive and exclusive), supported by trust and rules of reciprocity and characterized by a relative stability over time” (2000:1). According to Mutti, individuals benefit from the fact of being included within a certain network as well as from cooperative norms developed within it; in addition, emerging rules also play a positive effect at the aggregate level due to interconnections with other networks to which the individuals take part (since all individuals in general refer to different groups: e.g. we can suppose that a Muslim teacher living in Rome will probably be frequently in contact with other teachers and other Muslims).

A similar conception can be found also on a more recent revision of social capital formulation operated by Fukuyama Francis Fukuyama which highlight in its definition of social capital the crucial role of norms affirming that “social capital is an instantiated informal norm that promotes co-operation between two or more individuals” (Fukuyama, 2001:7) and it has also affirmed by Putnam in one of his most recent study. He argued that social capital is represented by “connections among individuals—social networks, and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them.” (2000:19). Therefore, Putnam reaffirms the centrality of dense associated network since their presence in society –he argued- is correlated with higher levels of reciprocity and community cohesion, “an association unites the energies of divergent minds and vigorously directs them toward a clear indicated goal” (338). As I already specified, the connection between associational engagement and reciprocity has not been exempted from serious critiques, however, what it is of interest here is that even if reaffirming the central role of networks, the scholar openly highlights the crucial role that reciprocity fulfil within social capital theory.



**Figure 3.2 Sources of Social Capital**

Summarizing, social capital theory has benefitted of an extraordinary expansion of the concept among different academic disciplines, but simultaneously this has also caused a serious stretch of its content, menaced its explanatory value, and held back the emergence of a systematic methodology of assessment of the phenomenon. Within this panorama, different traditions of thought can be identified: I have quickly recalled the three academic pioneers of the concept; and, successively, I indicated as the classical dichotomy between the micro or macro approach of study ought to be overcome in favour of embracing a *meso* level of analysis. I finally proposed to distinguish between a structural and a normative element of social capital and, so doing, I moved a critique to scholars aiming at exploring the mechanisms of mobility simply relying on the analysis of the structural element of social capital. As an alternative, I propose to devote higher attention to the *normative* element of social capital and, for this reason, I decide to focus on a definition of social capital that privileges this dimension which, I believe, it is embodied by the principle of reciprocity and realized thanks to forms of expectation that we can classify as trust. Following this path of analysis, reciprocity and trust are the subjects of the next paragraphs, where I will also explain how they affect individuals' life chances and, therefore, they ought to be considered as factor influencing social mobility chances of individuals.

### 3.1 The Idea of Reciprocity: a Founding Principle for Life in Society

I have open the chapter assuming, for sake of simplification, what I could call a “right to social mobility” in democratic and liberal societies is directly grounded on the basic content of our social contract. In other words, individuals accept to respect rules –which comprehend the exercise of the political power of citizens over other- and to maintain existing institutions on the base of a liberal principle of legitimacy, which means that the power is exercised in agreement with a constitution which recognizes all citizens as free and equal.

The respect of the two principles of liberty and equality brings, as a consequence, that one of the way toward which these two principles are respected is precisely related to the fluidity of the community within they live, which grants them the possibility to move within the social latter.

Freedom and equality represent the two funding concepts of the liberal and democratic tradition of thought: a long debate, which can not be recalled here, exists around the two principles and the fact that, in concrete, the extent of one limits the other and vice versa.

What it is important in our reasoning is to recognize that these two principles are supported and completed by another one that in French Revolution has been defined as “fraternity”, at completion of the famous triad: “*liberté - égalité - fraternité*”. Thus, if we consider social mobility as stemming from liberal and democratic society, our attention in the analysis of the mechanisms which regulate our phenomenon should take into account that “fraternity” represents *de facto* a constituent element of our theoretical paradigm and it is, therefore, crucial in order to understand what it makes social mobility possible.

But, what do we exactly mean with the expression “fraternity”? I suppose this term expresses in other words what within the academic community is generally referred as the principle or norm of “reciprocity”.

It is not by chance if the criterion of reciprocity is seen as the fundament of the liberal principle of legitimacy since every democratic society should propose to its citizens a certain set of basic laws to endorse through a free political arrangement, rather than through coercive imposition or a con.

However, the existence of a principle of reciprocity is not new among philosophers<sup>44</sup> and among social scientists: the idea ought to be understood as being directly entrenched with the social human nature and the interaction among human beings. In order to go further on this discussion, I firstly need to clarify the content of this principle and to explain how it is related to the idea of a mobile society in order to sketch some consequences of this approach to social mobility.

Reciprocity can be generally understood as *the human disposition to returning back a benefit or responding with hostility to harm*. This common idea is normally recognized as a social norm taking various forms in diverse areas of social life. However, the general schema applied is that of giving and returning as a feeling of obligation perceived in response to someone other behaviour more or less conscious or interested.

This logic of reciprocal response to friendly or unfriendly action has been widely analysed at the point that it is today considered as a norm having a determining influence on social order; since it promoted pro-social behaviours and ensured the functioning of life in community. The idea of the existence of principle reciprocity has implications in most of the human and perfect sciences: ranging from biology to psychology, reciprocity seems to find application and regulate the natural as well as human order and a stable feature of the evolution of every society. For instance, principle of reciprocity is invoked by scholars engaged with the study of evolution in order to explain how natural selection can lead unrelated organisms to mechanisms of cooperative and altruistic behaviour under conditions of repeated interaction and sufficient information (Trivers, 1971)<sup>45</sup>. A similar path characterised our ancestors which gradually learn to accept to cooperate, making themselves exposed to risk, in order to obtain joint benefit on a long-term (de Waal, 1996; Boehm, 1999). McCabe (2005) argued that human

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<sup>44</sup> See, for instance, *A treatise of Human Nature* (1739) by David Hume, where in section V he openly referred to a principle of selfish reciprocity to explain human actions.

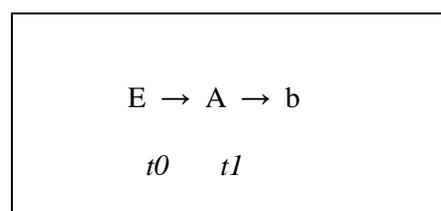
<sup>45</sup> De Waal experimented the reciprocal altruism studying the exchange of favours among chimpanzees in term of social services and observed how individuals who gave to other elements something of value were more likely to receive something back from the others (2005).

mind have certainly been subject to a progress of adaptation in order to tolerate complex commitments required to adopt behaviours of reciprocity, and that these actions have affirmed themselves since they cause “cool” mechanisms of gratification (in contrast to the “hot” ones which lead to an immediate gratification).

### 3.2 How is reciprocity constituted?

A wide-spread literature proves the interest concerning the relation between cooperative behaviours and the existence of a norm of reciprocity. Already at the beginning of the 70’s, Trivers specified better the rules of reciprocal altruism and identified the following minimum conditions for such a situation to happen:

- The action made by the actor Ego (E) should produce a benefit (b) for the alter recipient (A), but costly for E.
- A time interval ( $t_0$ ;  $t_1$ ) should separate the actions of giving and receiving.
- The existence of the benefit (b) and returns (r) generate by the use of the transfer<sup>46</sup>.
- The presence of a positive expectation from Ego of a future return from A.



**Figure 3.3 The core process of social capital**

These elements seem to be well summarized by Taylor when he affirms that reciprocity is “a combination of what one might call short-term altruism and long-term self-interest” (1971:28).

The conditions theorized by Trivers have also been tested by scholars moved from the interest to provide some evidence regarding the existence of a norm of reciprocity<sup>47</sup>. In this view, a significant

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<sup>46</sup> The transfer can involve material goods as well as symbolic ones; personal services; information or emotional contents.

<sup>47</sup> For an overview of the development of topic in social science see: Gouldner (1960); Hardin (1982); Axelrod (1984); Bicchieri (1993); Gachyer and Ernst (2000); Brosnan and De Waal (2003); Folk and Fischbacher (2006).

amount of social experiments have been carried out and their outcomes contributed to reinforce the existence of such a norm.

A classical experiment is based on a one-way game and it involves the participation of two individuals: actor A is endowed with 10.00 dollars. He/she can keep the whole amount or decide to send the entire or one part of it to an unknown actor B. Moreover, actor A knows that the amount he will send to actor B will be later tripled; while actor B knows that, at the end, he/she will have the chance to send back some of the tripled amount received. If the game is played only once (one-shot), the game will result with a non-cooperative equilibrium: actor A won't send part of the amount back to actor B, based on the backward induction that actor B will have no reason to send back to him/her some money. Berg, Dickhaut and McCabe (1995) conducted this experiment and found that the overwhelming majority of people playing as actor A sent some money to their counterparts. Among the 40% of the actor B who received some money returned to actor A more than they received and, on average, those who sent more than 5.00 dollars received a positive-return and vice versa<sup>48</sup>. A successive experiment (1999) has shown how adding a public (known by both actors) second round of the game incentive a more cooperative behaviour from both counterparts. In fact, it introduced the incentive for actor to set up a reputation: already in the first shot, al actor A send some money to B (around 30% sent to B the whole amount) and, reciprocally, the great majority of actor B returning more than the original money received, creating a classical "win-win" situation with a positive outcome for all individuals involved. Nevertheless, this relation of reciprocity changed in the second and final game: firstly, the few actor 1 who received a negative return from the first round, in the second sent zero to their counterparts; wile, although almost every actor A made a positive investment in round two, less then half of them received a positive return from their counterparts which show a considerable reduction of their reciprocity<sup>49</sup>. Another experiment based on a game which foreseen three possible variations directly based on actors' choice, has been carried out by McCabe and Smith

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<sup>48</sup> A similar experiment has been conducted on 1999 by other scholar in different countries of the world to make sure to test the result in different cultural context and, interestingly, the main outcome remained unchanged. While scholars found that an element that influences the decision is the opportunity to get in touch with the counterpart: indeed, even just to get some information or to know his/her face augment significantly the possibility to raise the amount returned. See, Buchan, Croson, Johnson (1999) and Yamagishi (2005).

<sup>49</sup> Harbaugh, Krause, Liday and Versterlund (2005) have studies the behaviour of children in similar experiments and observed how equilibrium of reciprocity are also achieved in interaction among children or teenagers.

(2005). Scholars found no confirmation about the fact that reciprocal behaviour necessitates a positive probability of repeated interaction with the same counterparts. While, evidences confirmed that reciprocal play is at least influenced from the threat of punishment by the counterpart. In fact, when the chance of punishment for the counterpart is eliminated, the rate of reciprocity in the game decreases.

These experiments allow a good simulation of what it should be typical individuals' interaction in close-knit groups (Skyrms, 1996; Gintis, 2000) and, as a consequence, they have the merit to show something about the complex relationship of reciprocity among individuals. Indeed, they show how individuals decide to own the risk to invest something on the basis of an expectation of a return based on reciprocity of the stranger.

Ostrom and Walker (2003) noticed that the degree of reciprocity overcame the predictions, but they also remarked how the outcome of these games are strongly influenced by contextual variables (e.g. to know something about the counterparts or to be acknowledged of the second round; prior experience with similar games). Overall, three main considerations can be drawn from these experiments:

- The first is the existence of a norm of reciprocity in human interactions.
- Secondly, these expectations are robustly influenced by environmental factors: knowing whether there is a second game or not to play later; getting some information about our counterparts; all these elements contribute dramatically to shape our expectations and beliefs, therefore, to determine our decision making process<sup>50</sup>.
- Thirdly, this reciprocity is shaped by a cluster of self-fulfilling expectations toward what the other will do (*trust*).

These arguments also deserve some complementary comments: *in primis*, the existence of a general norm refers to the idea that in all games the overall trend confirms a general behaviour of reciprocity

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<sup>50</sup> This consideration is also in line with the Coleman's and Piselli's idea of social capital as a "situational" and "dynamic" concept that it is not universal but need to be interpreted according to the context in which the individuals are called to act.

among individuals. This trend is also in line with the vision of a norm as a “grammar of social interactions” which affirms a “constraining behaviour” (Bicchieri, 2006; 2011), specifying what it is acceptable and what it is not within a group or a society. The enforcement of the norm is generally achieved through the recourse to a sanction, which can be social or legal, and works as a real incentive and encourage individuals’ to conformity.

However, reciprocity is one of the most general norm observable in society and, therefore, it can orient very general behaviour. As Bicchieri noticed (2011), the strength of the norm in term of conformity from the members of the group is generally related to its simplicity and its specificity: in fact, the more the norm is simple and aimed at settling a well-defined action, the more it has higher chance to survive. For this reason, in the case of reciprocity we can speak of a funding pillar, a general norm which inspires and simplifies life in society. Concrete example of behaviours inspired by reciprocity has been founded in all human societies and they seem to play a major role in our social life: from daily relations to commercial transactions, human interactions make often refer to this norm in a more or less conscious way.

*In secundis*, reciprocity stems from our self-fulfilling expectations: people learn from personal experiences as well as observing others’ behaviour and, thanks to these, a pattern of reciprocity arises and it becomes stable and replied by all actors in similar situations. This suggests that *what it makes possible reciprocity is what it can explain the fact that individuals accept to take a risk in prospect of an expected return in the future, which we normally refer to as trust.*

### **3.3. From Reciprocity to Trust**

As I already argued, reciprocity is a funding principle of every organized society and, in particular, it is crucial for the functioning of liberal and democratic societies where, de facto, a higher pro-social and cooperative attitude is required to the members of community.

Until now, we have mainly explained reciprocity as a norm applied within a restricted group of individuals, assuming that the concept finds its application to the interaction between two individuals. Briefly, a typical situation of reciprocity is the following “*A is kind to B. Then, B reciprocates kindness to A*”.

We need now to make an effort in order to extend the norm of reciprocity from a relationship between a limited number of actors (or, at the most to a close-knit and restricted group of people, as it is the cases of evolutionary game experiments) to a larger community, as it may be the case of the citizens of a state. At a first sight, we might think that the concept of reciprocity can not be extended to a similar situation. In order to broaden our perspective we need to make a step backward to refer once more to the use made of the principle by political thinkers.

When coming to political theory, reciprocity can be explained as a situation with the following features: when two or more free human beings, not having any moral or physical authority the one on the other (thus, being free and equal) and all being involved on a collective activity (therefore, being inserted in a social environment), decide to establish the regulations of that activity in order to determine the shares of costs and benefits deriving from that activity. Therefore, application of the principle of reciprocity requires a practice satisfying those principles in a way that people involved in that activity would plausibly require their respect in order to arrive to a mutual acceptance of the final outcome. In other words, a practice will be considered compliant with the principle of reciprocity if nobody of the people involved in that activity will consider his/her or other participation as being at his/her/other disadvantage. As it is evident the application of reciprocity, at least on a theoretical political context, firstly implies a situation of neutrality in term of authority that one person can play over the other, and, crucially, involves persons own fair pretension of what it is reasonable to get recognized from and to recognize to others (Rawls, 2010:42)<sup>51</sup>. The scholar also affirms the centrality

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<sup>51</sup> For instance, Rawls supposes that the majority of the members of a democratic society will be *reasonable* and, in other words, able to and aiming at respecting this principle of reciprocity: briefly, citizens must not only reasonably accept the basic set of public law, but it is also required that they can realistically believe that all the other members will accept to respect that set of public law. In other words, the criterion of reciprocity constitutes the basis of the legitimacy of the political system and it also represents the core of the assumption of

of reciprocity as being the principle shared both by justice and fairness. He pointed out that fairness is applied to the situations where people compete or cooperate and they also can choose to do it or not (in this case the expression “sense of fair play” is used), while justice permeates the whole spectrum of people’s life and no choice from them to accept it or not is required. Thus, the feature of mutual recognition in the case of justice is not present. Nevertheless, in order for justice to be fair, mutuality and, therefore, reciprocity is still needed and this implies that, also in the case of justice, individuals recognize each other as reciprocal, with similar interests and capacities and, therefore, they are ready to recognize justice as fairness<sup>52</sup>.

The idea of putting themselves in someone else’s shoes (Rawls would call this capacity reasonability) is always at the core of reciprocity. And, moreover, reciprocity constitutes a strong indicator of social capital level within a society. Nevertheless, as it emerges from previous research, its application finds a fundament in society only when this mutual recognition met a positive expectation and transforms the feeling in trust. This capacity is, according to many scholars, the crucial feature of trust: in other words, it refers to the “intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intention of the behaviour of another” (Rousseau, 1998:395). Similar situations can be found in everyday life and in most of the economic transactions: simple examples like the existence of a second-hand market of cars and the development of shopping on-line worldwide are a clear demonstration of possible mechanisms of reciprocity from which trust stems from allowing cooperation and mutual benefit.

In this view, it is intuitive to argue that trust is what it makes concretely possible to keep together large communities of individuals on the idea that the preservation of a highly structured and organized society is compatible with the openness and fair distribution of offices and positions among all its

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reasonability: since citizens who reciprocally respect themselves won’t attempt to enforce their own principles on others citizens.

<sup>52</sup> In an attempt to provide a more practical argument about the idea of justice as reciprocity, Rawls compares it with the idea of justice according to traditional utilitarianism, for which justice –he says- is more similar to efficiency rather than reciprocity. In this perspective, the assignation of resources to one part or to another depends exclusively on individuals’ preferences’ and interests. It follows that the satisfaction of a desire is the value that has to be taken into account by a hypothetical legislator, without looking at moral relations between persons. See, John Rawls (2010) *Giustizia come Reciprocità* in Rawls, Ricciardi, Del Bo’, Botti, *L’ideale di giustizia*, Milano: Bocconi Editore, 52. The idea to relate justice with reciprocity is, however, not new in philosophy. For instance, with due differences, it was already theorized by Aristotle in his *Ethica Nichomachea*.

members. In fact, in a structured and large society, we suppose not only to develop relationships of reciprocity and trust with other single individuals, but we also rely on the fact that this norm is, somewhat, shared and ensured through all the regulations and policies implemented and widely spread within formal and informal institutions. This general reliance on the functioning of the social and institutional structure can be defined as impersonalised or “general trust”.

In summary, *trust can be considered as a form of reciprocity which, in turn, also represents a source of social capital* (see figure 3.2). In other words, trust provides concreteness to the norm of reciprocity and constitutes a fundamental condition for human cooperation<sup>53</sup>. Having clarified these important points, it is now time to explore closely the concept of trust and to discover how higher and lower level of trust on society is directly interrelated with individuals’ expectations and risk aversion which, according to me, represent variables able to play a crucial influence on individuals’ social mobility pattern and, consequently, on his/her life chances.

#### **4.1 To the Core of Social Capital: Trust**

*The best way to find out if you can trust somebody is to trust them.*

*Ernest Hemingway*

When speaking about trust the first difficulty we meet is trying to define what trust is: an emotion, a feeling, a mood, an attitude? Chose an adequate term to describe it is all but a simple job, since all these expressions seems to represents just some aspect of trust, but none of them alone is able to catch its whole content.

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<sup>53</sup> As Bicchieri highlighted, norms are *local* concept (1999) and they assume an interpretation and a different prescription depending on the situation and specific conditions to which they apply. Nonetheless, “some norms are more local than others”. According to her, scholar trust is a norm where local attributes are particularly important: in most of societies –in fact- there are indications regulating the range of whom and to what extent should be trusted. The existence of such rules provides an explanation to different emotional responses to a lack of trust .For instance, any person will be very upset if he/she is not trusted, without particular motivation, by his/her partner. In general, trust is expected in any long-term, close relationship, such as labor or commercial relations (2006: 111).

Firstly, we can notice that it is certainly not by chance if a classic definition of trust is, indeed, directly rooted within the concept of reliance, understood as dependence: “a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon the positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another” (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt & Camerer, 1998: 395).

Even from this concise definition it is clear that the concept does not apply uniquely to bilateral relations. It follows that diverse typologies of social trust can be recognized; among the others a simple categorization would comprehend:

- trust in the partner of a transaction (an example is when I buy on Amazon a second hand book from a private);
- trust in the warrantors authority/ies (an example is when I go to vote trusting the rightness of operations or another example is when I give back some lost jewels found in the street to the police offices);
- trust in the environment (an example is when I leave my bag on a chair in a restaurant to go to the toilet).

Each of these diverse kinds of trust would probably deserve peculiar explanatory paradigms<sup>54</sup>, nevertheless, my aim here is firstly to introduce one general paradigm which could be applicable in all situations of trust arguing that it basically concerns a mental state that an individual, endowed with goals and beliefs, has toward a relevant event reputed to have a certain impact on his own goals.

Following my definition at least three points deserve a further comment. First, I have made refer to trust as a *mental state*. Indeed, trust can be understood as a *complex attitude* which stems from the elaboration of a personal set of beliefs based on knowledge, personal experiences, and perceptions. But conceiving trust as a mental state should not pass the false idea that its impact is merely limited to

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<sup>54</sup> Trust is often acknowledged among scholars for its elusive nature, this aspect is demonstrated by the great variety of explanatory models incorporating the idea that, apart from cognitive and rational interpretations, trust may stem from affective (emotion, intuition) grounds (see Lewis and Weigert 1985, McAllister 1995).

individuals' though; instead, as an attitude, trust has a relevant weight on individuals' choices and, so doing, it influences their actions.

A second important point regards the *nature of the beliefs*. When trusting, individual believes in something. But obviously these beliefs are not neutral; while they are rather based on esteem or on personal "image" or, rather, on what they repute being a reliable reputation (Dasgupta, 1990:49-72). It is from these beliefs that individuals produce the evaluation on the basis of which is rooted that positive expectation which combines his/her beliefs with a certain goal.

At the light of this, there is another important point implied in the concept of trust that does not emerge from the definition. It concerns the fact that each situation of trust always involves some degree of *risk*. As Hume noticed, it is "impossible to separate the chance of good from the risk of ill" (1978:497). In fact, in the act of trust individuals *bet* something, this "something" can be traduced in practice with *opportunities* -since he renounce to all the other possible alternatives- and costs, which are surely costs of evaluation but they might also be real investments in term of time, money and effort. Therefore, when individual trusts he/she takes two different risks: the risk of failure and missing its opportunity (missed gain) and the risk of wasting efforts (loss). On the other hand, distrust leads to dismiss opportunities. While trust incentives are the perspective to get benefits that it would be not possible to obtain or that largely exceed the savings from distrust (Hardin, 1992:155).

From these first observations, the idea of trust appears like a complex attitude which is a result of mental conscious and unconscious mechanisms of individuals. It is from these considerations that the analysis of trust as something rational emerged and found its way in the academic debate.

#### **4.2 Trust as a Rational and Learning-by-Doing Mechanism**

The rational conception of trust is a common and widely accepted idea in literature. Attempts to explain trust as a *rational human calculus* have been numerous and can be counted among both

sociologists and economists. For instance Coleman has founded his concept of trust on intricate rational expectations (1990).

Following the reasoning already started with reciprocity, a crucial feature of trust lays on the belief that an individual (trustor) has in the likely behaviour of the other (trustee). Trying to reformulate the notion providing it an operational basis, Gambetta stated that “trust can be defined as a probability assigned a priori that an action (beneficial or not detrimental) will be performed by other agent” (Gambetta, 1988:213).

This “probability” that the latter will behave in a certain way is generally called trustworthiness, and it can be seen mostly relied on incentives or on normative obligations on the basis of which the decision maker can act.

In general, the complexity of trust derives directly from trustworthiness. Since, the motivations for an actor to trust someone else can be various; while the problem is concentrated on trustworthiness. In other words, trusting someone in a certain situation can be explained with the expectation that the trustee will probably be trustworthy.

Trustworthiness is considered funded on incentives in case the trustee has a reason on taking into account trustor’s interests when taking a choice. An example is when the trustee needs to decide about continuing or not a love story. While, in case a moral commitment is what motivates trustee when acting in a certain way, it means that trustworthiness is, in this case, based on a normative element.

In other words, the trustor is called to make a Hamletic choice –to trust or not to trust- and his/her a strategic dilemma is not solvable without making assumptions about the trustee.

When we seek to exploring choices on the basis of a rational explanatory paradigm we are obliged to recognize three different factors. The first two elements are constituted by the *cost* and the *benefit*, since it is from the relationship between these two elements that each individual (in the position of being a trustor) will make an assessment and evaluate his/her vulnerability to trust or not to trust. Therefore, the trustor will seek to assess both the potential cost (PC) and the potential benefit (PB) deriving from his/her choice of trust, whereas the PC will be the result between his/her actual situation (status quo) and the worst payoff arising from trust (betrayal); while to assess PB he/she will look to

the difference between the best payoff resulting from trust (reciprocity) and his /her actual situation (status quo). The crucial dilemma for trustor is that betrayed trust produces a result that makes the trustor worse off than the status quo. The trustor must decide if this risk is worth taking.

The third and last element of our paradigm is taken directly from the above mentioned cost and benefit analysis, since it is the difference between PC and PB, this measure provide us with the value of the “*temptation*”, since it defines the range of gain and loss that both trustor and trustee evaluate, respectively, when deciding to trust or to be trustworthy. This last element is also particularly significant since it directly influences trustee’s expectation and it is a key indicator and predictor of reciprocity of the trustor toward the trustee (Snijders & Keren, 1999).

These three factors help us to better understand how trust always entails both expectation and vulnerability and, in other words, to demonstrate how the act of trust ids unavoidably related to the idea of assessing and taking a risk. As Luhmann remarked, without individual vulnerability, the expectation that others will act munificently would merely represents an “ordinary social prediction” (Luhmann, 2000). On the contrary, trust without a positive expectation concerning trustworthiness of the trustee is simply impossible and designated to the maintenance of the status quo.

The application of the rational paradigm to the question of trust addresses two main factors:

- some kind of knowledge allowing the trustor to trust (expectation);
- an incentive for the trustee to accomplish the expected action;

But while the first element (expectation) just mentioned practically refers to a pacific element of trust, the latter element (incentive) is more discussed in academia. One of the supporter of the second condition is Hardin who affirmed: you “trust someone if you believe it will be in his interest to be trustworthy in the relevant way at the relevant time” (Hardin, 2002:13). Hardin, in particular, has argued that this is possible when we confide on someone else who “encapsulates our interests”.

Nevertheless, to a better look, it seems that encapsulation of the other’s interest could be evaluated not as a key element for trust, while it could be considered (although not necessarily) a meaningful element for the trustee in order to be trustworthy. Indeed, trust does not merely entail the association with the trustor’s interest; while an essential element of trust is the expectation from the trustor that the

trustee will fulfil his/her trust (Barber 1983; Gambetta 1988; Dasgupta 1988). Therefore, the evaluation of the trustee's incentives is normally connected with the trustor mental mechanisms related to the creation of a positive expectation. Indeed, the debate concerning the exact mechanism of creation of this positive expectation is still open: some scholars highlight the need of a "good-will" (Jones, 1999:68). This will-based view takes its step from Annette Baier thought that a trustee who is trustworthy will be motivated by goodwill toward the trustor to what or to whom the trustee is entrusted with. In other words, the central element of the trust is here assigned to the *care* that trustor reserves to trustee and thanks to which his/her trust is distinguishable from mere reliance. Indeed, while in any rational paradigm of trust what it counts is uniquely to observe a certain action/behaviour which is conform to trustee expectation, independently whether this action/behavior stems from a selfish or altruistic choice of the trustee; in the case of a good-will view of trust, the trustor does not rationally rely on the fact that the trustee will act out in a certain way due to his/her self-interest (in this case self-interest range from the commitment to respect a social obligation or to the will of the trustee to show his/her accountability), but also because of his/her good-will and care toward the trustee<sup>55</sup>. It is not possible to analyse more deeply the wide-spread literature at stake here, but what it should be recalled it is that many other scholars affirm that this element *ex se* would not be sufficient to ensure trustworthiness: either, since they sustain that positive expectation toward trustee's good-will should be accompanied by conformity to social norms or to adherence to shared value (see Lahno, 2001; Smith, 2008); either since they argues that trust involves a situation of dependence of the trustor toward the trustee, such that the former is counting on the latter (Jones, 1999).

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<sup>55</sup> Baier highlighted how betrayal is the correct human answer to a non-corresponded trust; while in case of a lack of reciprocity in a situation of reliability we will not feel betrayed, but rather disappointed. In order to explain better the difference between these two conditions, Baier explains that we feel betrayed, for example, when we confide some secret to a close friend and he/she share it with others; while we would never feel betrayed in case our car does not powered on in the morning, although we rely on it every day to go to the office. In this study, the separation between reliability and trustworthiness is not at stake since, it my interest is mostly focused on the rational and cognitive theory of trust, as form of social capital and responsible for influencing individuals' life chance.

Whatever are the reasons that make possible this positive expectation to arise from trustor toward the trustee, we can be distinguished in three different typologies of interaction: mutual, one-way, and thick.

Mutual trust implies an interaction that derives from a series of associations between two actors, such that both have been called to be, in turn, trustor and trustee. A mutual relation of trust has the property to be auto-reinforcing, since both actors will have an incentive to be trustworthy and not to break reciprocity until the situation remains unchanged. This condition is instead missing in case of the one-way trust: in this case, the only way for actors to gain from interaction is that the trustor should trust the trustee. In case this does not happen and the trustor decides not to take the risk to trust the trustee, then the interaction ends and there is no alternative way to get the potential gain<sup>56</sup>.

It is from this assumption that Russel Hardin has developed the thick-relationship theory which is based on the idea that real relationships are generally inserted in a complex social environment where diverse interactions are developed and, therefore, each relation of trust is embedded within a ramification of past and ongoing relationships and actions which inevitably influence itself. For this reason trust can be better understood only if taking into account the overall set within the actors is inserted<sup>57</sup>.

Briefly, what counts in trust is what the trustor accounts for. In Hardin's words: "one's trust [...] is encapsulated in one's judgement of those interests. Some accounts do not specifically include reference to the trusted's interest in being trustworthy but merely requires an expectation that the trusted will fulfil. Adequate reason for such an expectation will typically turns on past experience to a large extent and on likely future incentives" (92:153).

Following these reflections, Hardin calls for a "street-level" epistemology of trust. It means that in order to explore trust for real people we need to focus on their capacities for commitment and trust,

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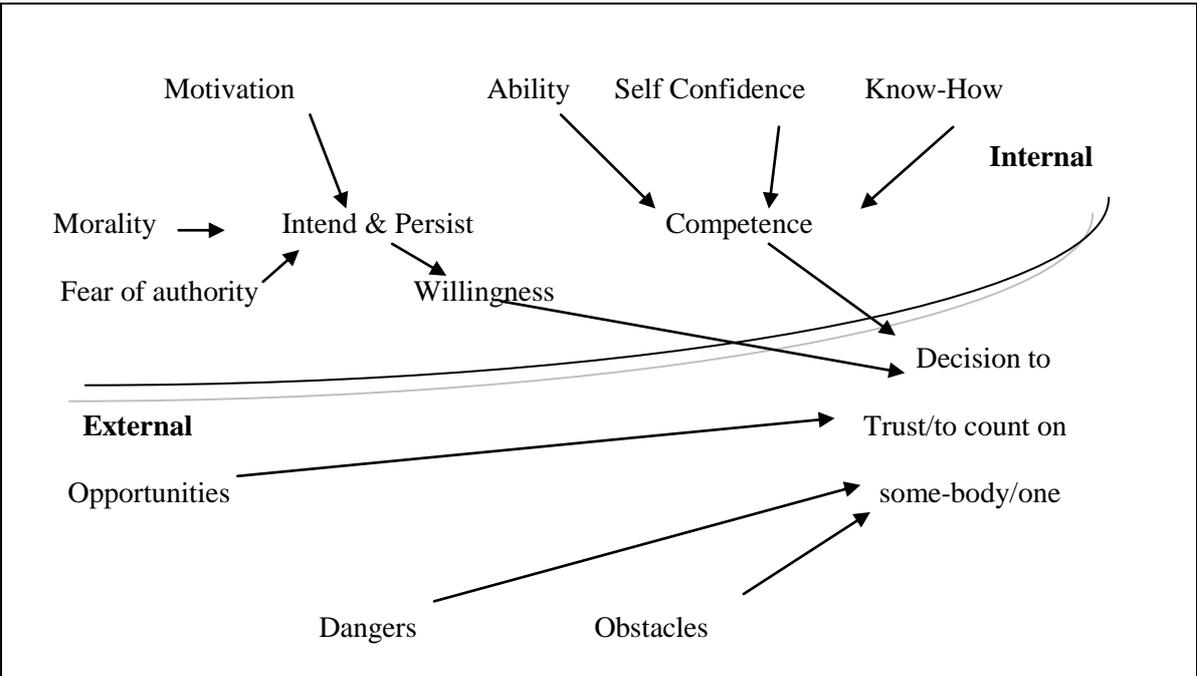
<sup>56</sup> A classical theoretical representation of these relationships of trust is that operated by the game theory through the prisoner's dilemma. In this case a one-way trust relation will be well represented by the classical schema offered by the Nash equilibrium, while a situation similar to the one indicated by the mutual trust is typically ascribable to the iterated games.

<sup>57</sup> In this view, Hardin highlights the value of reputation to be trustworthy in the thick community. Reputation, in other words, works as an incentive to be trustworthy since it affects substantially the social network of the trustee. Indeed, not only the trustor, but also the other individuals connect with him/her would probably react negatively to a trustee's defection.

which are mainly learned. We do not simply take the decision to trust or distrust someone, relying on a perfect unknown and assigning him/her the care of my interests. In fact, I will do this exclusively if I am in a particular situation such that no alternative is possible (e.g. I need to use the toilet in the airport and I can not bring with me inside my suitcase, I will ask somebody there to look after it) or under certain specific guarantee (e.g. I buy on e-bay a product on the base of several and positive opinions expressed from previous buyers and knowing that I will be able to affect his/her reputation with my opinion about his/her behaviour). If these alternatives do not verify, I will be reasonably sceptical and my precedent encounters with other people will probably influence my future judgements. In this perspective, we can say that the personal degree of trust in new persons/situation has been already learned (Hardin, 1992:155). Since practice shapes the psychology of trust, we could best understand trust as a rational state, which is enormously influenced by our learning-by-doing personal pattern. To understand trust as the result of our long-life learning pattern, lead us to accept the idea that our body of expectations and cognitive evaluations are responsible for developing a trust (or distrust) attitude and, therefore, our attitude to trust is also largely dependent not only on the external inputs we received from what we call our “relevant others” –e.g. relatives, friends, professors and so on- as well as from the social environment in general, but also on the expectations that the others have toward our expected behavior. Broadly speaking, we can affirm that cognitive evaluations and expectations influence the learning process of trust either facilitating or inhibiting it, and that trust is set up in a cumulative process that put together the progressive acquisition of information and the succession of different interactions and transactions with other agents in which trust is or not placed and reciprocated (Blau, 1968; Burt, 2005). This process, to Flap refers to as “shadow of the past” (2004), acts actively on our future interactions influencing personal expectations of risk, potential gains and scenarios of action available to individual’s decisions.

Until now, I have illustrated the fundamental elements which compose inter-personal trust as an essential form of social capital and reciprocity. In particular, I have firstly advanced a rational model of trust, explaining how the mental process to trust can be assimilated to a rational assessment of risks and opportunities. Furthermore, I have enriched this “cold” vision of trust, supporting the idea that our

act of trust are the output of a cognitive and cumulative process and illustrated the mental constituents leading individuals to develop trust thanks to a positive basic beliefs (expectation) toward another agent’s behaviour which is based on personal experience. Following my reasoning I would affirm, hence, that trust –in general- should be conceived as a state of mind which is composed by both an external and an internal element (Castelfranchi, 2011:10). The former refers to the external factors which may influence our cognitive development of trust, either playing a positive (opportunity) or negative (obstacle) role; while the internal element refers to the inner personal set of priorities, motivations, values and endowment which characterize the trustor’s personality (see figure below). The combination of these multiple elements and conditions leads single individuals to develop a unique personal attitude toward trust.



**Figure 3.4 Internal and External Trust (Castelfranchi, ISPRA, 2011 revised)**

From what I have argued up to here, it is possible to draw some conclusions:

- trust generally stems from a positive expectation of reciprocity which drives individuals to the assumption of a risk in perspective of a shared gain;
- trust is composed by a combination of internal and external factors which are combined according to rational and cognitive mechanisms;

- these factors are only partially independent the ones from the others: internal factors are influenced by external ones in a constant and stratified process of trust assessment.

### **4.3 Generalized Trust**

Following my line of analysis, it is possible to affirm that trust stems from interactions between individuals. Indeed, the dominant explanatory paradigms of trust rely on an inter-personal dimension. In this sense, it is not problematic to affirm that the core mechanism of trust obviously operates at micro individual level. But to a better look we can clearly notice that we currently deal with situations in which we do not simply trust another specific individual, but we are called to trust a whole group, or unknown person or, even institutions or companies or anonymous: as simple and daily examples we can think about the choice to put our money in bank instead of saving it in our wallet or to take public transportation to go to work instead of taking your own car; or rather to leave your bag on the chair in a restaurant when going to the toilet; or to allow your child to take a ride from his friends to come back home alone after school. All these cases illustrates how most of our actions in society entail a certain considerable degree of trust and, moreover, how higher is the trust and higher is our simplification and gain from living in a organized community. This aspect have been promptly noted by Kenneth Arrow who affirmed: “virtually every commercial transaction has within itself an element of trust, certainly any transaction conducted over a period of time. It can be plausible argued that much of the economic backwardness in the world can be explained by the lack of mutual confidence” (Arrow, 1972:343-62.). The vitality of a supra-individual trust has also been remarked by Simmel who affirmed: “without the general trust that people have in each other, society itself would disintegrate” (1990:178).

Therefore, we are often called in our daily life to trust “the society” we live in. Indeed, it is quite obvious that we trust society for almost every action we make as individuals living in a highly organized community. The idea of “social trust”, therefore, should not appear as a weird or empty concept, while it can be interpreted as a crucial form of trust which characterizes supra-individual level of interactions; it overcomes close relationships, such as family or friends, and simple

interactions between two individuals. It can be also affirmed that this kind of trust is a consequence of human progress and of the permanent human individuals' exposition to the others in current societies.

In this perspective, the idea of social trust has been defined as “the expectation of reliance that individuals in a community have on the basis of shared norms, mutual reciprocity, and cooperative behaviour” (Moreno, 2011). There is a “further element of socio-psychological quasi-religious faith” within trust (Simmel 1990:179) which Simmel describes as “an antecedent or subsequent form of knowledge, an intermediate between knowledge and ignorance” (1950:318); it expresses “a state of mind which has nothing to do with knowledge, which is both less and more than knowledge” (1990: 179).

I have already explained in the previous paragraphs, how trust stems from individual expectations and the crucial role played by norms of reciprocity and cooperation on this process. Instead, at this point I want to evidence the social dimension of trust and, in this attempt I remark here three different aspects that highlight the social extent of the concept: *in primis*, the fact that all groups normally show a certain enhanced degree of trust, with respect to individuals who do not know each other, is *ex se* an evidence of the collective aspect of trust. In fact, in each group a superior degree of trust is promoted by the fact that people which live within the same social structure tends to share –through a continuous exposition the one to the other in a process of socialization- a similar set of norms and expectations, and to develop shared beliefs and goals which, as I clarified above, dramatically impact on level of trust<sup>58</sup>.

Furthermore, the social dimension of trust is proved by the fact that trust emerges everywhere there is a connection between two individuals or two or more groups of individuals. When a contact is established each group will try to find the way to build the trust necessary to the good functioning of their connections. We are usually get used to think about group imaging it as based on a strong homogeneity, as it could be the case of people belonging to an ethnic minority or to a common social strata or, yet, living in the same neighbourhood; but this is only partially true: a consistent number of experiments have shown how the only fact to assign to an individual the membership to a group

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<sup>58</sup> Some key references for a insight analysis of the topic are: Hogg M. A., Terry D. J., *Social Identity Process in Organizational Contexts* (2001); *Handbook of Socialization Theory and Research*, Galford Press, (2006); Sztompka P., *Trust: a Sociological Theory* (2000), Cambridge University Press.

predispose him/her to a cooperative and trustworthy attitude toward the other members which is greater compared to the components of the other groups, even when the members did not each others before.

This last aspect can be better understood recalling the typology of social relationships proposed by Woolcock & Narayan (2000) who observed three different types of ties: bonding, bridging and linking relations. Whereas the firsts refer to the one observed in more homogenous groups (such as family or close friends); the seconds are entailed in more socially distant actors, while the third are meant to connect individuals coming from different social strata. Nevertheless, the ties existent among all the members of this group can also be recognized on the basis of relationships of trust bonding people together. Therefore, trust is not merely an attribute of individual relationships, while it rather can be referred to more or less formal groups and communities: it is evident that interactions between family members, volunteers of an associations, neighbourhoods, members of ethnical communities, and so forth, usually requires a certain trust for interactions. Furthermore, this trust will also be reflected in the level of social capital that they are able to transfer among all the members of the group. In this view, it is clear that trust is an attribute not only referable to individuals, but also to society and it is exactly when we extend the concept from intra to inter individual relations that we can also see social capital becoming a real meaningful concept. As it is evident, social capital arises from the interaction of human beings with other human beings. These interactions, I said, allow these two individuals to develop a mechanism of reciprocity. This mechanism is based on a set of written and unwritten and conscious or unconscious set of shared principles and, I think, it is the content of what political theorist would name “social contract”. On the basis of this the two individuals trust each others. This is the basic system of social capital and the same mechanism is in action when individuals develop interactions with a wider and structured society.

Although already referred to under many aspects as a property extendible to larger groups and society, the vision of a generalized (or social) trust as a crucial and funding element of social capital has been advanced by well-known historian Francis Fukuyama, who in 1995 affirmed: “Trust is the expectation that arises within a community of regular, honest, and cooperative behavior, based on commonly

shared norms, on the part of other members of that community. [...] Social capital is a capability that arises from the prevalence of trust in a society or in certain parts of it. It can be embodied in the smallest and most basic social group, the family, as well as the largest of all groups, the nation, and in all the other groups in between. Social capital differs from other forms of human capital insofar as it is usually created and transmitted through cultural mechanisms like religion, tradition, or historical habit” (1995: 26).

Social capital is equalized to the general level of trust of a state, resulting from ethical practices and obligations that single individuals’ have internalized through process of socialization within other members of the community. As it clearly emerges from the last sentence, Fukuyama’s vision of social capital is cultural deterministic: indeed, culture determines the level of trust in society which, in turn, affects social capital. History has stratified a certain culture and shaped habits and traditions which can not be eluded. Toward these, men can not found a space of movement and their actions, hence, appeared devoid of substantial freedom of determination<sup>59</sup>. While I can not share the Fukuyama’s notion of culture as an immutable and unceasing variable depriving individuals’ from their substantial freedom of action, I embrace Fukuyama approach to trust as *the key element of social capital*; in his view trust is applicable to individuals inter-connections as well as to communities and whole societies and represents a great variable for understanding social as well as economic social order. In fact, Fukuyama’s idea of trust is impregnated of the pioneering moral philosophy of Adam Smith who conceived society and social rules as indissolubly linked to its economic life. Therefore, where social life encounters problems, problems will also rise on the economic side, and the existence of this interconnection is most heavily affected by the single ingredient of trust (1996:11). Thus, Fukuyama identifies a clear correlation between social trust and development and explained the success and the well-being of national economics in terms of culture: “these communities do not require extensive contractual and legal regulations of their relations because prior moral consensus gives members of the group a basis for mutual trust” (1996:26). The author considered their functioning mainly influenced

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59 He states that communities are basically cultural in their essence, embedded into a “set of ethical habits and reciprocal moral obligations internalized by each of the community’s members” (1996:17).

by the degree of trust intrinsic to different societies and made a distinction between countries showing a high or a low degree of trust: in the first group he included Japan, United States and Germany; while in the second he focused on China, France and Italy. In particular, the scholar devoted numerous pages to the Italian case of study, as an example of how trust influences the increase of economic growth and knowledge empowerment and made an interesting parallelism with the Chinese case. He showed how the North and the South of the country, despite being subject to common national and binding legislation, have developed in a different way. In particular, Fukuyama advanced the idea that the main explanatory variable of this difference is exactly dependent on the level of social trust which, in turn, generates social capital. In his words: “economics does not predict the degree of spontaneous sociability that exists in a society; rather, spontaneous sociability predicts economic performance, better even than economic factors by themselves. At the time of unification in 1870, neither northern nor southern Italy was industrialized; indeed, a slightly higher percentage of the population worked the land in the North. But industrial development took off rapidly in the North, while the South actually became slightly less urban and industrial between 1871 and 1911. Per capita incomes in the North moved steadily ahead, and the gap between regions remains high today. These regional variations cannot be explained adequately by differences in government policy, since that has (for the most part) been set nationally since the emergence of a unified Italian state. They do, however, correlate very strongly with the degree of civic community or of spontaneous sociability that prevails in the respective regions. There are family firms in all parts of Italy, but those in the high-social capital center have been far more dynamic, innovative, and prosperous than those in the South, characterized by pervasive social distrust.” (1996:104)

### **5.1 Movable because Trustful?**

While Fukuyama’s theory remarked the importance of social trust for economic growth, I propose here the idea that the notion of social trust is particularly interesting in order to enlarge our understanding of individuals’ life chances distribution, and I shall now explain the reasons why the linkage between the two concepts is meaningful under my point of view.

I have previously explained how the idea to approach social mobility as a mere observation and quantification of movements between one social class and one income group to another is reductive. As a consequence, I have retraced theoretical perimeter of the concept and stressed how the idea of a mobile society is rather recent and indissolubly linked to the strength present in all free and democratic societies to find a balance between the concept of freedom and that of equality. Furthermore, I want to try to enlarge our understanding of the problem affirming that our attention should be focused on the *exploration of life chances creation and distribution*, and then focused my interest on the social capital notion to affirm that –leaving apart the institutional assets- a fundamental condition for a society to ensure a fair distribution of life chances is to support the development of a high level of social trust. I arrive to this conclusion on the basis of some considerations and, in particular:

-the functioning of liberal and democratic societies depends on their capacity according to ensure a shared balance between the principle of equality and freedom in a way that an acceptable distribution of life chances among its citizens is guaranteed;

-the principle of reciprocity constitutes the basilar condition of human interaction in order to satisfy the balance between freedom and equality;

-the form, par excellence, assumed by reciprocity in daily life and according to common sense is trust;

-trust, therefore, appears as the phenomenon to look at when trying to understanding the basic condition of human life chances in modern society.

This simple syllogism leads us directly at the core of the problem: what kind of relationship does it exist between trust and life chances?

As I said, my idea is that trust constitutes a powerful ingredient of social capital and should be considered as playing a role in the determination of individuals' life chances. If this is trust, our analysis of trust can help us to disentangle the intricate processes leading people to be or not mobile during his/her life pattern. Life chances regard perspectives about the future. These perspectives are, therefore, determined by the possibility that each individual has to visualize its "gain" (I use here the expression "gain" to refer to individual's desires and ambitions), but not only. Life chances are also

significantly influenced by his/her capacity and possibility (enablement) to make a correct assessment of what he/she can really expect from the future. I think this kind of process –which I will define here as “*image of life chances*”- is essential in the determination of individual’s possibilities of mobility and it is directly influenced by the generalized trust that individuals feed toward society. In this view, trust -as *positive expectation of gaining a return*- becomes the key-element of social capital since it crucially shape individuals’ life choices (e.g. deciding to enrol or not to university; leaving the old job for a new one, and so on). As Simmel noticed trust is not neutral for agents’ behaviour, rather, it is “a hypothesis certain enough to serve as a basis for practical conduct” (1950:318). This means that both when an individual takes –in a more or less conscious way- an important life-decision or even in daily behaviours; his/her beliefs toward the society within he/she lives inevitably and profoundly influences his choices and behaviours causing a reduction or, rather, an empowerment of his personal life chances. In this sense trust can also be represented in term of a “bet” that individual makes when he/she decide to trust. Since when trusting, all of us accept to take a risk. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to equalize trust to a gamble, since when we trust our choice is not merely rooted on blinded fortune. Instead, every choice of trust is –as I argued- based on a complex combination of rationality and beliefs which, together, create that positive expectation which proves to be fundamental in order to transform attitude in concrete actions. This mechanism is valid either when individual decides to trust another individual; either when he/she decides to “trust” society expecting to receive back in the future a positive gain as a reasonable correspondence to the efforts, investment and risk carried on. It is clear that here the use of the expression “society” is generally referred to the ensemble of norms, habits and set of more or less formal institutions that compose a social structure and which can be equalized, using an artifice common among political theorists, to the cluster of rules and conventions composing the social contract.

This idea of trust seems to be also confirmed if we look at the etymology of the words, at least when looking at the different root of the words in the Indo-European languages: indeed, the term “*fiducia*” comes from the Latin verb “*fidere*” which literally means “to believe in somebody or someone” but which also has a Sanskrit origin from the equivalent of the verb “to know, to understand”: this let us

assume that the belief which every act of trust entails is supported by a knowledge and, for instance, that it is exactly this element that prevailed in modern society and distinguish “faith” from “trust”, since faith is blinded, while trust is *ex se* critical and revocable. Revocability of trust is the element which is also stressed in the German etymology of the word, taken from the Gothic “*trausti*” means “agreement, alliance”, in other words, trust is something which concerns equals and, therefore, it is subject to arrangement and revocation and, as it happens for all agreements, it can involve one or more parties: exactly alike it happens for social contract.

In other words, I argue, living in liberal and democratic societies requires not only a certain degree of trust for interactions between other single individuals, but it is also required to develop a generalized trust based on expectations toward the community within we live and their adherence to shared value and rules as well as towards that institutions that ensure our life within the community; and it is exactly this generalized trust that play a role on shaping our life chances and future opportunities. Similarly for what it happens in self-fulfilling predictions, these expectations determine the borders of individuals’ vision of life chances and lead them to inefficient behaviours. In society where social trust is low, individuals are deprived of their expectations of positive gain as a trade-off of their reliance to the social contract and in the attempt to minimize possible lost, they develop distortive behaviours which are damaging for both their own life-chances and, overall, have a negative impact on the rest of society.

At a first glance, someone could say that, in case a low level of trust is at stake, individuals would better prefer to break up existent linkages and stop the social contract, rather than adopting distortive behaviors which ends up with reducing their own opportunities. Nevertheless, such behaviours can not merely considered as irrational: since, to a closer look they represent a reasonable answer elaborated – on the basis of information and external input received- to the lack of trustworthiness perceived from disadvantaged actors. As in a game where the trustor knows that he/she could get a potential gain from trusting, but he/she has the perception that no sanction will be applied on the counterpart in case of betrayal and, moreover, that the risk at stake is serious and the lost substantial, the trustor will –

whenever he/she can- decides to minimize the risk and –with it- to minimize his/her future gain, choosing to act within a limited range of “safer” hypotheses.

Similarly for what it happens to trust between two individuals, the funding elements required for a generalized trust are:

- recognition of reciprocity/conformity to a certain behavior/principle of the counterparts (or, in the case of generalized trust, of all or most of other individuals implicated);
- beliefs that this behavior/norm will be implemented/respected from individuals on both advantaged or disadvantaged conditions;
- existence of sanctions which reinforce the conformity (sanction in these cases are generally social: e.g. exclusions from the group of reference or loss of the retained status and similar).

When these three factors are equally shared among individuals, independently whether they have a more or less advantaged social and economic background, a high generalized trust can arise and, as a consequence, members of the community –independently from their socio-economic origins- put no restrictions to the development of their life chances, unless the one that they accepted to. This last point about acceptance of the limits to life chances is referred to the idea that –obviously- different liberal and democratic communities organize society under the classical cleavage existing between the application of the principles of freedom and equality which, in turn, lead them to adopt certain public policies and organize their institutions in a diverse ways. Nevertheless, I am arguing that, previous to institutional architectures and political assets, only in societies where above mentioned conditions are respected and general trust is promoted, individuals can maximize their development of life chances.

In brief, all liberal and democratic societies ought to protect and promote citizens’ life chances firstly ensuring a high level of generalized trust.

Furthermore, since social fluidity involves, *ex se*, a change and a modification of an initial position (in the case of social mobility the change, involved, is generally referred to our previous occupation, or to the one occupied by our parents) which is fixed and known and, therefore, “sure” in change of a new potential one which is unknown and “unsure”. A change will be, therefore, searched by individuals if

and only if a positive expectation will arise with respect to the existence of two clear conditions: perspective to gain a more satisfying position, and expectation that this perspective has good chances to be realized. To this positive expectation will always correspond a certain risk: as argued by Moreno (2011) the trustor can rely on trustee's trustworthiness on the base of reciprocity (in case the trustor knows that the trustee will be found in the medium or short time in the same position and, therefore, he/she has an interest in cooperating); or shared values and cooperation (which stems from the threat of the trustee to be subject to a sanction). In the case of individuals' life chances, in liberal and democratic societies, these mechanisms ought to be preserved in order to support preservation and promotion of the positive expectations. As I affirmed, this objective ought to be pursued providing to individuals' elements enhancing those beliefs which feed up these expectations, but –at the same time– attentively avoiding the elimination of risk, which constitutes the real stimulus and reduce free-riding behaviors.

## **5.2 Trust and Educational Choices**

Before moving to the last chapter, I want to introduce an example in order to explain how trust constitute a powerful and tangible element of social capital and, in so doing, is able to enlarge and restrict personal life chances' affecting individuals behavior, in a very similar way to what it happens with trust toward other individuals.

To illustrate my hypothesis I will take as an example the individuals' choice to stay or not in education after the end of compulsory school. As a general premise, we should give account of the fact that today education is widely considered in all liberal and democratic societies as the key and privileged tools for the enlargement of life chances. In fact, a classical theory about social mobility is represented by the alleged crucial role assigned to education as a means of mobility. Indeed, an impressive amount of research have been devoted to study the effect that recent phenomenon of enlargement of higher education to lower social strata had on social mobility rates, with results that are less clear than

expected and not always supportive of the intuitive casual relation: *higher level of education* → *higher probability of mobility*.

The alleged linkage between the two variables is, as I said, intuitive: if mobility should be seen as the result of individuals' abilities and technicalities, the position covered by every person should ideally reflect these personal features. It follows that education –and, in particular, university degree, as higher level of education- would represent the most secure investment to ensure people to become what they wish to and, as a consequence, one would expect a massive participation to education followed by a very high turn over in social positions, especially in those countries where education is accessible –both under geographic and economic perspective- to the overwhelming majority of citizens. Nevertheless, to closer look things seem to go rather differently from what expected. After the end of II World War, scholarization average level in all economically advanced countries has permanently increased. In these countries primary and secondary education today has become almost universal and even the higher stage of schooling process has raised impressive rates of participation. In this perspective, it has become widely accepted to speak about “mass access” to higher education. As it has been noted, “we refer to “massification” as the process by which academic systems enrol large numbers –and higher portions of the relevant age group- of students in a range of differentiated academic institutions”<sup>60</sup>.

Nevertheless, looking through the Eurostat and OECD statistics<sup>61</sup>, we may observe that, with few exceptions, there is still a persistent percentage of the population which does not take part to or does not complete the higher stage of the educational processes<sup>62</sup>. *Prima facie*, these data might appear not

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<sup>60</sup> A clear refer towards a mass access to the university has also been theorized and studied by other scholars, among the others: Ulrich Teichler, Massification: a challenge for Institutions of Higher Education, *Tertiary Education and Management*, 1998, vol. 4, n.1, pp.1-27; Ulrich Teichler, Massification and Diversity of Higher Education Systems: Interplay of Complex Dimensions, *Higher Education Policy*, 2007, n. 20, pp. 373-389; Dennis Hayes and Robin Wynyard, *The McDonaldization of Higher Education*, 2002, Westport Conn. Bergin & Garvin; David Palfreyman and Ted Tapper, *Understanding Mass Higher Education: Comparative Perspective on Access*, Routledge, 2004; Sarah Guri-Rosenblit, Helena Sebkova, Xing-Ming Chen, Massification of higher Education and Equality of Education, *Heilongjiang Researches on Higher Education*, 2003.

<sup>61</sup> To this regard the same report over mentioned (see note n.2, p. 6) states: “Globally, the percentage of the age cohort enrolled in tertiary education has grown from 19% in 2000 to 26% in 2007, with the most dramatic gains in upper middle and upper income countries. There are some 150.6 million tertiary students globally, roughly a 53% increase over 2000”.

<sup>62</sup> Educational attainment refers to the highest level of education completed by each person, shown as a percentage of all persons in that age group. On average, among the 23 OECD countries for which data are

problematic since tertiary education is not compulsory and it is aimed to provide individuals a strong level of specialization, therefore, it is not to be taken as a benchmark for the whole population. Nonetheless, the most striking fact about this data is not, *ex se*, that there is a part of the population which does not participate to tertiary education, but that it has been systematically shown that people which do not take part to higher education are much more strongly likely to come from a poor socio-economic background and that –in case they decide to go forward in their education path- they will have an higher probability to not accomplish their studies compared to people coming from a higher socio-economic milieu (Jaeger and Holm, 2003; Iannelli and Paterson,2005; Furlong and Cartmel, 2009, Yelland, 2011). This statement can be considered intuitive, but it might still appear not so uncomplicated if we consider that data about differentials in educational attainment across social classes has been subjected to little change over the years (Shanvit and Blossfeld, 1993; Breen, Luijks, Muller and Pollak, 2009)<sup>63</sup>.

In an attempt to analyse this social dilemma we should now try to make an effort and consider the situation of two young individuals, one coming from a poor socio-economic background and the other coming from an advantaged socio-economic background, both taking their decision about enrolling or not to university and showing very similar performance in terms of school GPA (Grade Point Average).

I might firstly sustain, without major doubts to be contradicted, that their decisions will be firstly determined by a cluster of external and internal factors interacting one with the other and that are

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available, some 30% of students in university-level education do not graduate from the programme they enter. In the most recent analysis, dated March 2010, Eurostat showed how: “In 2008 only 26 regions in the EU (out of 271) recorded a proportion of persons with higher education above 35%. In EU Member States such as Ireland, Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany educational attainment levels are generally high across the whole country. The regions with the lowest percentages of people with tertiary education are largely concentrated in the rural parts of nine EU countries, in marked contrast to their larger cities. This is the case in Portugal and Romania in particular and also in Greece, Italy, Hungary, Croatia, Turkey, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia”. For further information see, OECD, 2010, *Education at a Glance*; Eurostat, *Europe in figures, Yearbook 2008*, Eurostudent – Eurostat, 2009, *The Bologna Process in Higher Education in Europe*.

<sup>63</sup> In a well-known research involving 13 countries, Shanvit and Blossfeld reported stability of socio-economic inequalities in educational attainment over much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and found a decrease in class inequality in education only in Sweden and Holland. This stability has been questioned by Muller, Luijks, Breen and Pollak, although their research has confirmed the overall negative outcome in most of the countries analysed.

usually classified as primary and secondary effects, according to the distinction proposed by Boudon (1974) and widely accepted by sociological and economic literature.

Primary effects show their direct influence of family background on pupils' academic ability with children from advantaged backgrounds on average having higher ability than children's coming from disadvantaged social classes (this is due to differences in social, economic, cultural resources). While secondary effects pertains the impact that relate social backgrounds can have on actual scholastic achievement and educational choice given academic ability, over and above those directly observed as primary effects (Dardanoni, Forcina, Modica, 2009:20) and for this reason secondary effects basically depends on choice made by pupils and their families (Schindler and Reimer, 2008). As stated by John Goldthorpe, "A number of studies, from different periods and places [...] have shown that even when ability levels held constant, children are more likely to enter longer-term and more academic courses, the more advantaged the class origins from which they come". One of the most preminent confirm of the existence of secondary effects concerns the widely proved trend of students with similar level of academic performances, but different social classes' origins, pursuing systematically different educational outcomes" (Goldthorpe, 1996:482)<sup>64</sup>.

Nevertheless, I argue, apart from primary and secondary "social class effects" the university choice is powerfully and hidden influenced by our trust to get a reasonable reward from them. With this I mean to say that, given a certain advantaged and disadvantaged background and taking into account the fact

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<sup>64</sup> This has been demonstrated by several studies. See in particular, Micklewright which has tested class differentiation in educational choices in the United Kingdom (1989) and found that family background was the most important variable influencing the probability in deciding between continuing or leaving school after compulsory studies: he analysed the top 10% talented students and proved that, for those with a lower social-economic background, the probability of leaving is around 30%. While as those with professional parents the probability of leaving the education system was practically insignificant.

In the same perspective, Duru-Bellat (1996) studied French education system. He found that, at the same level of academic performances, inequalities in choice account for 30% of class difference in education. Another research has been carried out by Erikson and Jonsson (1996) in their empirical investigation of the Swedish case. These and successive analyses confirmed that students with higher social-economic origins are more likely to make the transition to higher secondary school than are students of working-class background at all levels of GPA, furthermore, they estimate that primary and secondary effects each accounts about 50% of class differences in educational outcomes. Another study has been recently developed by other scholars (Yaish, Erikson, Goldthorpe, 2007) to analyse the transition of English and Welsh students covering the extensive period from 1974 and 2001. They found that both primary and secondary effects play an important role on individuals' path. Firstly, class differentials have an impact on students' academic performances. Additionally, class differentials also persist in transition propensities at all level of academic performances, showing their most strong effect especially at the intermediate levels. Overall, they estimate secondary effects of class differentials as accountable for between a quarter and a half of the transitions analysed.

that public policies have a direct effect on balancing the opportunity to make or not a certain choice; the individuals, in making their choice, will always be influenced by their expectations about what they could get from a certain investment and only in case they will have a full positive expectation they will decide to expend all their material and immaterial resources in change of a future gain.

For instance, students could also live in a country where education is free or highly incentivized, but when there are very few expectations that the attainment of a certain degree will increase the opportunity to obtain a certain job or position, individuals will be strongly discouraged to trust the system and to get engaged on further education. Of course, our discourse is a simplification of a real similar situation, since in reality things will be more complicated and individuals would take their choice on the basis of several conditions and –one would say- the influence of their socio-economic background will also be counter-balanced by an institutional organization of the educational system, which might encourage or discourage disadvantaged students to stay in education. In other words, the institutional organization of education (its structure, monetary or other kind of incentives such as taxes exemption, availability of grants based on income or/and merit, open or restricted access, students accommodation; access to discounts for public transportation or books, and so forth) can certainly constitute an influencing variable affecting the individuals' decision to enrol to university or not. Since a life decision of this kind would certainly involves considerations related to family and individual budgetary needs, as well as the will to move in another town to attend a certain program and, possibility to receive a grant or to pay or not tuition-fees and so on. But, I would insist, that even in case the institutional architecture is particularly oriented to guarantee the access to people coming from a less advantaged milieu, the choice to stay in education will certainly be not “fully embraced” in case students are not persuaded that education will enlarge their life chances. When I use the expression “fully embraced” I refer to the fact that even in condition where a strong state intervention in higher education for the implementation of a free and public university system, students will have their life chances constrained in case they could not expect the system is trustworthy and their participation will lead to achieve a certain position. Therefore, in order to minimize their risks the students in such a situation will probably decide to behave in a way that try to maximize the short term

benefits and minimize the future loss: in fact, the limit or the absence of positive expectation (*trust*) will bring them to behave in a rational way, but in this condition their rationality will cause strong distortions and even neutralize the expected effects of public redistributive policies.

Briefly, in order to get individuals fully engaged on a university program a minimum requirement would be that they expect that this choice will broaden up their chances to be socially fluid. Indeed, the individual's development of a positive expectation concerning the value of being engaged on a university program as mean to enlarge his/her own life chances exercises a crucial and prior importance in his/her choice. In this perspective, trust can also be considered as a sort of preliminary and enabling condition in order to allow individuals to take a "free choice": this is valid for what it concerns getting or not enrolled to a university program, as well as other choices. This last argument, I want to highlight, is valid also in case individuals make their university choice in an institutional framework which guarantee an access to education through grants, free services or other kind of incentives: since all possible public measures can not eliminate the basic element of risk which is implied in engaging in a university program and that determines a necessary investment in term of material and immaterial resources that individuals should reserve to this goal rather than any others. Indeed, what we can expect to happen in a situation where individuals are called to take such a choice, having a low degree of trust about the future rewards they will receive, but with the perspective to benefit of strong incentives in case they decide to engage: a standard behaviour in such a case will probably be to decide –whenever possible- to enrol to a university programme on the basis of a logic aimed at taking advantage of the state incentives provided as far as this is possible (i.e. non or low tuition-fees; access to low cost or free accommodation; discount for public transportation and so forth), and in the meanwhile trying an exit option which will probably be looking for a job that allow them at least to have open an alternative path in case the university choice does not provide expected results. The more common consequence of this kind of "two-feet-in-one-shoe" strategy is very frequently a high percentage of students that at some point decide to drop out the university (because they end up to consider university as a waste of time and since they do not receive or need anymore the incentives related to the status of being a students) combined with another substantial percentage

of students that take a long time to achieve their degree (since they have considered prior to preserve/look for a job, which tarnished their time dedicated to university). As it is clear, in my example, the low level of trust is firstly hitting students with a poor socio-economic background: this is true since we can imagine that these students generally take their choice in a condition that *ex se* is more risky, in fact due to primary and secondary effects recalled above, they generally have a more restricted range of choices to move into. Nevertheless, as I clarified, this range of action can be adequately enlarged by appropriate interventions aimed at equalizing the “level of the playing field”, but this equalization is not really efficient when a low level of trust is at stake. Not only, I believe that a situation of low trust ends up with having a negative impact and reduce not only life chances of less advantaged individuals but also those of people with a richer background. Indeed, in our case of analysis: in a situation of low trust also more advantaged students will find their life chances restricted since –even if not having the need to deal with aspects related to budgetary or financial requirements, and even if generally receiving more stimulus and social incentives to stay and devote their efforts to university study- in case their expectations about the future reward of the university investment are reduced they will probably tend to minimize their risk and to rely on other form of investment that appear to be more trustworthy: in other words, they will probably tend to restrict their choices in areas where they can rely on inter-personal linkage of trust. In a similar situation, there will be a relevant percentage of the lawyers’ sons/daughters to enrol to the faculty of Law or either of doctors’ sons/daughters to engage into a medicine faculty. Of course, such an hypothesis can not be interpreted as if all the sons/daughter that decide to engage on a similar education path of their parents do this on the basis of a low trust and with the intent to minimize their risk; for instance, there will certainly be a consistent percentage of them which will take this decision on the basis of the passion and enthusiasm transmitted by their parents. Nevertheless, where the percentages of this kind of transmission are very high (also compared to the other countries with similar institutional framework) I would advance the idea that a low generalized trust is spread among individuals and, as a counter-balance to it, strong ties of inter-personal trust are present and act as a substitute of broader one,

inevitably affecting shape and dimension of individuals' life chances and their consequent possibility of social mobility.

### **6.1 The Antagonism between Inter-Personal and Social Trust and its Consequences for Life Chances**

In the previous paragraphs I have explained how the idea of trust is, or rather, ought to be extended to a general notion of trust in modern society and, I argue, social trust constitutes the most meaningful dimension to look at when exploring the linkage between life chances and trust. As it is evident, being socially mobile entails a capacity of individuals to break with his/her micro environment (routine interactions) and to enlarge his social space of reference. Therefore, the trust we are interested to understand cannot simply be the kind of trust individual agents have toward the members of their groups of reference (so-called "relevant others": ranging from friends, parents and other relatives, classmates and so on), but we should rather focus on the trust individuals show toward society in general and, that it is generally revealed when they take decisions which are decisive to orient their life in a sense or another. It is for this reason that our analysis cannot be focused on merely *micro* human interactions (between single individuals), but it should be better aimed at capturing a *meso* social dimension, which is the one between interacting units inserted in a large community, as I previously explained. This dimension is the one I am interested on: in fact, in order to account for trust as a factor influencing individual life chances' it is evident that our focus cannot be limited to the micro dimension. Indeed, the need to enlarge our horizon of analysis is directly required by the same phenomenon we aim at understanding. This kind of "generalized", or "social", trust plays a fundamental role in shaping and defining *a priori*, individual's life chances, since it largely influences beliefs and perceptions that individuals have toward the opportunities they have to achieve certain goals and obtaining expected gains. As I clarified, I want to stress once more that individuals' expectations do not stem from another world and are only partially the result of an individual endowment; while, they are reasonably affected by a set of external factors (i.e. individuals'

background, experiences, and observations of the social environment where they live, as well as by their perceptions of social dimensions they aspire to become part). After having illustrated my hypothesis of a link between trust and life chances I introduce in the next paragraph a fitting example which would help me in the attempt to clarify the relationship between trust and life chances in modern societies. Nevertheless, before moving forward, I need to spend some words to clarify the relationship existent between inter-personal and social trust.

As I affirmed, a basic condition for social fluidity is firstly related to the possibility for individuals to trust and to develop a positive expectation about a future reward with respect to a certain behavior. Nevertheless, I argue, the opportunity to develop such positive expectation is related to the development of a *general* trust spread in the whole society, this is another crucial point I need to clarify. What I am trying to say is that the existence of basic relationships of trust between two individuals are not sufficient to ensure social fluidity and open life chances, while the correlation between life chances and trust is referred to the trust individuals develop toward societies, rather than toward single individuals. Not only, going forward it would be correct to observe that an inversion correlation exists between micro or macro relations of trust with respect to the empowerment of life chances. Although an in-depth analysis on this point would require a larger space, what it is interesting here to note it is that the more strong relationships of trust exist at the micro level within individual, the weaker generalized trust will be. The reason to explain this phenomenon is that the more individuals will tend to confide on other close individuals, the less a spread trust toward society would emerge.

Since inter-personal trust tend to be developed with other individuals close or sharing our same economic and social conditions (e.g. family, sons of parents' friends, neighbors), it would be much more difficult for individuals to break up with their current situation in order to reshape personal life paths independent from the safe and prevalent linkages of trust.

Furthermore, it is also necessary to affirm that, in some cases, stronger micro relationships of trust might often emerge as a consequence of missed conditions able to ensure generalized trust. In case this

happen individuals' life chances will be strongly reduced since individuals will be almost obliged to adjoin their positive expectations within the ones offered by their trustees.

But this is not, I ought to argue, the only negative consequence a situation where micro relations of trust prevail over generalized trust. In fact strong inter-personal relations of trust might also harm life chances in a rather indirect way, which is by producing individuals' behavior of trust that have a negative impact over other members of the community and their life chances. I am now referring to phenomenon of corruption or organized crimes that scholars have frequently described as "negative aspect" of social capital. Indeed, where basic conditions of social trust are not respected, individuals are lead to concentrate their relationships of trust on that developed with the individuals closest to them. In particularly difficult situations these relationships can develop forms of trust which cause further damages to the social one.

A peculiar observation of this phenomenon has been described by Edward Banfield in his *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*, published in 1958 and based on a research conducted in a small village located in the Italian Southern region of Basilicata, Chiaromonte, which the scholar called in the book using a pseudonym, Montegrano. His hypothesis is that the whole society he observed was based on the centrality of self-interested families, where the public good is regularly set aside and logics of open favoritisms and nepotisms in favor of closest member of the family are applied: "the extreme poverty and backwardness of which is to be explained largely (but not entirely) by the inability of the villagers to act together for their common good or, indeed, for any end transcending the immediate, material interest of the nuclear family" (1956:10). This social deviation is defined by Banfield as "amoral familism" and the hypothesis is explained as follow: "In a society of amoral familists, no one will further the interest of the group or community except as it is to his private advantage to do so. In other words, the hope of material gain in the short-run will be the only motive for concern with public affairs" (1956, 85). Banfield points out as that "in a society of amoral familists, the claim of any person or institution to be inspired by zeal for public rather than private advantage will be regarded as fraud" (1956:98) and that "organization (i. e., deliberately concerted action) will be very difficult to achieve and maintain. [...] It is a condition of successful organization that members have some trust in

each other and some loyalty to the organization. In an organization with high morale it is taken for granted that they will make some sacrifices, and perhaps even large ones, for the sake of the organization” (1956:89). Although he does not develop in-depth the analysis of the linkage between social trust and social mobility he also remarked “ “Getting ahead” and “making a good figure” are two of the central themes of the peasant's existence. But he sees that no matter how hard he works he can never get ahead. Other people can use their labor to advantage, but not he. [...] He knows, however, that in the end he will be the knowledge that no matter how hard he struggles he will remain behind (*indietro*) is galling.” (1956:65).

Therefore, what I argue, in line with Banfield and others scholars (i.e. Alesina, Ichino 2009), is that in situations where social organization strongly relies on micro linkages of trust restricted to *ex se* closest groups, first of all nuclear family, generalized trust will permanently be designated to be subject to the inter-personal one and, as a consequence, individuals' life chances will be limited accordingly and very few opportunities are offered to individuals to sketch original life patterns far from their origins. This hypothesis should not be interpreted as if inter-personal trust ought to be avoided and disrupted. Rather inter-personal relationships of trust would better be encouraged –since they remain the basic tile of life in society- but they ought to be balanced encouraging spread and general relations of trust. This last consideration should be taken into account by policy-makers when designing new policies and institutional architecture: hence, the effort of fostering and enhancing life chances passes from ensuring a high level of generalized trust and a certain openness of inter-personal trust bondages.

Summarizing, social capital represents a key factor to take into account when analyzing life chances creation and distribution. Despite the interest devoted to the study of individuals' networks and other micro interactions and their relationship to opportunity for social mobility, a limited attention has been devoted to a key component of social capital: trust, as a relevant social ingredient having an impact over the mechanisms of individuals' fluidity. The concept of trust, as a form of social capital and conceived as a rational and cognitive state of mind, is instead directly correlated with the possibility for individual agents to enlarge their life chances: I pointed out how the presence of a generalized state of trust among citizens is a presuppose in order to ensure the highest development and the fairer

distribution of life chances, and I specified the inverse correlation existing between inter-personal and generalized trust, explaining why the former can be somewhat an obstacle to the latter.

The last section of my thesis is dedicated to a comparative analysis developed around my hypothesis of a correlation between trust and individuals life chances. I will use a recent survey about Social Inequality to study the individuals' perceptions about life chances available. Using perception as unit of analysis means to focus on those expectations that compose trust and that I have widely assumed to be a crucial assumption for ensuring to individuals to develop their life chances.

## **IV. Exploring the relationship between trust and life chances: a European cross-country analysis**

### **1. Introduction**

I have dedicated the first two parts of my thesis respectively, to sketch an idea of social mobility based on life chances and, secondly, to address the existence of a linkage between generalized trust and creation and distribution of individuals' life chances.

This third and last section is, instead, a first attempt to apply my hypothesis through the recourse to a comparative analysis developed using an international panel of data carried out by the International Social Survey Program (ISSP).

The chapter is organized as follow: *in primis*, I ask myself which is the most suitable way to capture this alleged correlation between trust and life chances. My attempt to answer to this question lead me to introduce the different methodologies used by scholars to assess trust and explain why I have chosen to analyse a panel of data based on individuals perceptions of life chances and how trust is implicated. Therefore, I introduce the details about the ISSP data and provide some information about the survey: brief history, methodology, and my specific interest about the survey dedicated to Social Inequality and a cluster of European countries. Then, I pass to comment the data elaborated and conclude with providing some elements of reflection useful for European and national policy makers committed with ensuring the enlargement and empowerment of individuals' life chances.

## **2.1 Operationalizing Life Chances: Not Just Simply Mobility**

In the first chapter I have explained how the calculation of social mobility is normally associated by scholars to a complex studies based on panels collecting data about different birth cohorts and focused on the observation of trends revealing similar life patterns for individuals categorized within a homogenous group. The classification of these groups can follow diverse criteria depending on data available and concept of social mobility: incomes, educational attainment, belonging to a certain social group/class, are the principal classifications widely accepted and present within the literature on mobility.

The basic idea is to assess the changes between generations (father/parents and son) or evaluating the movement of an individual over a certain period. As already discussed, on one hand although the large amount of study existing on the topic, there is still an open and lively debate about the most appropriate methodology to assess these changes and complex and composite indicators are normally used by scholars. On the other hand, the great difficulty to collect data useful for this kind of research has too often brought scholars to use incomplete or inappropriate panels of data. Moreover, all this has also caused an unavoidable limitation of comparative studies: since it has proved to be extremely difficult to find national panels of data sufficiently rich to be adapt to mobility research. In addition, the absence of a unique data-base and the lack of a uniform methodology in data collection and elaboration have made particularly difficult to carry out solid comparative research. For this reason most of the scholars preferred to focus their interests on the comparison between two or three countries and/or on a specific field (e.g. focusing on income mobility of lawyer or, rather, on educational achievement of pupils coming from a disadvantaged socio-economic geographical area, for a review see Breen, 2005).

As eminent scholar Anthony Heath and others researchers noted “the actual trends over time have been a source of considerable academic dispute” (2010, 58). In fact, even where attempts have been made to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the mobility phenomenon, the lack of information and the objective difficulty to take into account country-specificity and to adapt it to a

unique methodology of calculation lead to a clear difficulty to reach unambiguous and shared outcomes. For instance, in the well-known study carried out by the economists Blanden and Machin (2007) they showed how intergenerational earnings mobility has decreased during the latest decades (see also Ermisch and Nicoletti, 2007). Nevertheless, in fair disagreement with these evidences, the research completed by Goldthorpe and Mills (2008) found that intergenerational occupational mobility has been fairly stable over the last thirty years<sup>65</sup>. Also when looking to country analyses different findings emerge about country rates of social fluidity: for instance, one of the country which received more attention is the U.S., for which scholars have found evidences in support or against the well-established idea of the country as a “land of opportunities”. However, several studies focused on US mobility rates show as this idea is not really supported by facts: US appears in fact to be not more mobile –if not less- than others countries to which is compared (Chinoy, 1955; Brint, Karabel, 1989; MacMurrer, Sawhill, 1998; Ferrie, 2005; Pistolesi, 2009). But also when looking to the EU countries, evidences appear in contrast the one with the other: even if Scandinavian countries in general perform better than the rest of European countries, some study has highlighted how this evidence is not so incontrovertible and, however, it is less strong than it firstly appeared (see, Clark 2012, Blanden, Gregg, Machin, 2005).

In light of above, it appears quite clear that, even if important steps forward have been made in the understanding of this phenomenon, scholars have not found a unique shared operationalization of the concept of social mobility, since the assessment of the phenomenon is inevitably related to the perspective of the analysis (relative/absolute; educational/income/class based; methodology used).

Moreover, I argue that the conception of social mobility applied academic literature deals with is “epiphenomenal”, in the sense that it always aims at capturing a reflection, a secondary effect failing to reveal the essence of it.

I shall try to clarify better this point. All the measures of social mobility are ascribable to two macro methodologies of measurement:

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<sup>65</sup> See Erikson and Goldthorpe (2010) for a comment about these divergent findings.

- As frequency, here social mobility is measured in terms of number and extent of movements made by individuals from their original positions or compared to their family of origin. This type of study provides a picture of the fluidity in a certain time;
- As statistics probability, in this case the purpose is to provide through complex regressive analyses a measure which express the probability that an individual in a certain economic or social condition has to make a movement in a certain direction (upward, backward or lateral).

However, both measures conceal several limits:

- First of all, the data used tell us not about the distribution of opportunities as between those of different origins but about the distribution of outcomes. As Adam Swift noticed: “It is true that one cannot achieve an outcome without having had the opportunity to achieve that outcome. But the converse does not hold. One can perfectly well have the opportunity to achieve an outcome that one does not in fact achieve. Indeed, one can have the opportunity to ‘achieve’ an outcome that one makes no effort to attain and the attainment of which one would not even regard as an ‘achievement’. This means that, on their own, measures of association between where people start out and where they end up cannot even tell us about the distribution of opportunities for mobility” (2002: 7).
- Secondly, the conception of social mobility as frequency and statistic probability are obviously connected with the idea that mobility is something desirable for every society and, therefore, the observation of frequency helps us to evaluate the level of “goodness” a certain society shows. This notion of mobility does not take into account a central consequence entailed in this logic, which is: if we aim at observing the highest level of mobility frequency (and probability), it would follow that our main goal would be to have a rate of frequency of mobility equal to the total of population observed. Nevertheless, to a better look, this observation would not be meaningful or desirable for two reasons. In concrete, complete mobility has never been observed and, the highest rate observed are inevitably and intuitively associated with the overturning of the social order, this means that, concretely, highest rates of mobility understood as frequency are mostly related to social disorder and violent revolutions, which –I assume- do not exactly coincide with our idea of desirable society (see Abatemarco, 2004). In this perspective of this hypothesis, some countertrend researches in the field of psychology has

observed how the process of mobility tends to submit individuals to stress and pathologies related to the loss or conflicts among different identities to which single individuals are simultaneously called to comply with. This aspect was firstly theorized by Durkheim which described this state affecting individuals as “anomie” and suggested that both upward and downward mobility is associated with higher rates of suicide (1951, 246-254). Successively, Lipset and Bendix referred to this problem as “status discrepancies” and said: “every society may be thought of as comprising a number of separate hierarchies –economic, social, ethnic, educational etc.- each of which has its own status structure, its own conditions for the attainment of a position of prestige within that structure. There are likely to be a number of discrepancies among the positions in different hierarchies that every person occupies simultaneously” (1992, 64)<sup>66</sup>.

- Another limit of current methodology used to assess SM can be considered as directly connected to the first one. If the registration of higher rates of mobility not only does not necessarily coincide with something desirable, in this way we lose our reference point for the analysis of the phenomenon and, therefore, we are not able to say whether it exists or not an optimal level of SM, which it would rather become relative and changeable on the basis of circumstances. This limit is clearly related to the fact that current measures of mobility does not take into account individuals' priorities. In other words when measuring mobility we do not know anything about the qualitative aspect of this mobility (e.g. we do not know whether individuals' preferences expectations have been fulfilled).
- A last important limit of current measures of social mobility is related to the fact that this vision does not satisfy the traditional criterion of social justice which is, I argue, encapsulated within the concept of social mobility. In other words, when measuring mobility as indicated above the interest is exclusively focused to notice trends and quantity of movements, while we do not take into any account

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<sup>66</sup> Lipset and Bendix offer a good overview of the studies on the topic. For more recent research see, Robert Steele, *Relationship of Race, Sex, Social Class and SM to Depression in Normal Adults*, *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 104-1, 37-47, 1978; Wsevolod W. Isajiw, Aysan Sev'er, Leo Driedger, *Ethnic identity and SM: a Test of the “drawback model”*, *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 18-2, 177-196, 1993; Linda Jackson; Linda Sullivan; Richard Harnish; Carole Hodge, *Achieving Positive Social Identity: SM, Social creativity and Permeability of Group Boundaries*, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 70-2, 241-254, 1996; Elizabeth R. Cole and Safiya R. Omari, *Race, Class and the Dilemmas of Upward Mobility for African Americans*, *Journal of Social Issues*, 59-4, 785, 802, 2003.

whether these movements are the consequence of the application of a criterion of justice (such it would be through a lottery for luck egalitarian) or whether its distribution is, for instance, the result of a distribution operated by an absolute monarch.

The above mentioned limits, I believe, constitute a serious limitation to our understanding of the crucial idea lying behind mobility.

I have previously tried to explain that an effort by scholars is needed in order to rethink about the concept of SM, looking for a notion able to encompass the idea of opportunity. As I anticipated this new understanding would inevitably also lead us to a revision of the methodologies of assessment of the phenomenon. Scholars have done enormous steps forward in the comprehension of the mechanisms of SM and today, depending on the completeness of the panel of data at their disposal, they can maybe be able to say how much individuals moved on average, if people moving was likely to come from a more or less advantaged social or economic background. But these studies do not take into accounts which are the opportunities of movement at disposal for individuals.

Following this logic, in my analysis, I have considered mobility *per se* (generally understood in sociological and economic literature as the differential of income, or education, or social class between father and sons or for an individual within a certain time of interval) as an epiphenomenon, an observable effect of a primary phenomenon, which is the availability for individuals of life chances. But, if this is true, how can we assess individuals' life chances?

The real problem about assessing life chances is to try the way to overcome the evident problem related to the fact that individual capabilities derive from a combination of inherited or acquired abilities and achieved functionings, which depend on the efforts made, as well as on external conditions. As noticed by Blane (2006: 55): "The life course may be regarded as combining biological and social elements which interact with each other. Individual biological development takes place within a social context which structures life chances so that advantages and disadvantages tend to cluster cross-sectionally and accumulate longitudinally. [...] Social organization also structures advantages and disadvantage longitudinally. Advantage or disadvantage in one phase of the life course

is likely to have been preceded by, and to be succeeded by, similar advantage or disadvantage in the other phases of life.” In this perspective, life chances are deeply entrenched with both internal (individuals’ endowment, internalization of value and principles) and external (socialization, belonging to a certain group of reference, institutional organization and welfare) features and, therefore, they still remain very difficult to disentangle the one from the others.

A recent attempt to put in place this approach is related to the idea of seeing life chances as a social indicator of well-being. As an example, it is here interesting to recall the framework proposed by Veenhoven (2000) in order to assess quality-of-life. The scholar theorized a classification of quality-of-life indicators based on a two bi-partitions, which is described by a matrix built upon two axes representing the cleavage “Chances vs. Outcomes” and the “Outer vs. Inner”. The first category corresponds to the distinction between life chances (the opportunities provided by the environment to individuals) and life outcomes (the way different persons take advantage or not of these alleged opportunities). While the distinction between “Outer and Inner” aims at differentiating between the individual’s qualities and those that pertain to the environment. Here too, the “outer and inner” qualities influence each other, as specific external conditions are essential to allow internal qualities to emerge. Veenhoven’s approach re-states, once more, the conception of life chances as a complex category, encompassing both external qualities and constraints related to the environment, as well as personal qualities. Although the comprehensiveness of the model proposed makes it particularly interesting, the conception offered of life chances does not allow minimizing the arbitrariness of the categorization. All in all: how shall we distinguish the opportunities which pertains exclusively individual’s qualities from those related to the external environment?<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> A completely different theoretical approach to the analysis of life-chances has been proposed by sociologists E. O. Wright, which looks at them in term of “trade-offs between alternative reachable functionings” (1997:32). The scholar develops his hypothesis within a class-based theory of society as follow: in practice, for all individuals there is a trade-off between income and leisure, but the quantity of leisure to trade in change of income varies for individuals depending on their class of belonging. Indeed, individuals owing a socio-economic advantaged position (Wright defines it as “capitalist class”) can combine high levels of consumption (income) with high levels of leisure. Conversely, the situation is reversed for the components of middle and working classes. In addition, the middle class individuals have more possibilities compared to the working class members since the latter face higher wage rates. Consequently, the achievement for a working class member of a living standard equal or higher to the one enjoyed by a member of the middle class, this is inevitably made at the

As already explained, the idea of “life chance”, as a notion with an high explanatory potential value, has been firstly invoked by Dahrendorf (1979:52-53), when looking for a category: “somewhere between the philosophy of money and the philosophy of happiness, that is the assumption that everything can be measured in dollar terms, and the other assumption that the individual alone knows what has value – in short, a category which expresses human wants and needs, interests and hopes in a way that does not suppress the subjective element but makes it clear that one is seeking more than the personal sensation of happiness, namely socially structured ways of individual life. The category which serves these multiple purposes is that of life chances. Human societies and their history are about life chances, not about the greatest happiness of the greatest number, but about the greatest life chances of the greatest number. Life chances are (in principle) measurable possibilities to realize needs, wants and interests in, or at time, against a given context. They are the substratum of social structures, in which life chances are therefore organized. They are also the motive force of social process, which are therefore about life chances.”

A different way to solve this dilemma has been setting up with the aggregation of indexes able to encompass general opportunities of access to certain goods, or to attain a means (e.g. education), or develop a certain capabilities such as that the result of this measurement ought to account for the inequality of life chance distribution that individuals living in a certain state deal with.

These attempts take their steps from adaptation of the famous Gini index of inequality which catch the frequency distribution and, so doing, reveal the level dispersion of the observed phenomenon. Moreover, in general these indexes try to assess this inequality leaving apart the weight of that “circumstances”, which are not the result of choices that individuals operate (Roemer, 1998). Since, also in this case, the definition of the scope of “circumstances” that are within or beyond the individuals’ control is not univocal, in these indexes “circumstances” are understood as socially determined exogenous factors (such as gender, race, socioeconomic background) and about which there is broad agreement that they should not have a role in outcomes. Therefore, where there is full

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expenses of leisure, in other words by trading free time against income. Wright’s analysis is interesting since it provides an interpretation of how the mechanisms mobility works, but it does not really seem to provide an answer to our first interrogative: how should we assess life chances?

equality of opportunity, these circumstances should not affect individual's achievement (e.g. Checchi and Peragine, 2005; Lefranc et al., 2009; Ferreira and Gignoux, 2008; Yalonetzky, 2010). Probably the most prominent attempt accomplished in this context is the creation of a Human Opportunity Index (HOI, firstly presented by Barros et al., 2009) which is a country indicator tracking children's equal access to a cluster of services which are identified of primary importance for their future advancement in life. This index has the great merit to provide a synthetic measure which is useful to catch the overall trend especially for developing countries or countries in transition, subjects to rapid changes. While in this case the limit is mostly related to the fact that the complexity in the elaboration of a similar composite measure does not overcome the above mentioned methodological criticalities, such as consider uniquely variable which exert an influence on life outcomes but are not under the individual's control. In fact, the HOI assesses the access and the equal opportunity to access to a set of *basic* goods and service considered as a minimum standards<sup>68</sup>. The HOI observes the coverage rate and then "adjusts it according to how equitably goods and services have been allocated among circumstance groups" (Molinas Vega et al., 2010:45). So doing the HOI is able to measure the average coverage of a certain service and to inform us about the allocation of that service according to an equality of opportunity principle.

The HOI has been firstly applied in 2010 to assess current condition in Latin America and, at present, efforts are in process to calculate it in US, France and some African countries. The availability of a similar index for the whole globe will certainly represent an improvement in our understanding of social mobility.

However, the HOI does not represent a suitable index for my specific purpose of analysis. In fact, when referring to SM I not only allude to a comprehensive meaning of the concept which takes into consideration both changes *and* opportunities for change, which represents, in other words: "life

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68 A set of five indicators are used to assess the HOI and account for two main dimensions: the education dimension, assessed looking at the "completion of sixth grade at the proper age"; the housing dimension, evaluated assessing the access to three basic housing services, namely: safe waters, electricity, adequate sanitation. These indicators are, then, weighted by the verification of "circumstances". In other words, it is also measured the correlation between the coverage rates and certain circumstance groups, which are considered as variable beyond individuals' control but potentially related to an unequal distribution of mobility. These circumstance groups are: parents' education; family per capita income; number of siblings; presence of both parents; gender of the individual; gender of the household head.

chances". These life chances, I argued, are intrinsically connected with a key element of social capital, which is generalized trust. In other words, generalized trust is not neutral, while it orients agents' beliefs and actions and, so doing, it defines their horizons of life chances.

In this way, life chances are directly entrenched and influenced by individuals' perspectives about the future. They appear significantly influenced by individuals' capacity and possibility (enablement) to make a correct assessment of what a person can really expect from the future. This individual cognitive process –which elsewhere I referred to as "*imagination of life chances*"- is essential in the determination of individual's possibilities of mobility, and it is directly influenced by the generalized trust that individuals feed toward society. In this view, trust -as *positive expectation of gaining a return*- becomes the key-variable influencing opportunity of mobility since shaping individuals' horizon of life chances. Following the distinction proposed by Paul Ricoeur (1991), trust represents the key experience on the basis of which the human being discovers himself as inserted in the world or, better, in a certain society. The action of trust obliges us to open an horizon which is, in fact, *other* from himself; to include the trustee (in case of generalized trust, the society) not only in our personal experience, as something given, since it entails an "open and infinite horizon" (1989). In this sense, life chances and trust are inseparable: chances of life depends on our individual circumstances and capacities (given and acquired) to sketch new patterns of life; while, trust represents the preliminary condition allowing us to define scope and density of these possible patterns. In other words, life chances are determined by the difference between the horizon of expectation and the space of experience: when this difference is minimal, then it means that expectations do not get over what individuals know and experiences. In a similar situation trust is weak and individuals' life chances are inevitably reduced. At the contrary, when the horizon of expectation raises above the space of experience broader and alternative life patterns may emerge<sup>69</sup>.

Having clarified why the traditional measures of SM and EO are not useful to explore the basic relationship between trust and life chances, we could wonder whether the appeal to the available measurement of trust might constitute a good basis to reflect about its linkage with life chance.

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<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, the difference between experience and expectation should always avoid overrunning the attainable, since a similar event would imply individuals to be gripped by a deep frustration and –when this phenomenon is spread among individuals- it determines a profound social crisis.

## 2.2 Assessing generalized trust and limits

For what it concerns the assessment of trust, it is possible to divide its measurement among three different approaches: the first mostly developed by economists and related to the idea of trust as uncertainty. In this case trust is strictly understood as something related to the risk and its calculability. Trust as a risk evaluation is interested on the probabilities related with a certain future event to happen. Therefore, trust is determined by qualities of the trustee and other specific circumstances, such as social and normative frame. In case trustor does not dispose of enough information, the determination of trust becomes incalculable.

Indeed, trusting is a risky action, but it would be rather simplistic to equalize trust to risk calculation. In fact, there is a difference between reasoning and calculating: we can reason about everything, but we cannot calculate everything. An alternative approach to trust assessment has been developed by scholars focused on sociology and psychology. In this case, the focus lays on human behavior and his observation: here the key interest is on the exploration of cognitive mechanisms that lead individuals to trust or distrust. In this peculiar branch of study the role of experiments, already recalled in the previous chapter, is particularly relevant. Pioneer research paving the way to this typology of study have been carried out by Robert Axelrod who in 1984 published his pivotal work *The Evolution of Cooperation*: based on reiterated repetitions of the prisoner's dilemma between two individuals. He revealed the existence of a basic and robust norm of reciprocity which is called "tit-for-tat" strategy. Axelrod showed as retaliation is the winning strategy in case the partner of the game does not reciprocate and, therefore, betray the trust given. Another connected branch of research looks at trust as result of a cognitive choice based on indirect experience: as an example, individuals can decide to trust someone on the basis of his/her reputation –as it happens when we choose a lawyer suggested by some friends to take care of a personal legal issue- or when we decide to buy on Amazon a book choosing a specific seller on the basis of the online reputation system based on the rates given to the retailer by previous shoppers (Castelfranchi and Falcone, 2000, 2010; Corritore, 2005; Bohnet, and Meier, 2005).

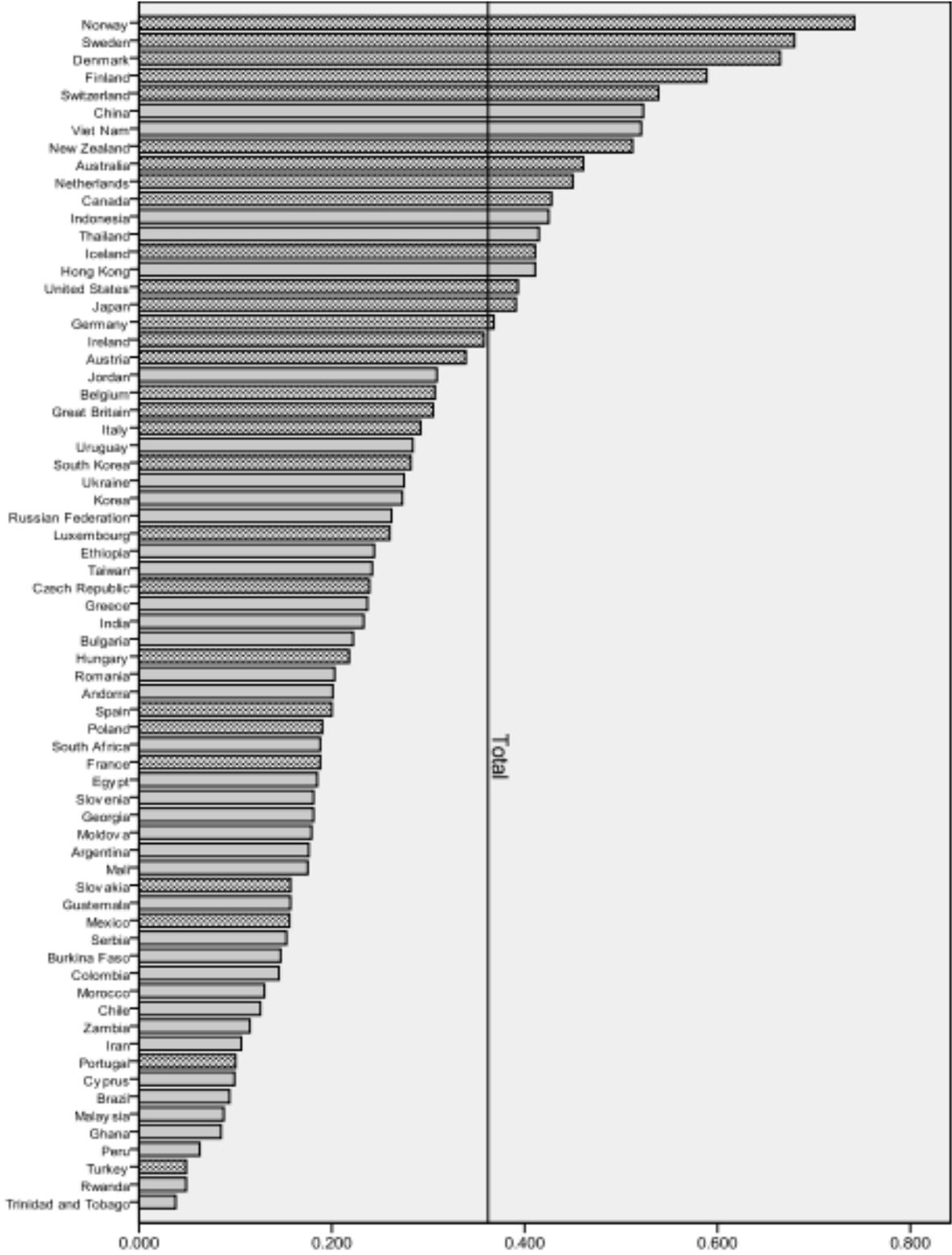
In both of above mentioned approaches trust is still conceived and, thus, operationalized in its interpersonal dimension. Nevertheless, as I previously explained, the idea of trust as a general component of our societies –I referred to it as “generalized trust”- is usually recognized by the academy as a component of social capital and, therefore, the need to grasp its general dimension leads scholars to look for alternative methodologies of operationalization. But, how do we assess the social dimension of trust?

The answer to this question has lead scholars to approach the problem of generalized trust distinguishing between:

- trust in the institutions;
- trust in others.

In both cases, scholars commonly proceed through statistical surveys revealing citizens’ attitudes. In general, the empirical literature on generalized trust has focused on responses to attitudinal questions designed to capture the level of confidence one has in others. The general formulation of the question used to assess trust is the following: “Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people?” (Rosenberg, 1956). The idea implied in these kind of measurements derive from the theorization made by Almond and Verba in their research of civil society in the Post-War period and assuming that individuals will trust if they believe others are trustworthy. Therefore, persons who answer that “most people can be trusted” are categorized as “trusting” and the aggregate result give the percentage of the citizens’ sample who believes that most people can be trust, and this measure is used as an indicator for national level of generalized trust. This question, with some little and negligible change, can be found in national and international panels of survey. This is the case, for instance, of the General Opinion Research Center’s General Social Survey (GSS) which is carried out in U.S. since 1972; or the Australian Community Survey. While among the cross-national social survey including this question we find the Latinobarómetro and the World Value Survey. With regard to the latter we reproduce in the next page (figure 1) an elaboration of the trust question or the last wave carried out between 2005-2008. The scale range from 0 to 150 and see at the top Scandinavian countries and other Western countries such

as the Netherlands, Switzerland, Australia and New Zealand, while other high position are occupied by countries such as Thailand, China and Indonesia. In the middle we found UK and Italy, while all Eastern EU countries as well as Portugal and Turkey occupy the bottom of the ranking together with African and Latin American Countries.



**Figure 1. (Source: World Value Survey, wave 2005-2008)**

As anticipated, an alternative way for scholars to approach the measurement of trust is to relate it to trust toward institutions (sometime referred to as “political trust or systemic trust”). The idea to evaluate generalized trust looking at the attitude citizens have toward institutions comes from the consideration that in modern organized society the institutions (e.g. government, parliament, judiciary power, EU commission, ONU and so forth) have officialised and are responsible of the maintenance of the relationship of trust and reciprocity within the national community, consequently, a lack of trust toward them ought to be interpreted as the reflex of a general weakness of trust in society.

This typology of trust calculation can be sub-divided into a micro and macro element, depending on whether they aims at tracking trust in political system and its institutions, or rather the focus is on the personnel in charge of these institutions. The measurement is carried out in the same way using surveys, but in this case it is asked to respondents to rate their confidence in a certain organization. Similar surveys are carried out by several organization, among the others: the World Economic Forum, the Australian Government Information Management Office (AGIMO), the United Nations Online Network in Public Administration and Finance (UNPAN) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the European Commission through the Euro-Barometer and the World Value Survey (WVS). From these studies it emerges large differences across countries. For example, in the elaboration of the WVS for the OECD countries for the wave 2005-2008 the average rate of people reporting a high trust in parliament has been 38% with important differences between countries (e.g. Norway, Luxemburg and Turkey, more than 60%; US, Germany, Poland, less than 25%, with Italy around the 30%).

As it is understandable, these kinds of elaboration have roused the interest of many researchers interested to explain the difference between countries. Nonetheless, for what it concerns the assessment of trust through the generic question about “trusting others”, several critiques have been moved to the utility and reliability of these data: first of all, it has been said that a substantial variation

in responses might have been caused by different understanding of the meaning of “trusting someone”, as well as about what it comprises the generic expression “most people”. Moreover, a substantial margin of error might be due to the diverse interpretation given by responders to what it means “to trust someone”. Therefore, despite its popularity, some serious problem with its measurement exists<sup>70</sup>. For what it concerns the measurement of trust looking at institutions, this studies seem more adapt to capture citizens’ trust or distrust in a precise contingency and to involve a person-oriented attitude, rather than a general orientation of trust (Blind, 2006).

Leaving apart the critiques moved by a part of the academic literature to this method of assessment of trust, here I need also to remark that the measurement offered by the panels of research above mentioned do not fit particularly well the scope of my analysis. In fact, these indexes do not seem able to assess a key feature of trust which is the fact that the act of trusting is never an unconditioned act of faith (who can answer to a question such as “most people can be trusted?”), while trust is always influenced by personal history and specific circumstances.

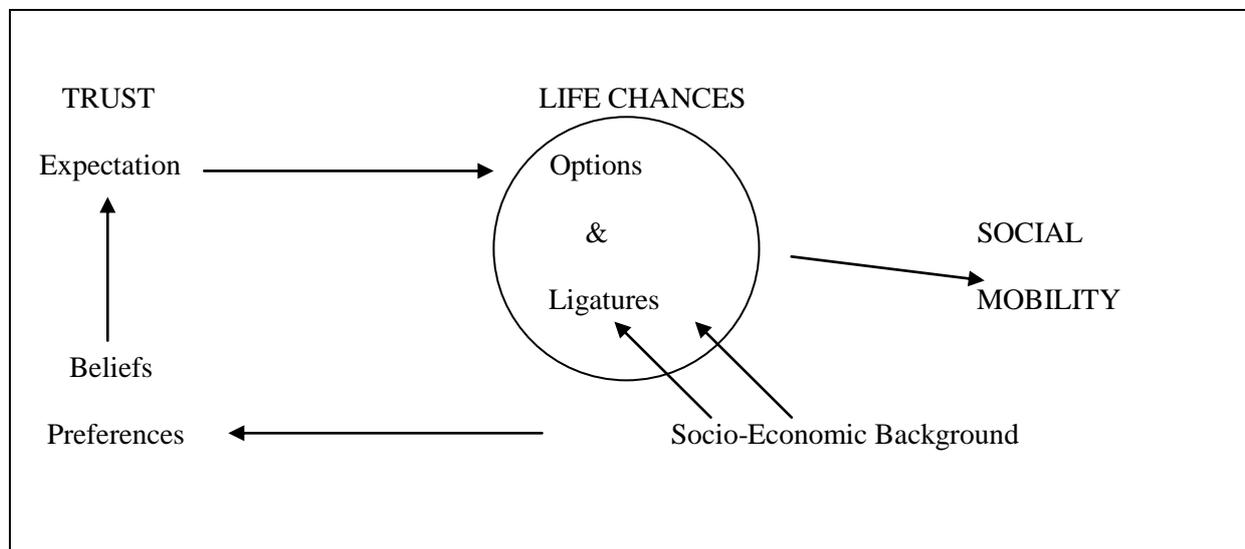
This is, I believe, a crucial point for my analysis since it captures the connection between life chances and trust: they are my personal experience, the inputs I receive or not, the words I heard and read that determine –together with my individual self-endowment- my possibilities to develop a positive expectation that allow me, at the end, to trust and to make certain choices that dramatically influence my future life path. And, in case this mechanism of trust is blocked, life chances becomes inevitably restricted and the development of new ones are negatively affected.

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<sup>70</sup> In the attempt to go beyond the just mentioned limits, recently scholars have tried a mixed approach, merging the experimental games with the attitudinal questions. For a review of critiques and new approaches of study see E. Glaeser, D. Laibson, J. Scheinkeman, C. Soutter, Measuring Trust, in *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 2000; M. Capra, K. Lanier, S. Meer, Attitudinal and Behavioral Measures of Trust: a New Comparison, Department of Economics, Emory University 2008, available at <http://www.gate.cnrs.fr/IMG/pdf/Capra.pdf> ; M. Naef, J. Schupp, Measuring Trust: Experiments and Surveys in Contrast and Combination, IZA DP n. 4087 (2009), available at: <http://ftp.iza.org/dp4087.pdf> .

### 3.1 Exploring expectations through subjective perceptions

In the previous paragraph I have illustrated how life chances and trust have been operationalized in current literature and explained why these measures are not so useful from my perspective. My idea is instead to approach the analysis *looking at the level of trust –understood as positive expectation that people have toward the availability of life chances to change their socio-economic status of origin within the society where they live.*



**Figure 2. Theoretical Model**

Scholars use to divide trusting behaviour in two components: preferences and beliefs. In theory these two elements are easily distinguishable, although when individuals take a choice their behavior is always a result of a combination of these two elements (Sapienza, Tolgra, Zingales, 2010:14). In fact, per a given type of preferences, a person who has a higher expectation about a potential future gain deriving from certain behaviour will invest more than another person who has lower preferences of that given type. Therefore, we can deduct that expectations are influenced by beliefs, but not by preferences<sup>71</sup>. In addition, we can argue that expectations represent, *per se*, a good measure of trust –

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<sup>71</sup> This point turns out to be important when we think about the fact that through a process of socialization and formation of group identity, individuals are exposed to a social mechanism of adaptation of their preference formation. For example, the daughter of a seamstress has more probability to become a seamstress too, since parents and parents' friends frequently act as role models for children. Unfortunately, this point cannot be taken

meant as individuals' positive expectation of gain- which, in turn, constitutes a pre-condition and a factor which influence life chances.

In fact, as clarified in the first chapter, life chances can be interpreted as what results from the intersection of two different sets, the first containing "options", and the second "ligatures". The former represents "possibilities of choice, or alternative of action", while the latter are "allegiances, bonds, linkages" (e.g. family, religion, local origin). Then, trust acts as a positive factor on individuals' life chances since, raising rational positive expectations (I called it elsewhere "horizon of expectation"), it enlarges individuals' options and weakens the weight of ligatures.

In brief, expectations about opportunities of mobility –as a reflection of generalized trust- help us to explore two dimensions of the mobility: on one side, it offers us an idea of the strengths of trust within the community; on the other side, when assessed on specific topics related to mobility, they also provide us an interesting background to reflect about mobility mechanisms on that community (e.g. obstacles and bottlenecks). Both aspects are useful for policy indications.

Following these considerations, my cross-country comparison is based on the will to explore the variation of individuals' expectations. Hence, representing the key element which links trust with life chances, individuals' expectation is the factor to look at in order to assess variations of life chances among different countries. In other words, expectations can be considered as a reflection of the generalized trust individuals have toward the society they live in, and these expectations are relevant since they have an impact on individuals' behaviours by shaping their life chances (with all the connected consequences that this might have also on other macro social phenomena related to it, see chapt. 1). In other words, I am assuming that individuals' expectations are entrenched and, therefore, constitute a good indicator of the level of generalized trust that individuals have toward society. In light of above, expectations represent a privileged variable to look at when aiming at assessing life chances vary across selected countries. The next question to answer would, therefore, be: how do we

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into consideration by traditional measure of mobility (see Swift, 2002), while when looking at mobility in terms of life chance we live apart this criticality since, as explained, preferences do not seem involved in the formation of expectations. Nevertheless, how do preferences set up is a difficult and central question. Although it is out of the purpose of my thesis, progress in providing an answer would help to improve our normative evaluation of empirical inequality in several fields of interest (ranging from class analysis until gender inequality).

operationalize them? In social theory the concept of expectation is defined as a “stable prefigurative orientations composed of specific beliefs about one's future trajectory” (2006, Morgan). Coming from Latin, *expectatio*, which literally means “looking, waiting for”, intuitively the expression is connected to the idea of “vision” or “promises” and, in this view, the notion has also been described as “real-time representations of future situations” (Borup et al.; 2006:289). This last notion of expectations also stresses another important feature of the concept: although being subjective, they contain a normative image about the future and in this sense expectations are made real “they can be understood as performative” (286)<sup>72</sup>. Being the results of a sum of subjective beliefs, expectations seem particularly adapt to be assessed through individuals’ perceptions.

Although not commonly used in the study of mobility, the choice to use perceptions to is not new in sociology. Scholars have often made appeal to perceptions and used them to understand how individuals respond to events (Heath, de Graaf, Yaojun, 2010). This consideration seems also valid for social mobility since, as I said, the techniques developed to measure mobility appear at the moment opaque and problematic. Obviously, ordinary people do not have any idea of the abstracts notions used by scholars to explain the phenomenon, nevertheless, they have perceptions of whether or not they have moved within the social latter during their life-time or compared to their parents, they also have gained beliefs about unfair obstacles and gaps difficult to fill up in the attempt to access to a certain position. Perceptions that the attainment of a certain position is unfairly blocked could also lead the person to a lack of effort and becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy; even in this case, perceptions remain a valuable indicator to explore the individual horizon of life chances.

In particular, I think perceptions represent a privileged meter of analysis by enriching our knowledge about human expectations and behaviour: they tell us something that the frequency and the extent of movement within the social latter does not say and help us to disclose the existence of hidden or

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<sup>72</sup> It is the worth to specify here that expectations should not be assimilated to the concept of aspirations. Since aspirations are born and stay within individual’s nucleus and are mainly a glare of a self-assessment and identity formation process; expectations crucially impose individuals to open their “self” outwards and make an evaluation about what you can reasonably wait to receive back in a specific context. In other words, expectation is what we develop when we trust, while aspiration is what we do when we recognize and project our-self outside.

distorted mechanisms which constitute an obstacle to mobility and that are difficult to grasp through a mere quantitative analysis. In other words, the use of perceptions allows us to get a bit closer to a concept of mobility capable to clutch the tricky idea of “life chances” and, therefore, encompassing opportunities and monitoring obstacle present within our societies. So doing, we can introduce an alternative way to conceive mobility that, together with the current ones, can improve and complete our understanding of the phenomena. We could think about it as a “relative” type of mobility, since it derives from people’s subjective perceptions, rather than objective quantified data. This denomination seems also to be coherent with the existing categorizations of mobility. In fact, as elsewhere explained, “relative social mobility” is already a concept in use in academy and it refers to individual movements between different social classes or income groups, taking into consideration the change in the distribution of the population between them; therefore, it is ‘relative’ to the rest of society (Lambert, et al., 2007). While in this case the “relativity” is directly referred to a feature of the data.

Somebody could argue that a crucial problem related to the use of perceptions is the fact that these can be wrong. In other words, perceptions are useful when information on which they are based on are accurate. Where this is not the case, we will have a misperception which has a rather different consequence compared to having unfair life chances, since in this case the policy implications will be completely different and focused on minding the information gap, rather than re-shaping the odds toward which individuals are struggling (for a discussion on this about educational choices see Gambetta 1987). Nonetheless, the existing pioneering study on this field found evidences that support the meaningfulness of the individuals’ perceptions for what it concerns their social-economic status and mobility. This point has been firstly affirmed by Hout who in 70’s demonstrated how only 3 percent of Americans failed to self-identify their social class (1970). About ten years later, a study carried out by Mary and David Jackman (1983) have confirmed the robustness of the American self-positioning within the social ladder (the 86% of the people identified themselves in a middle class position fitting the model proposed).

For all reasons clarified above, I refer to subjective perceptions in the following study. Our perspective of analysis will be opportunity for mobility: as having a subjective perceptions to be mobile has a

“welfare effect” on individuals’, at the same way perceiving to live in an open society where individuals efforts and investments are accompanied by a positive expectation of a future gain produce what we could call a “well-being effect” strengthening and enlarging the horizon of individuals’ life chances. The mechanisms in act theorized can be better explained taking back the example on education: briefly, when a student ends his high school the decision to enrol to a university degree will be based on a choice based on his/her priorities (e.g. dreaming to become a parliamentary) and beliefs (e.g. only pupils coming from well-to-do family can become parliamentary). It is clear that in this case the belief (which is reflected in perceptions) produces a “flying effect” with a two-fold negative impact: on one side, it frustrates ambition –therefore, reducing effort and motivation- and discourages investment (*why should I study hard?*); but it also opens the path to strong distortive behaviours, such as corruptions and opaque habits which are difficult to root out.

#### **4.1 Exploring Perceptions about Opportunities of Mobility: the ISSP Survey**

At this stage my focus is to provide with a data analysis aiming at capturing the dimension of opportunities and to offer some ground for a reflection about the hypothesis of a correlation between generalized trust and social mobility.

This analysis will be carried out through the use of the data collected by the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), born on 1984 from the collaboration between various national centres of research for the establishment of a permanent annual programme of international collaboration focused on what it concerns the elaboration and submission of surveys covering topics of primary importance for social science research and a specific attention to the development of questions in a way that take into specific consideration cultural differences and, therefore, make them useful for a cross-country comparison.

At the moment ISSP gathered together the data of 48 countries, classical topics of survey are focused on: Role of Government, Social Networks, Family and Changing Gender Roles, Work Orientations, Religion, Environment. In my analysis I will use the data of the survey on Social Inequality launched

in 2009. The Questionnaire aims at collecting people orientation on a wide range of problem rated to the problem of social inequality, while in our analysis we will focus only on the comments of a restricted panel of data that should help us to explore the people perceptions about life chances and its determinants.

The universe of persons interviewed is composed by people old at least 18 years (for Italy at least 16). The period for data collection is comprises between 2009 and 2012, in particular, for the country of interest for my analysis:

- Germany: between 2010-05-31 and 2010-11-01
- United Kingdom: between 2009-06-08 and 2009-11-16
- Italy: between 2011-06-23 and 2012-01-16
- Spain: between 2009-11-10 and 2009-11-30
- Sweden: between: 2009-02-23 and 2009-05-06

Sampling procedures differ for the individual countries, ranging from partly simple and partly multi-stage stratified random samples; while the mode of interview countries have conducted face-to-face interviews<sup>73</sup>.

#### **4.2 Choice of the Sample: a European Focused Study**

Although the list of the countries participating to this survey is extremely wide and covers all the continents (ranging from Australia, China, South Africa most of the EU countries, Russia, US as well as Venezuela and Argentina) I decided –both for reasons of necessity and opportunity- to focus just on a selected and restricted group of European countries. This choice to restrict the case-study is based on two basic motivations:

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<sup>73</sup> All details about the interview methodology are reported in details in a specific report available to the following link: <http://zocat.gesis.org/webview/index.jsp?object=http://zocat.gesis.org/obj/fStudy/ZA5400> .

-the first concern the necessity to focus on countries that share a common cultural and institutional basis, as it is the case for the European countries. In fact, although Europe cannot be considered as a unique homogenous country the geographical closeness, the permanent interactions and, more recently, the process of European integration have dramatically contributed to create a shared space of basic values and beliefs. This, although probably limiting the space of the gap in the evidence, provides a fundamental methodological consistence to the study. Since, keeping together countries with completely different cultural, institutional and economic traditions would have necessarily implied the involvement of further variables entrenched in the analytical outcomes. In addition, with regard to this specific point we should also consider that also the relative homogeneity and interdependence of the economic system among European countries contribute to obtain more consistent data adapt to a comparison since, as it is intuitively evident, also the contingent economic situations may have an impact on influencing people' perceptions about life chances opportunities.

- A second consideration concerns, instead, the countries chosen among the European ones. Here the driving idea is also to have a rather heterogeneous universe of analysis choosing states that are different the one from the other in order to catch diversities and trends that might be useful for further reflections about policy indications. As it is evident, many criteria could be useful for this purpose, nevertheless, since my conclusive aim is also that of providing with some comments about possible path of reform, I believe it is particularly interesting to select countries on the basis of some fundamental feature able to catch on the most comprehensive way its organization. For this reason, the main criteria of difference on which the countries have been selected is that of the treatment that state reserves to their citizens and, in particular, with respect to the welfare regime categorization indicated by Esping-Anderson (1990), which theorized welfare system not as just the sum of the diverse social policies, but as systems with an internal coherence implying standard about values and objectives that a certain society intend to adopt and implement; in this view, they are understood as "regimes of welfare".

Modern welfare state dates back its origin to 1930s and it was then more clearly developed in the post-war period along three different strengths that reflect correspondingly the following regimes: the Anglo-Saxon regime, also called “liberal” (UK and US), supports individualism and market-based values. It foresees only a minimal public intervention inspired by a need-basis principle aiming at ensuring exclusively the mere subsistence in case of serious deprivation. This model has, therefore, as its main features limited employment protection, mostly focused to guaranteeing fair contractual conditions; poor family support; no active labour policies and few interventions in support of education and youth training.

At the opposite side there are the Scandinavian countries which have a welfare regime based on the idea of social democracy (from this is identification as “social democratic model”). This principle is implemented through the idea of the free and universal citizenship-based notion of rights and benefits which gives access to a broad range of services. Main features are: minority and gender integration in labor market; active education and care program for the children development; high degree of employment protections; strong labour unions.

The third regime has affirmed in Continental Europe and it combines social insurance with elements of corporativism and familism (Kersbergen, 1995), with a refer also to the social Catholic subsidiary traditions. This regime is generally identified as “conservative” and it is accompanied by an heterogeneous social structure and, in particular, by an heterogeneous social policy legacies: where, level of social insurance is differentiated on the basis of occupation; policies of redistribution are not connected the one with the other under a universal concept of citizenship and they are more focused on pension while offer a limited income support; public services are mostly limited to education and health with a combination of a mix private-public market; family policies are passive and based on the male breadwinner family model and trade union are quite strong and attend sectorial wage bargaining.

The conservative regime has been also more recently –between 70’s and 80’s- evolved on a Mediterranean model (see Rhodes, 1997; Naldini and Guerrero Jurado, 2009), encompassing Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece, which conserve elements of the conservative model (which is welfare benefits based on the level of previous earnings), but it can be distinguished by elements related to a higher fragmentation of rights<sup>74</sup> (which are not only related to the belonging of a certain category but also to a certain condition, in contrast with the universalism of social-democratic regime) and relative measures of benefits and services redistributions mainly attributed on the basis of the contributory system (therefore, for example; unemployment contribute is provided on the basis of individuals work history), moreover stronger attention is given to pension and lower focus on other social interventions<sup>75</sup>. In particular, this system shows an unbalanced redistribution of risks between young and old generations which is in general attributed to the “safety net” of family (Naldini and Guerrero Jurado, 2009, 5).

Following this theoretical categorization I will focus on a sample of five countries which cover the whole range of welfare regimes, in particular: Sweden; United Kingdom; Germany; Italy; Spain.

The choice to introduce two Mediterranean countries (Italy and Spain) is motivated by the will to get a clearer overview about common trends going on in the group of Mediterranean countries with respect to other countries –such as Germany- belonging to a pure Continental welfare regime. In other words, including Spain we could have an additional relative term of comparison useful to assess the position of Italy among the EU countries.

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<sup>74</sup> In particular, as Naldini and Guerrero Jurado highlighted “unlike in Continental regimes, in Southern European countries “familialism” has not translated into state support for families through social policies”, in particular there would be a varieties of familialisms and some of them support families through specific policies, while other (the Mediterranean ones) instead rely on family as the main source of care provision.

<sup>75</sup> As Saraceno (2002) noticed this lead young people to live for a longer time with their parents with respect to what it happens in other EU countries.

## 5.1 Exploring Data

The interviews carried out within the ISSP Survey on Social Inequality present the following country distribution:

Interview Distribution		
Country	Num.	%
Italy	905	17,6
Germany	1.342	26,1
United Kingdom	865	16,8
Sweden	1.032	20,1
Spain	1.003	19,5
Total	5.147	100,0

Source: ISSP 2009

The number of the interviews carried out in the single countries, although not reflecting the proportionality of the whole EU population (e.g. Sweden population is lower inhabitants than the Italian one, even if more interviews have been carried out in Sweden rather than in Italy), are quite numerous and represent a good sample for our analysis.

In the questionnaire it has been asked to respondents to express their view concerning the factors that they think are important in life “*to get ahead*”. The use of this expression allow us, at least theoretically, to refer not necessarily to the idea of upward mobility, but it is rather related to the idea of individuals’ aspirations to reach a position which is satisfying and, for this reason, better able to come closer to the idea of “life chances”. In this case, life chances is assessed through individuals’ perceptions which reflect nothing else that beliefs about the functioning of mechanisms of mobility in society and, for us, are important since they are able to enrich our understanding of our life chances are perceived being distributed and available in society.

The questions have been organized in way to assess both ascriptive and achieved variables that are generally assumed as playing a role in opportunities for mobility. Nevertheless, the questions also

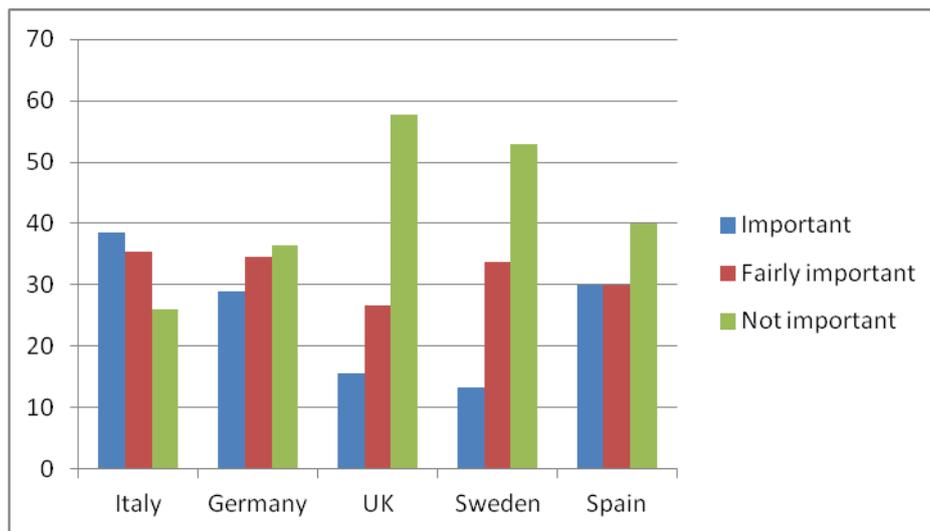
provides a good coverage for what it concerns factors of mobility identified in the mobility equation developed in the first chapter ( $f(SM) = IE + EK + CK + SK$ ).

The answers to the questions are close and respondents could choose between five different answers which are: essential/ very important/ fairly important/ not very important/ not important at all. In an attempt to identify in a more clear way emerging trends, I have also summed up these five answers in three big groups: the first gathering together the answers “essential” and “very important”; the second one reporting the “fairly important” answer, and the last assembling “not very important” and “not important at all”. The results have been then represented through bar chart tables.

The first question asked is meant to capture the weight respondents assigned to the economic background (in my equation expressed as EK: economic capital) as a factor of mobility in life. The tables with answers expressed in percentage and the bar chart follow.

Q1a: How important is coming from a wealthy family? Column %						
	Italy	Germany	UK	Sweden	Spain	Total
Essential	8,5	7,9	2,6	2,5	6,5	5,7
Very important	30,1	21,0	12,9	10,7	23,5	19,6
Fairly important	35,4	34,6	26,7	33,8	30,0	32,3
Not very important	17,7	28,8	39,4	37,0	25,2	29,6
Not important at all	8,3	7,7	18,4	16,0	14,9	12,7
<i>Important</i>	<i>38,6</i>	<i>28,9</i>	<i>15,5</i>	<i>13,2</i>	<i>29,9</i>	<i>25,3</i>
<i>Fairly important</i>	<i>35,4</i>	<i>34,6</i>	<i>26,7</i>	<i>33,8</i>	<i>30,0</i>	<i>32,3</i>
<i>Not important</i>	<i>26,0</i>	<i>36,5</i>	<i>57,8</i>	<i>53,0</i>	<i>40,0</i>	<i>42,4</i>
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

Source: ISSP 2009



How it clearly appears from the tables above, Italian respondents appear to attribute a larger weight the economic family background since are the country with the higher percentage of people saying that coming from a wealthy family is essential or very important. In addition, Italy has also the lower percentage of people answering that this is not important. In line with the division we made on the basis of the welfare regimes, the countries which come closer to Italy are Spain and Germany, which share similarities in policy of economic redistributions and services. Therefore, it seems that individuals' perceptions do not only reflect national policy orientations, but they also assign to the economic inequality related to family of origin a precise role in the personal availability of life chances. And, this role is judge to have an impact that in Italy is higher rather than elsewhere.

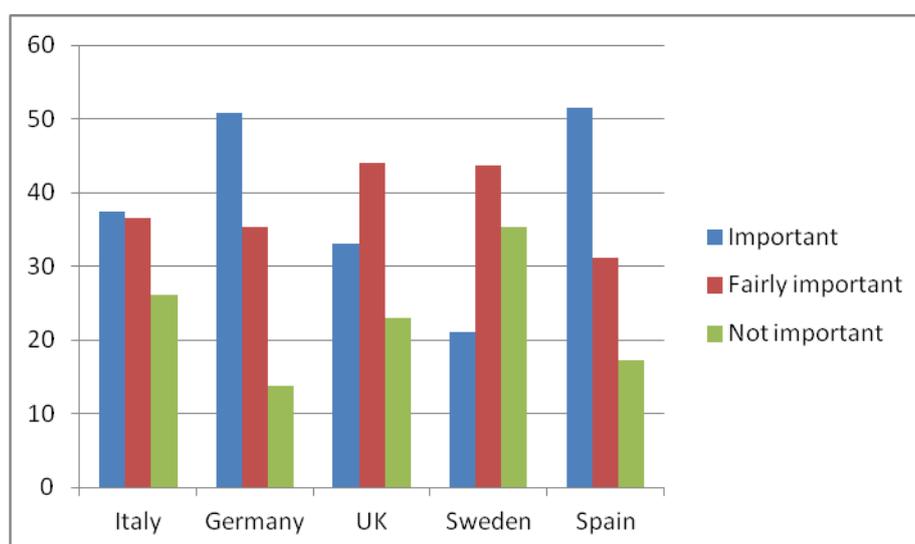
A rather different situation is found in UK and, but for different reasons in Sweden. In fact, in the UK a lower percentage of respondents attributes a role to family economic origin for future life chances than in Sweden. This is, however, most explicable with the refer to the well-established meritocratic idea, enrooted especially in UK and US, and related to the classic liberal approach according to which the key component for getting ahead in life are individual's capacities and efforts put in it, this UK peculiarity will come back later on when focusing on the impact of the factors related to the individual endowment.

A second question explored the role of "cultural capital", understood as the weight of the parents' education on their sons' life chances, that in my equation is expressed by the term "CK" as a factor influencing the opportunity of individuals' mobility. As explained elsewhere this question is clearly

founded on the abundant literature proving that pupils coming from educated parents have much larger chances to attain good educational standards (and, therefore, also have better chances to move upward). This is due to the fact that parents that attained higher level of education are shown to be more supportive about pupils' aspirations and inclinations (e.g. spend more time with their sons helping them in career choice as well as with the daily school routine). Moreover, these children also benefit from the process of socialization and internationalization of a serious of habitus and knowledge that provide them a comparative advantage compared to other children sharing a less advantaged parental background .

<b>Q1b: How important is having well-educated parents?</b>						
Column %						
	<b>Italy</b>	<b>Germany</b>	<b>UK</b>	<b>Sweden</b>	<b>Spain</b>	<b>Total</b>
Essential	8,6	9,1	5,7	1,6	9,1	6,9
Very important	28,8	41,7	27,3	19,5	42,4	32,8
Fairly important	36,5	35,4	44,0	43,6	31,2	37,9
Not very important	20,1	10,8	16,7	26,0	12,7	16,8
Not important at all	6,0	3,0	6,2	9,3	4,6	5,6
<i>Important</i>	<i>37,4</i>	<i>50,8</i>	<i>33,1</i>	<i>21,1</i>	<i>51,5</i>	<i>39,7</i>
<i>Fairly important</i>	<i>36,5</i>	<i>35,4</i>	<i>44,0</i>	<i>43,6</i>	<i>31,2</i>	<i>37,9</i>
<i>Not important</i>	<i>26,1</i>	<i>13,8</i>	<i>22,9</i>	<i>35,3</i>	<i>17,3</i>	<i>22,4</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Source: ISSP 2009

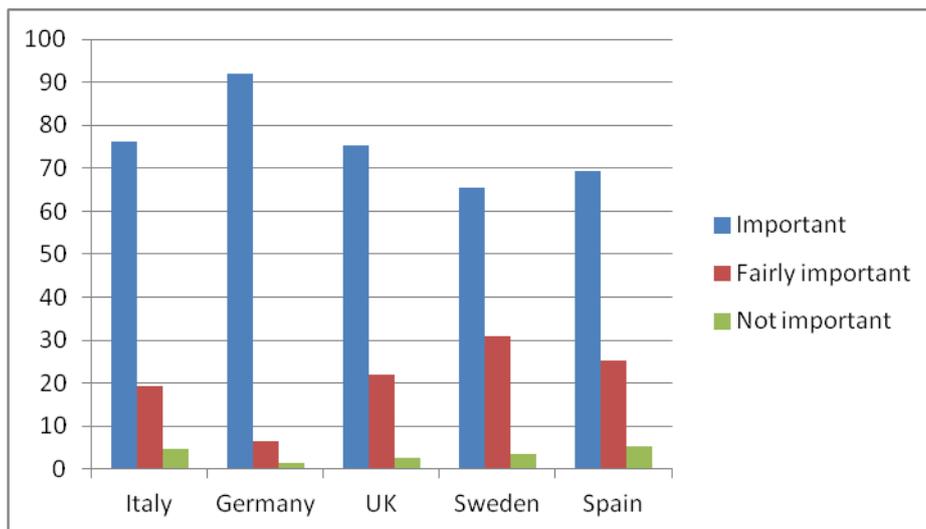


The data above show as parents' education is considered a rather crucial factor in Germany and Spain, with Italy and UK are somewhere in the middle and Sweden in the last position. Once more, Sweden data do not come as a surprise since the high attention provided by educational policy at all level and, especially on the earlier years, by the Sweden state support a correlation in the intergenerational educational achievement which is weaker than in other countries. This strong commitment made by the Sweden welfare state probably influence the idea in the population that parents' education do not constitute a particularly important factor for getting ahead. While Spain and Germany are the countries where parents' education is deemed to have a stronger weight on son's life chances, respectively 51,5 and 50,8. This trend firstly certifies the existence of a stronger beliefs about the existence of cultural elite supporting, directly or indirectly, their children' career and ambitions within a public educational system which is, instead, not so powerful to contrast this kind of mechanism.

After this, respondents have also been asked to say how important is having good education to get ahead in life. This question clearly aims at exploring the classical link established in modern society between education and upward mobility and it is in my equation the second a last element included in the cultural capital term, "CK".

<b>Q1c: How important is having a good education yourself?</b>						
Column %						
	<b>Italy</b>	<b>Germany</b>	<b>UK</b>	<b>Sweden</b>	<b>Spain</b>	<b>Total</b>
Essential	35,5	32,0	23,6	10,7	19,4	24,4
Very important	40,7	60,1	51,7	54,6	50,0	52,3
Fairly important	19,2	6,6	22,1	31,0	25,2	20,0
Not very important	4,0	1,1	2,0	2,6	4,6	2,7
Not important at all	0,6	0,2	0,6	1,1	0,8	0,6
<i>Important</i>	76,2	92,1	75,3	65,4	69,4	76,7
<i>Fairly important</i>	19,2	6,6	22,1	31,0	25,2	20,0
<i>Not important</i>	4,6	1,3	2,5	3,6	5,4	3,3
<b>Total</b>	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

Source: ISSP 2009



In this case the results are a bit more controversial, since Germany is the country where education is given stronger importance, while Sweden is the one giving to education a lower importance for future life chances, while the other countries are lying in the middle. These output is telling two important things: firstly, education is reputed as a key factor for individuals life chances in all countries. Secondly, the country where education is completely free and strongly supported by national policy in order to guarantee the larger access, which is Sweden with a public spending on education equal to 1,36 in comparison with Germany (0,98), Spain (0,96), Italy (0,67) and UK (0,39), is also the one where education is expected to play a weaker role on individuals' mobility (Eurostat 2010). In this case Swedish respondents' perceptions are telling one thing: when education is believed to be open and accessible to everybody, then it does not constitute anymore *the* key and distinguishing factor for getting ahead.

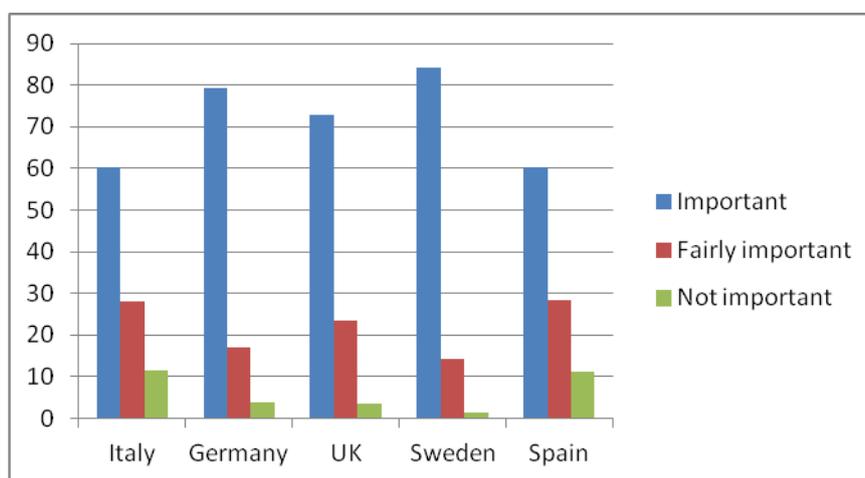
Another term of our equation of mobility is the individual endowment "IE". This term refers to the personal skills such as motivation and personal inclination which are generally considered as "meritocratic" elements necessary to get ahead in life. In the ISSP survey the question focused on the importance of ambition and hard work, as follow:

**Q1d: How Important is having ambition?**

Column %

	<b>Italy</b>	<b>Germany</b>	<b>UK</b>	<b>Sweden</b>	<b>Spain</b>	<b>Total</b>
Essential	27,6	20,8	25,6	24,8	16,6	22,7
Very important	32,6	58,4	47,4	59,5	43,6	49,5
Fairly important	28,2	17,0	23,5	14,4	28,5	21,7
Not very important	9,4	3,5	3,3	1,1	8,7	5,0
Not important at all	2,2	0,3	0,2	0,2	2,6	1,0
<i>Important</i>	<i>60,2</i>	<i>79,2</i>	<i>73,0</i>	<i>84,3</i>	<i>60,2</i>	<i>72,2</i>
<i>Fairly important</i>	<i>28,2</i>	<i>17,0</i>	<i>23,5</i>	<i>14,4</i>	<i>28,5</i>	<i>21,7</i>
<i>Not important</i>	<i>11,6</i>	<i>3,8</i>	<i>3,5</i>	<i>1,3</i>	<i>11,3</i>	<i>6,0</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Source: ISSP 2009

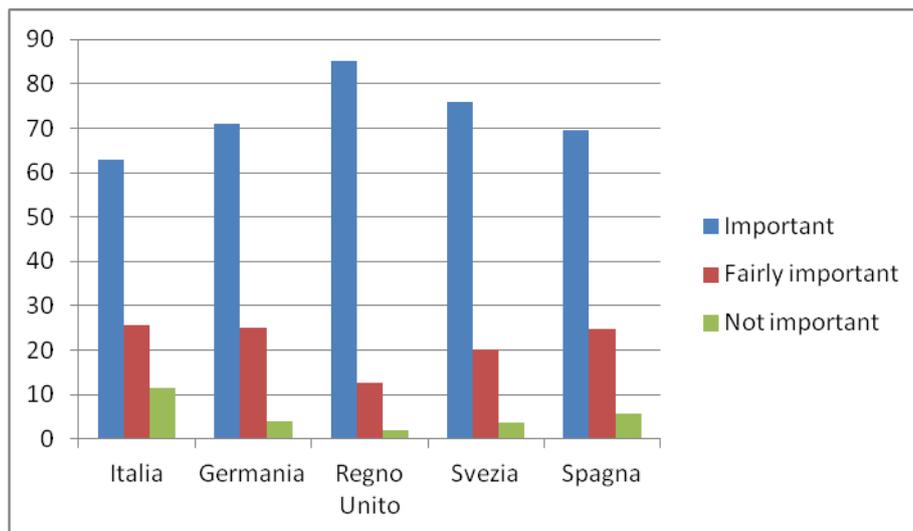


**Q1e: How important is hard work?**

Column %

	<b>Italy</b>	<b>Germany</b>	<b>UK</b>	<b>Sweden</b>	<b>Spain</b>	<b>Total</b>
Essential	30,0	15,9	32,7	20,6	24,3	23,8
Very important	32,9	55,0	52,5	55,3	45,1	48,9
Fairly important	25,6	25,0	12,8	20,3	24,7	22,0
Not very important	10,4	3,8	1,3	3,3	4,1	4,5
Not important at all	1,1	0,3	0,7	0,5	1,8	0,8
<i>Important</i>	<i>62,9</i>	<i>70,9</i>	<i>85,2</i>	<i>75,9</i>	<i>69,4</i>	<i>72,7</i>
<i>Fairly important</i>	<i>25,6</i>	<i>25,0</i>	<i>12,8</i>	<i>20,3</i>	<i>24,7</i>	<i>22,0</i>
<i>Not important</i>	<i>11,5</i>	<i>4,1</i>	<i>2,0</i>	<i>3,8</i>	<i>5,8</i>	<i>5,3</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Source: ISSP 2009



The tables above indicate that in all countries there is a shared beliefs about the fact that individual endowment represent a key feature to get ahead. Without ambition and hard work few chances to move are available to individuals. Nevertheless, some difference exists also in this case: while in the UK and Sweden the percentages of people saying that this attitude are important largely overcome the 70% of the respondents, Spanish and Italian respondents show to be on average a bit sceptical (in both questions between 50 and 60 percent of respondents recognizing them as important factors). Italy, in particular, proves to be the more sceptical country to recognize a determinant role to personal endowment to get ahead: since more than the 11 percent of respondents do not consider important to get ahead in life nor having ambition nor hard work compared to an average around 3 percent of respondents (with the exception of Spain showing a similar rate on what it concerns attitude toward ambition). The fact that even in countries with very different welfare organization and cultural value there is a strong consensus about the importance of this individual endowment certainly means that EU citizens shares the idea that individuals have their own life in their hands and motivation to succeed is a key element whenever you have a state more or less supportive on this point. Italy, together with Spain, makes however exception: in Italy ambition and hard work are considered important but at the end of the day, a significant percentage of people tend to downgrade the role of this factor, since other factors are probably considered play a more central role.

## 5.2 Assessing Generalized Trust

A last factor assessed by the ISSP survey through individuals perception is the Social Capital, “SK”. Social capital not only complete my equation of mobility, but it also bring this analysis forward helping to better understand what I have pointed out in the previous chapter making an hypothesis about the existence of a relationship between the level of generalized trust in society and level and distributions of individuals’ life chances. To a better look, the degree of generalized trust that individuals have toward the opportunity to be mobile during their life-course is already reflected by the questions analysed above. Due most probably to an entrenched and complex aggregate of different factors, that it is not possible to deepen here, such as institutional organization, shared value and personal/familiar experience, in some countries respondents tend to share stronger beliefs about the fact that ascriptive factors are not essential to get ahead in life, while supporting the role of strictly individual dependent variable (e.g. ambition, hard work, education). In this sense countries two different countries, such as UK and Sweden, even if sharing totally dissimilar institutional organizations and welfare regimes, seem to show overall a higher level of trust toward life chances available to individuals from society to getting ahead compared to Germany, but especially to Spain and Italy.

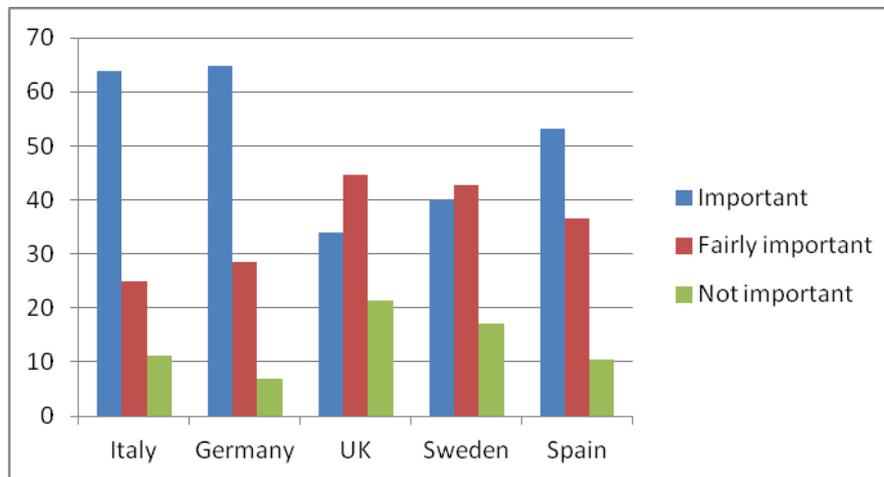
In the case of the social capital questions we have an even more direct attempt to explore the level of general trust that individuals have toward their peers in getting ahead for what it concerns the mechanisms that individuals perceived as being in action when thinking about individuals’ life chances and relationship with other member of the community. The questions that in the ISSP survey I categorize as useful to our understanding of SK factor are three and are organized n the basis of a sort of climax, starting from assessing the role played by the most informal form of social capital which is the importance of personal network for getting ahead (the question is focused on the general importance of “knowing the right people”). This question has a very broad formulation, since the expression “the right people” could be meant to refer to people helping you to develop ambition and

our own talent, although it is also clearly referred to the idea that, our chances to get ahead clearly depend on the social network we can rely on and which is, mostly, developed through a progressive process of socialization based both on a process of socialization which often strictly depend by the family of origin. The second question relies instead on the idea that political connections constitute a good tool to move within the social ladder: the question do not say what it is precisely meant for “political connections” but the idea beneath this question is to assess how public life and commitment is felt as being something which is most used for the good of a restricted group of people, rather than for all citizens. This question, therefore, is also able to highlight the limit of generalized trust that citizens have toward institutions and their political class which is –as I previously clarified- an important dimension of generalized trust for every individual inserted on a state based community as it happens on current time. The last question which I see as part of the assessment of the social capital dimension is the one which openly asked to respondents about the role of “cheating” in order to get ahead. The question is specifically formulated referring to the importance of “giving bribes”. This question has most probably being inserted by the ISSP Board since the survey is carried out also in a country where corruption represents a serious problem. Nevertheless, I have decided to include it here since corruption represented –as I said- a clear fraud and whatever admission about the importance of a similar mechanisms as a means of life chances clearly play a strong negative expectation toward future life chances and it, therefore, both constitutes a strong disincentive to not invest in other possible means of mobility (why should I put some effort and invest on something for what I won’t have something back?) but, at the same time, it also press on citizens to consider fraud as a means to use when determined to move ahead (if I expect others will behave in a certain way, I will try to do the same to avoid losing game). Both aspects are particularly dangerous and cause evident social distortions. Data and respectively bar charts for the three questions follow.

**Q1f: How important is knowing the right people?**  
Column %

	Italy	Germany	UK	Sweden	Spain	Total
Essential	27,6	17,5	7,5	9,2	12,3	14,8
Very important	36,1	47,3	26,4	30,8	40,8	37,3
Fairly important	25,0	28,4	44,6	42,8	36,5	35,1
Not very important	9,6	6,2	17,9	15,1	9,3	11,2
Not important at all	1,5	0,6	3,5	2,0	1,1	1,6
<i>Important</i>	63,8	64,8	33,9	40,0	53,1	52,1
<i>Fairly important</i>	25,0	28,4	44,6	42,8	36,5	35,1
<i>Not important</i>	11,2	6,8	21,5	17,1	10,4	12,8
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

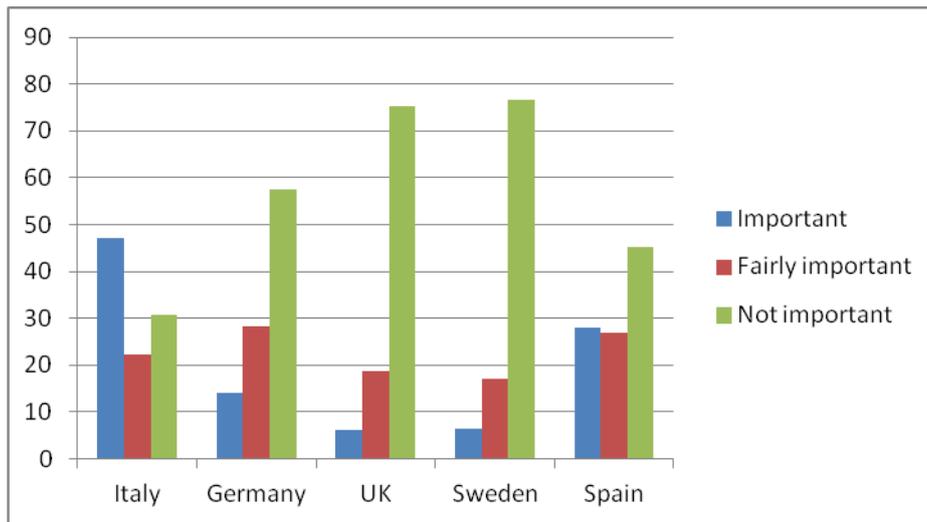
Source: ISSP 2009



**Q1g: How important is having political connections?**  
Column %

	Italy	Germany	UK	Sweden	Spain	Total
Essential	22,0	2,7	1,2	1,5	6,1	6,1
Very important	25,0	11,5	4,8	4,8	21,8	13,3
Fairly important	22,2	28,4	18,6	17,1	27,0	23,2
Not very important	18,6	44,9	48,2	49,7	26,8	38,4
Not important at all	12,1	12,5	27,1	26,9	18,3	18,9
<i>Important</i>	47,1	14,2	6,1	6,3	27,9	19,4
<i>Fairly important</i>	22,2	28,4	18,6	17,1	27,0	23,2
<i>Not important</i>	30,7	57,4	75,3	76,6	45,1	57,4
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

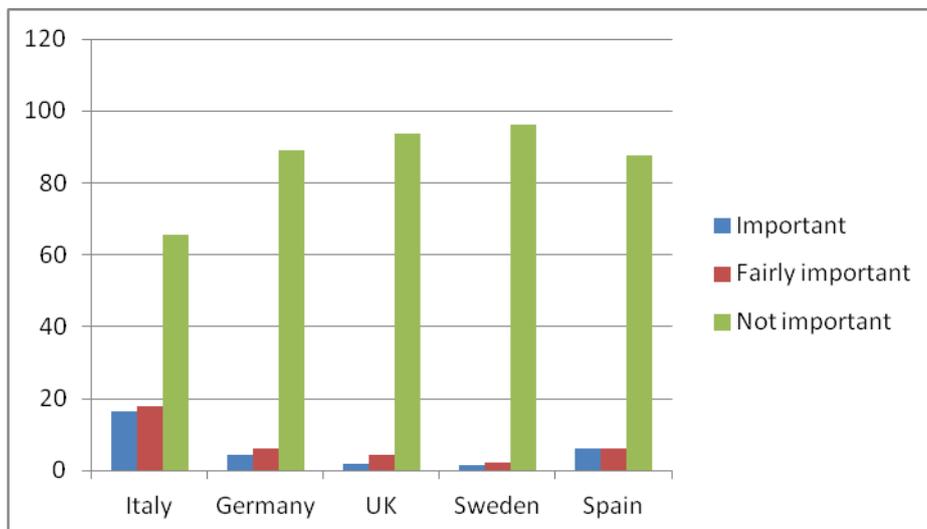
Source: ISSP 2009



**Q1h: How important is giving bribes?**  
Column %

	Italy	Germany	UK	Sweden	Spain	Total
Essential	6,2	1,7	0,8	0,9	1,8	2,1
Very important	10,2	2,8	1,3	0,6	4,5	3,6
Fairly important	18,0	6,2	4,4	2,4	6,2	7,1
Not very important	18,0	21,3	15,2	14,5	20,9	18,4
Not important at all	47,6	67,9	78,4	81,5	66,5	68,8
<i>Important</i>	16,4	4,5	2,0	1,5	6,3	5,8
<i>Fairly important</i>	18,0	6,2	4,4	2,4	6,2	7,1
<i>Not important</i>	65,6	89,2	93,6	96,1	87,5	87,2
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

Source: ISSP 2009



I believe respondents' orientation toward all these three different aspects of social capital give us the opportunity to have a good overview of what it is the level of trust that citizens express toward other citizens, as well as institutions. In fact, looking at the data above a series of considerations are in order:

- First of all, in all the three questions a much larger distance compared with the previous one divides UK and Sweden from Spain and Italy, with Germany respondents showing a less clear orientation. Going more in details: Sweden and Italy appears to be at the two opposite sides.
- Personal social network is considered particular important to get ahead in Italy and Germany, respectively the 27,6 and 17,5 percent of respondents think that knowing the right people is essential compared to the 9,2 and 12,3 percent of English and Swedish respondents. As I already said, it is not so easy to interpret this feedbacks due to the very general formulation of the question. Nevertheless, once more, Italian respondents prove to be more sceptical about mechanisms of mobility which evidently are perceived less transparent (to know the right person is a matter of origin or luck, certainly not of fairness or merit) and more related to individual entourage rather than in what it happens in other countries. The fact that Germany is here closer to Italy rather than Spain (which, by the way, come just after) can be most probably explained by the long tradition of corporatism present in Germany (see Siaroff, 1999; Hicks, 1988) based on the idea that society in the country should be organized into major interest groups. This point might lead Germany citizens to develop the beliefs that, more than it happens in other countries, networks constitute a powerful and distinguishing means for being mobile. For what it concerns Italy a similar reflection can be made, since together with Germany the two countries have recognized a particular role to corporatism (as I explained also their welfare regimes reflect this feature, since it is organized in a way to distribute service and benefits depending on your previous contribution).
- Moving on the questions about political connections the gap between Italy and other countries becomes very wide, with Italy –once more- on the more extreme position of the scale: 22 percent of Italian respondents have affirmed that political connections are essential in order to get ahead (and 30,7 that they are important); Spain follows but with its 6,1 percent is closer to the rest of the countries

(UK 1,2; Sweden 1,5 and Germany 2,7). Also when looking at the percentage of the people affirming that political connections are not so important the gap is very wide since just 30,7 percent of Italian respondents agree on this, in comparison with 75,3 of UK, 76,6 of Sweden, 57,4 of Germany a 45,1 percent of Spain. This data clearly show how in Italy people general perception about the fact that political class and affairs are connected and play a strong role on mechanisms of mobility is an anomaly within the EU area and it is inevitably representative of a weak level of generalized trust with regard both to the ruling class and institutions as being able to ensure and encourage fair life chances distributions and enhancement.

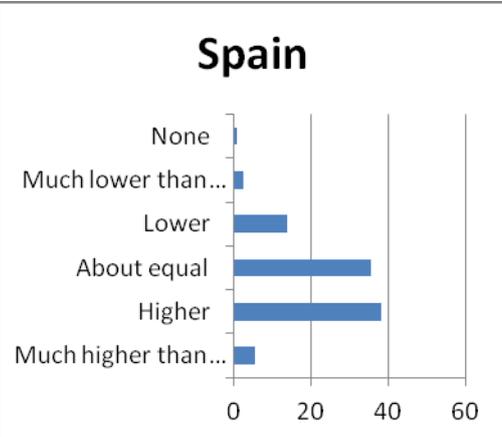
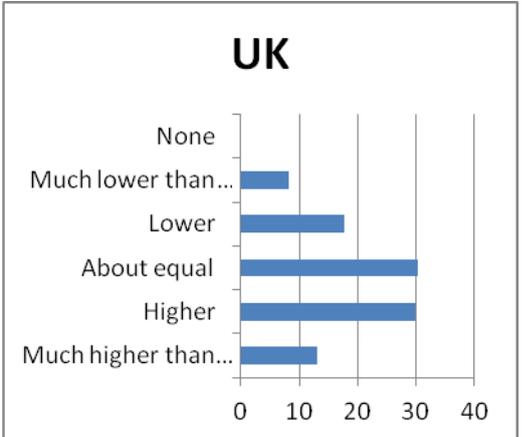
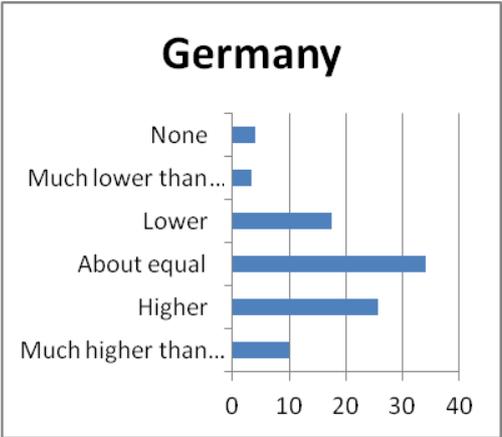
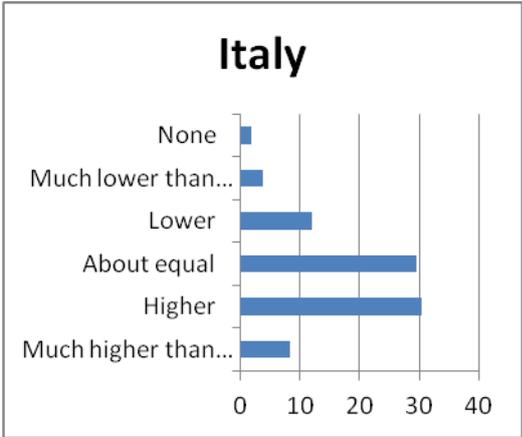
- Nevertheless, probably the most striking evidence is the one provided by the last question concerning the importance of giving bribes to get ahead in life. In this case Italian is far from the other EU countries average: the 16,4 percent affirmed that bribes are important in comparison to the 4,5 of Germany, 6,3 of Spain, 2 of UK and 1.5 of Sweden. This evidence does not come as a real surprise, since Italy is the notably one of the most corrupted EU country according to the international Index carried out by Transparency International. For instance Italy ranked at the 72th position in the index for the year 2012, respect to Spain (30), UK (17), Germany (13) and Sweden which is meant to be as one of the less corrupted country in the world and ranked 4<sup>th</sup> (see Transparency.org – CPI, 2012). This Index, as the ISSP one, is also based on perception and, therefore, both outcomes appear perfectly on line, one with the other. What it makes the difference for us is that a much larger percentage of the Italian respondents found important, if not essential, the use of bribes as a way to become socially mobile, maybe thinking about the possibility to win a open competitive exam for state level employment or for a tender. Whatever it is the exact position they have in mind it seems that Italian respondents have not problem to admit the existence of mechanisms based on opaque and discretionary actions to explain the way it is possible to get ahead.

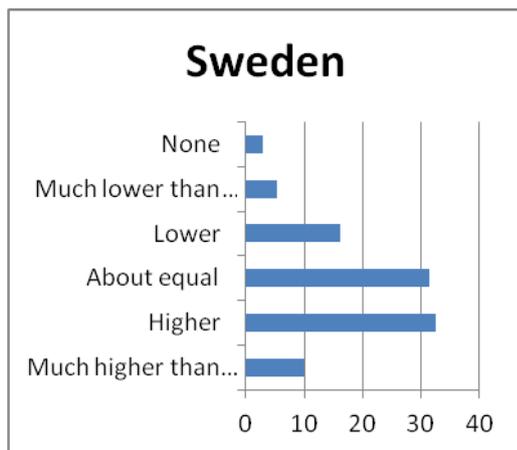
The three questions together help us to grasp and to explore different dimensions of the generalized trust concept, since they investigate individuals' beliefs under all the crucial aspects of trust: the inter-personal one (knowing the right people); the public one (having political connections) and what can be

referred to as the normative one, since bribes clearly involve the violation of a basic rules of fairness and equality which are fundamental in all democratic and liberal societies. It is clear that where blurred mechanisms of selections are recognized as having a priority over other transparency and achieved factors of mobility trust is seriously weaken and this has, as I explained, a very negative influence over individuals' life chances creation and distribution and, at last, on social mobility. From my analysis it emerges clearly that Italy is the place where this kind of situation is most evident: Italy is the place where this situation is most evident. Italian respondents are, in fact, the one which tend to be less convinced about the role of the individual capacities and skills as fundamental to get ahead and, more than this, they are openly admitting the existence of mechanism of selection and recruiting that are all but based on merit and/or fairness. All this, on the basis of what I have explained in the previous chapter is seriously dangerous since when such beliefs become deeply enrooted and they are shared at all level of the society this lack of trust brings individuals to general block of personal investments about the future, as well as to take any risk to try to change their condition and look for a different place in society. Nevertheless, someone could say, these arguments are just the results of a survey and, for instance, in this kind of questionnaires, people is rather inclined to answer on the basis of their personal history and perception: therefore, in case they experienced downward mobility they will probably tend not to trust society and to think that "the system" has not been fair with them (see Piketty, 1995). For this reason, it is interesting to have a look to the answers that respondents gave to the questions made about their self-perception of mobility. At this regard, in the ISSP survey it was also asked people to compare their job with the level of the job father. In fact, if it is certainly true that experience and self-perception about mobility shape personal beliefs about life chances: who have an individual history of upward mobility will more likely develop positive perceptions about life chances available in society, and the reverse is true for people in an opposite condition. Nevertheless, when we look to the tables below reporting individuals self-perceptions of mobility it looks quite clear that not large differences exist among the countries analysed and, therefore, the different outcomes that respondents gave about mechanisms to get ahead cannot be simply ascribed as a reaction to individual experience (I was not able to move and this happened since external obstacles were avoiding this).

While, since the percentage of people which declared to have experienced intergenerational upward or downward mobility is mostly equal in all countries (Italy is instead the country with the lower percentage of people declaring downward mobility) the outcome of the previous question deserve to be taken into consideration and can constituted a good ground to sketch policy pattern of reform.

<b>Level of job compared to the job of father</b>					
	<b>Italy</b>	<b>Germany</b>	<b>UK</b>	<b>Sweden</b>	<b>Spain</b>
Much higher than your fathers	8,4	10	13,1	10	5,5
Higher	30,5	25,6	29,9	32,6	38,1
About equal	29,5	34	30,2	31,3	35,4
Lower	11,9	17,4	17,8	16,2	13,7
Much lower than your fathers	3,7	5,5	0,7	1,6	4,1
None	1,7	4	0	3	0,9





### 6.1 Emerging Trends: Italy as an outsider, a brief explanation

As the data above shown, although countries chosen for the analysis represent a cluster not too heterogeneous and social mobility, as well as the positive value associated to it (freedom and equality) are certainly shared by citizens, the criteria through which citizens from different countries considered this mobility to happen are not the same: a difference weight is given to ascription and achieved factors and, more than this, a diverse role is attributed to social capital, in its different aspects. In particular, I remarked as the strong position assigned in certain countries much more than in others, Italy first, ought be interpreted as a sign of a low generalized trust with all the connected consequences discussed in the previous chapter.

I have also tried, when making this analysis, to choose countries with a different welfare regimes, in order to be able to grasp and reflect about possible emerging trends. With respect to this, I have found that Sweden, together with UK –which, by the way, follow the first at a certain distance- is the country where respondents seem to attribute a lower weight to ascriptive factor and where generalized trust is stronger. This is quite surprising if we think that these two countries have two opposite welfare regimes: a social democratic where a high degree of universalism of service and benefits to all citizens and redistribution is applied and, on the other side, in UK the liberal one which instead is based on the principle of the minimum level of intervention. This would make us to suppose that, although English citizens do not benefit of the same kind of universalistic services and redistributive policies, there is a

strong cultural element which is at stake and concerns the fact that in the UK a deeply shared liberal tradition lead citizens to strongly believe to merit (skills, merits and personal ambition) as the key element to get ahead, with or without the support of a welfare state. A long tradition, well-rooted in history distinguishes the UK citizens and, most probably, strongly influences them in a way that let them see any strong state intervention as something justified only in case of strict necessity and whereas the citizens have not been able to take care of them self with their own capacities, for this reason in this country state aid is almost related to a matter of charity and generosity, rather than to an effort of fairness and equality (see Wacquant, 2001; Esping.-Andersen, 1999). This two countries are the those where citizens tend to have developed, for diverse reasons, more positive beliefs about availability and distribution of life chances and, in particular, they tend to show a higher degree of generalized trust compared to the others three countries. Germany, Spain and Italy are instead on a different situation: with Germany generally closer to Spain, and Italy which appears as a real outsiders especially for what it concerns the data about the generalized trust. This consideration suggests us that countries with conservative welfare regimes tend to perform less well compared to social democratic and liberal one for what it concerns the enhancement and encouragement of generalized trust. This is not so hard to understand if we take into consideration that, in fact, except for what it concerns some universal services, in this countries other services and benefits tend to be distributed to citizens on the basis of who they are and what they have done in the past (e.g. unemployment benefit on the basis of the years of work accumulated), trying to frame them within groups of belonging shaped on the basis of quantitative (e.g. income, ownership) or qualitative thresholds (e.g. belonging to certain category of workers, professionals, public officer and so forth) which very often do not correspond to real need. So doing, this kind of state organizations are most probably responsible for not promoting reciprocity and, therefore, discouraging trustworthy and trustworthiness behaviours, since the idea of having individuals that access to services depending on the category they belong to inevitable encourages members of the group to enhance their feeling of belonging to that single group and, therefore, it promotes reciprocity only toward the member of that group, while barriers are erected to access and exit from the group making more difficult the turnover. This kind of welfare organization, therefore,

discourages reciprocity among all the rest of the members of community also because this division in categories naturally lead them to accumulate a cluster of benefits and treatments that tend to be guzzled and understood overtime as acquired rights that become slowly rigid and support the maintenance of the status quo since nobody is intentioned to review his own treatment, being afraid to lose something, in term of benefits and privileges acquired. Being the belonging to a certain category the status that grant you the rights to a certain treatment, individuals are pressed to identify themselves within their familiar background and they will have more difficulty to develop ambitions and desires to move from their socio-economic background of origin. This mechanisms, instead, seems not being in act in Sweden, nor in UK since in both cases citizens of these countries seem to have assured an equality of treatment, although very different ones.

At this stage, one could also ask why Italian seems, more than other countries, to show even weaker level of generalized trust and, although an exhaustive analysis will deserve a level of details which is not possible here, a few considerations can help us to understand why Italy comes out as an outsider in this analysis:

- A traditional historical disinterest about social policies by governments has caused a high fragmentation of a systematic frame of reference. The situation get worsened with the gauche constitutional federal reform attributing this competency to local power in a total lack of a common vision about the guidelines and goals to be achieved on the national level (as it happens –for instance- in the UK where there is a clear and constant focus on the contrast to poverty) as well as without previously implementing the introduction of a information systems able to gathered relevant data crucial to correctly address the action of the policy makers (Checchi, 2010:7). This lack of a shared and permanent goal to achieve have practically lead to a rather irrational use of the public expense in a desperate attempt to cover all the areas (from care for the elderly, family, unemployment, education and life-long-learning, housing), but with the substantial result of doing it in an extremely fragmented way, very often with the impression of setting up provision closer to the request of a powerful part of the electorate.

- The lack of a clear vision about the objectives to be achieved is aggravated by the low budget that the country reserve to welfare policies. According to Eurostat, Italy in 2009 has expended 29,8% of its GDP, compared to a just lower 29,2 of the UK and 31,4 of Germany and 32,1 of Sweden. In addition, the amount becomes much lower than the EU average when cutting the percentage of the budget devoted to pensions (Italy is the country in EU spending more, more than 15% of its GDP, compared to around the 12% of Germany, Sweden and UK) and situation get even worse when focusing on the real capacity of the state to ensure a real coverage of the services (see Castles, 1995 and Busilacchi, 2006) .

- The high weight assigned to the family as the pivot institution of the social security cushion. In Italy, probably also due to the strong role exerted by the Catholic Church, family is considered the pillar of social organization. Nevertheless, this has lead governments to delegate to family the implementation and distribution of services and information that are crucial in the process of creation and distribution of life chances. An example under this point of view is the lack within an educational system substantially free of any services of orientation for students. And even where young students with a disadvantaged socio-economic background manage to enrol to university only few and insufficient means are offered them to perform successfully during their study period: university scholarships are few and cover just a small part of the expenses; lack of part-time study plans to allow a compatibility of the university study with a part-time job; lack of study loans. All this crates crucial obstacles even to higher motivated students and where families cannot afford the cost of education the university degree is more likely to turn on a Chimera than in reality. Moreover, similar obstacles exists at all levels and are all based on the idea that family is meant to fill up the gap for ensuring the implementation of constitutional rights that state cannot really guarantee. This is, according to me, a particularly problematic aspect since it produces what Busilacchi (2006:52) has very well defined as an *ambivalent delegation*: since a very limited attention is devoted by the policy makers to ensure the universal coverage of single services to all citizens, while there is a forced delegation to take care of what it is not adequately covered by the public by the family which necessarily brings it all individuals that are part of it to take all their choices about their future plans and life taking into strict

consideration the needs of the other members . In a similar situation the death of a grandfather which is not able to ensure anymore his contribution to the family though his pension can dramatically lead to a drop out of the nephew from university; similarly, a serious illness of a parent can determine the decision of a son or daughter to abandon a more satisfying job in another city to ensure adequate care to the sick parent. In other words, what happens is that individuals internalized within the family the supply of services that are not ensured by the state and this mechanism produced distortive direct and indirect very negative effects over trust and individual life chances: first of all, as a direct effect, individuals' choices about future life plans are always required to take into account family needs. This inevitably strengthens the linkage of individuals to family of origin and, in fact, reducing the development of positive expectations to change at individuals' disposal and, therefore, his/her life chances. But individuals' life chances result to be frustrated by this mechanism also under another perspective: in a similar situation individuals tend to clearly rely just on their strict family and annex social entourage which is the only one showing to the citizens the availability to ensure a certain level of care and options. In this way, social networks, entrustment and patronage, as well as forms of distorted loyalty are a rational answer to a lack of care ensured by the public system. All this is also worsened by the chronic political instability of the Italian governments which are not able to ensure any continuity in policy and related objectives. In this way, citizens feel inescapably destined to look for solid points of reference which they won't be able to find on the public sphere, but within the family and the social environment close to it, and it will be toward them, rather than toward public institutions or people with whom they just experienced any or few integrations, that they will trust and be trustworthy toward.

At this stage, my analysis comes to its end, but some final remarks are offered in the conclusion addressing the path of public reforms able to strengthen and enlarge life chances creation and distribution.

## **V. Conclusive Remarks: Sketching new Horizons for Policy Makers**

In the previous chapters I have introduced the concept of social mobility and explained its crucial role in current democratic and liberal societies. I also explained how its content is intrinsically related to a need to be addressed through the idea of life chances, which indeed constitute the real focus of the mobility analysis. In this perspective, I proposed the existence of a relationship between individuals' life chances and the level of trust in society. In a nutshell, I believe that a society showing low levels of generalized trust condemns its citizens to pay a high cost in terms of reduction and unequal distribution of life chances.

Then, I have introduced a comparative analysis about individuals' perceptions of available life chances in five selected European countries and showed how the problem of weak trust is principally diffused in countries with a Conservative welfare regime and, more than this, a particular worrying situation is present in Italy, most probably due to a cluster of peculiarities that make the country extremely poor in terms of level of generalized trust and, therefore, of life chances available to its citizens.

Due to the paramount importance, both for social justice as well as economic efficiency reasons, recognized to the guarantee of adequate life chances to citizens, some fundamental recommendations follow for the Italian good policy makers aimed at improving this alarming state: first of all, in order to encourage generalized trust an effort of clarity and long-term commitment is required. When rules are over-abundant, citizens cannot develop positive expectations or be encouraged to invest in their future. A simple and recent example of such a situation is the one created by the recent labour reform approved in 2012: it seems, in fact, destined to play any good effect the introduction of a right to a minimum salary for young graduates engaged in an internship. The decision of the threshold of this salary left to the local authorities is currently causing the multiplication of different treatments which is, in turn, leading, on one side, private and public sector not to use the internship contracts penalising the already desperate condition of young employment and, on the other side, leaving young people on a total lack of information and making even more difficult for them the understanding of a highly

fragmented labour system. In a similar condition, the real competitive advantage is given by who can pay whatever price to achieve the position wanted, which means people with a better socio-economic background.

The same logic is valid when a new rule or a reform is introduced, but there is a pervasive belief that this organization is not there to stay but it will be possibly changed in the near future by the new party at the government or when new interests will become more powerful and pressing. In a similar situation citizens are mostly lead to rely on and trust just their close entourage and, as a consequence, they will be strongly discouraged even to look for mobility, also when coming from less advantaged socio-economic milieu. This consideration is extremely important, since in a lack of clarity everybody will be much more risk averse and will prefer to keep their position, not matter how poor it is, rather than making efforts to exchange a totally blind return.

Another fundamental point of reform regards the introduction of a comprehensive approach to set up public policy. When every single public action is adopted under a specific interest or it is the result of a narrow objective, disconnected from a larger and integrated scheme under which all the single provisions are framed, the effect of that action will be poor and limited and, more than this, it won't be able to generate a positive change in the citizens level of trust, at the contrary, it will mostly ingenerate distortive behaviours. As it happens in the example I made regarding students which decide to take, as far as they can, the small scholarship for the year of university to receive some monetary help, while focusing on the job research rather than on their university study.

Another point, connected to the previous one, and even more essential, concerns the introduction of a new approach to re-think the whole Welfare organization. In fact, in order to enhance the level of trust among citizens it is strictly necessary to switch from a fragmented to a systemic welfare approach. This objective entails a twofold actions: from one hand, it is necessary to consider individuals, rather than their families, as the core target of the care offered by the welfare state and, on the other hand, welfare organization should focus on individual as citizens rather than on their selective aspects. This

means, firstly, that whatever will be the level of protection and benefits set by the state –low, medium or high- it is extremely important to switch to a system where the first object of care is individual, instead of family. Taking family at the centre of interest has, in fact, a strong negative impact on individuals' trust, since it strengthens the linkage of individuals to their socio-economic origin. When this happens, individuals become dependent on their family in order to benefit of services and advantages (e.g. payment of university tuition-fees, buying an house or paying the rent for a room, help for taking care of a baby in lack of public nursery), so doing, they create bonds that are extremely difficult to break, when not impossible. But, there is also another crucial aspect to be considered: in a similar situation the development of positive expectation on return in the future becomes mostly related to the family, to what family think it is correct to pursue or to invest on, to the social network to which family provide individuals with access to. This kind of mechanism has a clear negative impact: it weakens generalized trust by creating a social closure within the social group of origin, family first, which narrows individuals' options as well as their own conceivability and, so doing, limiting individual life chances. In order to avoid this situation, considering individuals as the first recipient of the public policy is vital, but not sufficient. Since, it is also necessary to consider them not as mere recipient of single services or certain benefits, but as persons that spend their life in a community taking and providing resources and opportunities to others members. This means that a successful model of welfare is the one that is able to understand and distribute its cares on the basis of the real needs and taking the individuals into full account not just considering them, according to the service they draw on as students, patient, retired, poor and so forth. This constitutes, in fact, the presuppose to avoid the creation of castes and closed social groups which tend to be detached to the other members and institutions of the community. In addition, a similar approach would also help to prevent distortive behaviours: when the state has a comprehensive overview of your life pattern, access to services and benefits it becomes much easier to have a clear assessment about efficacy of policies and to avoid and sanction behaviours of free riding.

A last consideration is about the field where policy makers should focus when aiming at strengthening generalized trust. Up to now, I have spoken mostly in general about the welfare state referring to the ensemble of policies encompassing all that public actions directed to ensure to citizens a certain degree of care during their life-course. Nevertheless, the last decade has been particularly difficult for the welfare state model, the economic crisis obliges us to re-think about current model in an effort of rationalization of the expenses. So, which provisions can be considered most important to enhance life chances?

As I explained, the creation of a generalized trust is associated to the idea of social capital and to a rational and cognitive process that it is gradually developed by individuals during their life-course. For this reason, it seems plausible to attribute a crucial role to all those policies having the capacity to generate on individuals that disposition to positive expectation, that is trust. Being trust a disposition progressively developed by individuals, it is fundamental to focus on the actions that are concentrated in the early years: childhood and adolescence represent the crucial period, since people firstly come in contact with others and start to make the first experience that will shape their future. It is therefore fundamental to give during this period a particular care ensuring, for instance, a high level of nursery services, a strong integration among children (e.g. both for what it concerns the heterogeneity of the students in classes and for the distribution of the resources), and offering an intensive program of orientation and socialization (e.g. meetings with qualified counsellors, with representatives of different social and economic milieu) in order to actively support the development of that social soft skills focused to provide citizens with a basic set of means that are particularly important to ensure an open mind personal attitude fundamental in the attempt to support the enlargement of that relationship between options and ligatures that shapes individuals' life chances. These encompass, in particular, the realization of the following points:

- Pre-school children care, e.g. more affordable condition to access it; larger access for disadvantaged socio-economic children, hours compatible with parental employment and encouragement of combination from different backgrounds;

- Education, e.g. postponed tracking, economic incentives to support universal access and achievement, development of skills pathways coherent with labour market;
- Social groups integration, e.g. promotion of socially mixed residential areas and in the use of public services;
- Employment policies, e.g. incentives not to quite work, prevention of poverty traps, support employment rotation and job transitions.

These appear as the key challenges for re-funding a new Welfare system able to offer to its citizens the realization of that popular dream called social mobility, which is connected to the attainment of a full development of life chances. These life chances are, as I explained, more concerned with the idea of desert rather than with that of meritocracy and are inevitably entrenched with the establishment of deep reform of the criteria regulating social life and public policy. In this perspective, to affirm individuals' centrality is fundamental in order to support the creation of independent positive expectations toward community and future.

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