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## ***Relocation and the Uproot of Social Capital: Insights from a Swiss Panel***

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**LIFELONGMOVE**

*Understanding spatial mobility from  
early life into adulthood*

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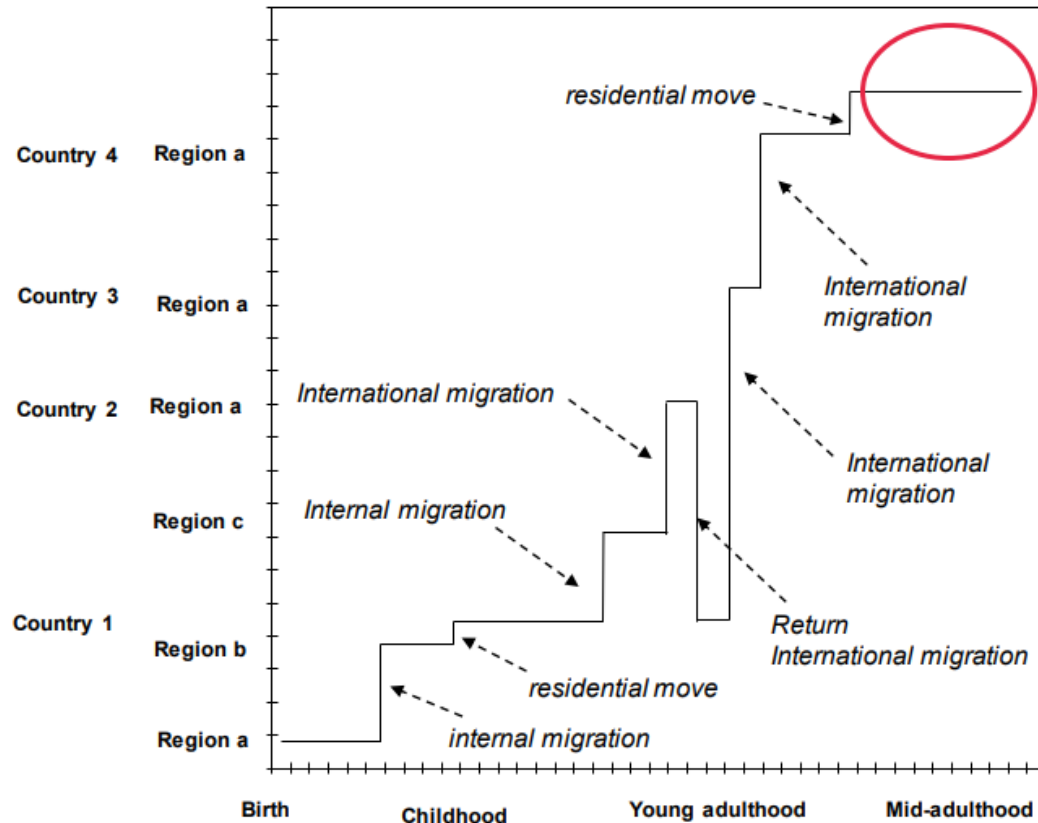
Period: Jan 2023 – Dec 2027



**European Research Council**  
Established by the European Commission

### Example of a fictitious individual trajectory

Bernard et al. (2017)



There is growing recognition that mobility is more complex and diverse than *binary approaches* suggest, e.g., lifetime sedentarism, chronic residential mobility, circular international migration, return migration, etc. Hence, underlying axioms of a one-way permanent migration or views that denote that individuals migrate through clearly demarcated life cycle stages *are increasingly obsolete*.

→ Mobility as a *process* vs. mobility as an *outcome*

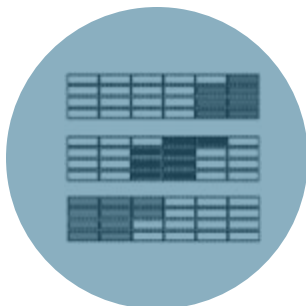
→ *Immobility* & downgrading of housing conditions

*Component 1:*

Mapping lifelong mobility

*How is spatial mobility “lived”?*

Assessing  
heterogeneity in  
lifelong mobility  
pathways



Deciphering  
continuities and  
disruptions



Unmasking  
population  
heterogeneity



*Component 2:*

Explaining lifelong mobility

*How earlier life influences movement?*

Place  
attachment



Attitudes and  
capabilities



Early-life  
(dis)advantages



*Component 3:*

Outcomes of lifelong mobility

*What are the consequences of lifelong mobility?*

Socio-economic  
outcomes



Family  
outcomes



Health  
outcomes



LIFELONGMOVE addresses how spatial mobility unfolds through life, from early childhood into adulthood.

Sources of data:

1. integrated register and census data  
(e.g., Sweden)
2. cohort studies  
(e.g., Millennium Cohort Study)
3. household panel studies  
(e.g., Swiss Household Panel)

### *Swiss Household Panel*

- First edition in 1999, with three refreshment samples
- Representative sample of the Swiss population
- SHP\_III (2013) includes the *retrospective residential trajectories* of 6k individuals aged 16+ (life calendar)
- Respondents were asked to provide information about the *occurrence and duration of each residential event* before the panel study, as well as information about the *geographical location* of their residential stays at the cantonal and regional levels

### *Analytical sample* (N=3,841)

- SHP is structured around a *core* and *rotating core*
- Linkage of the life calendar (2013) with individual files of three waves (2014, 2015, and 2016)

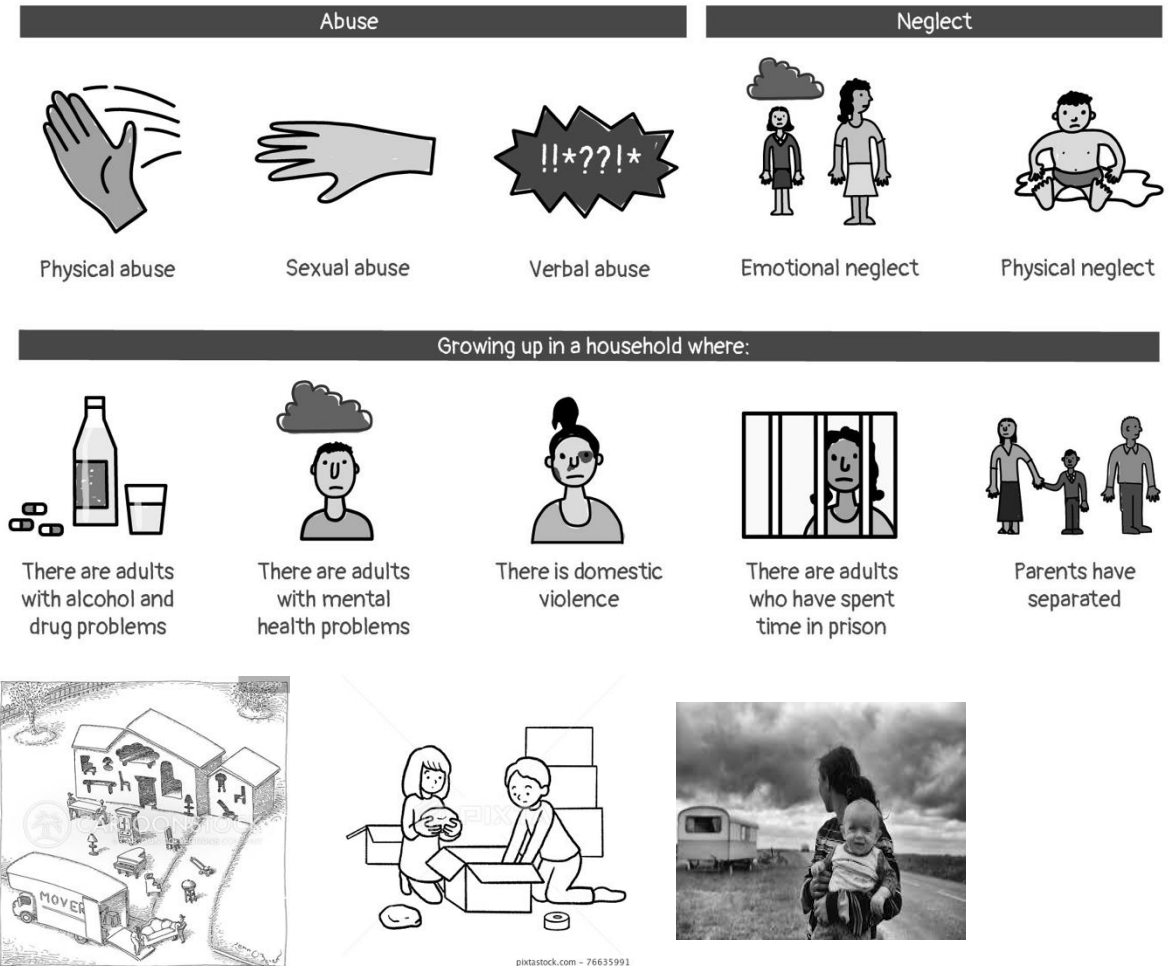


Schweizer Haushalt-Panel  
Panel suisse de ménages  
Swiss Household Panel

## Mobility & mental health

We know from previous literature that:

- *frequent moving* may be a marker for various family problems
- frequently changing residence during childhood is reported to increase the risks of developing *health problems later in life*
- although moves may be driven by positive (e.g., birth of a child or a job promotion) or negative forces (e.g., divorce or substantial loss in income), they nonetheless bring *transitions and adjustments*
- *cumulative, timing-specific, and interactive* effects



Repeated mobility as an ACE?

DeCandia, C., Volk, K. and Unick, G. (2022)

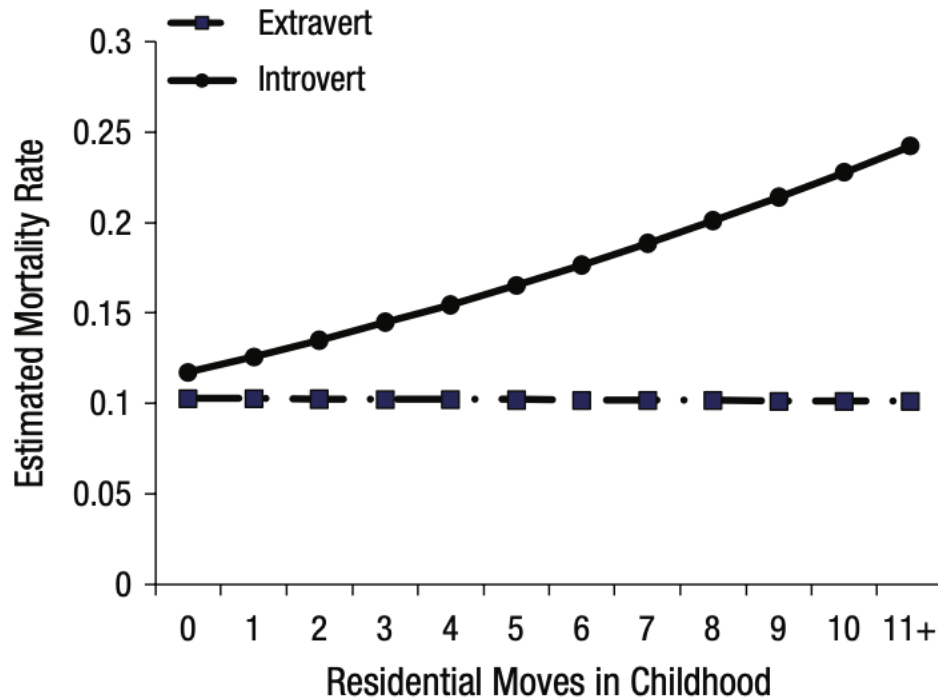
## Repeated mobility as an ACE? It depends ...

*Introverts* who had moved frequently as children had a much higher risk of mortality during the 10-year follow-up period than did introverts who had not moved much. In contrast, *extraverts* who had moved a lot as children had roughly the same risk of mortality during this period as did extraverts who had not moved as children.

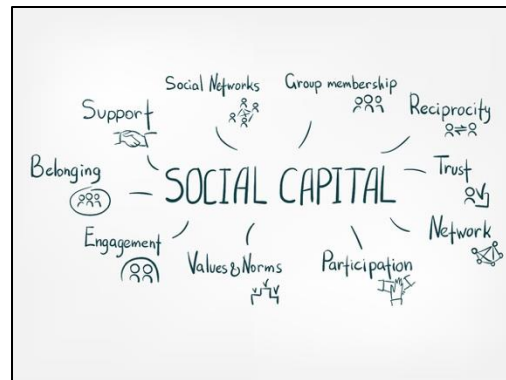
Residential mobility provokes *a shift in individuals' self-definition from collective to personal attributes*.

Oishi, Lun and Sherman, (2007)  
Oishi and Talhelm (2012)

Psychological  
approach



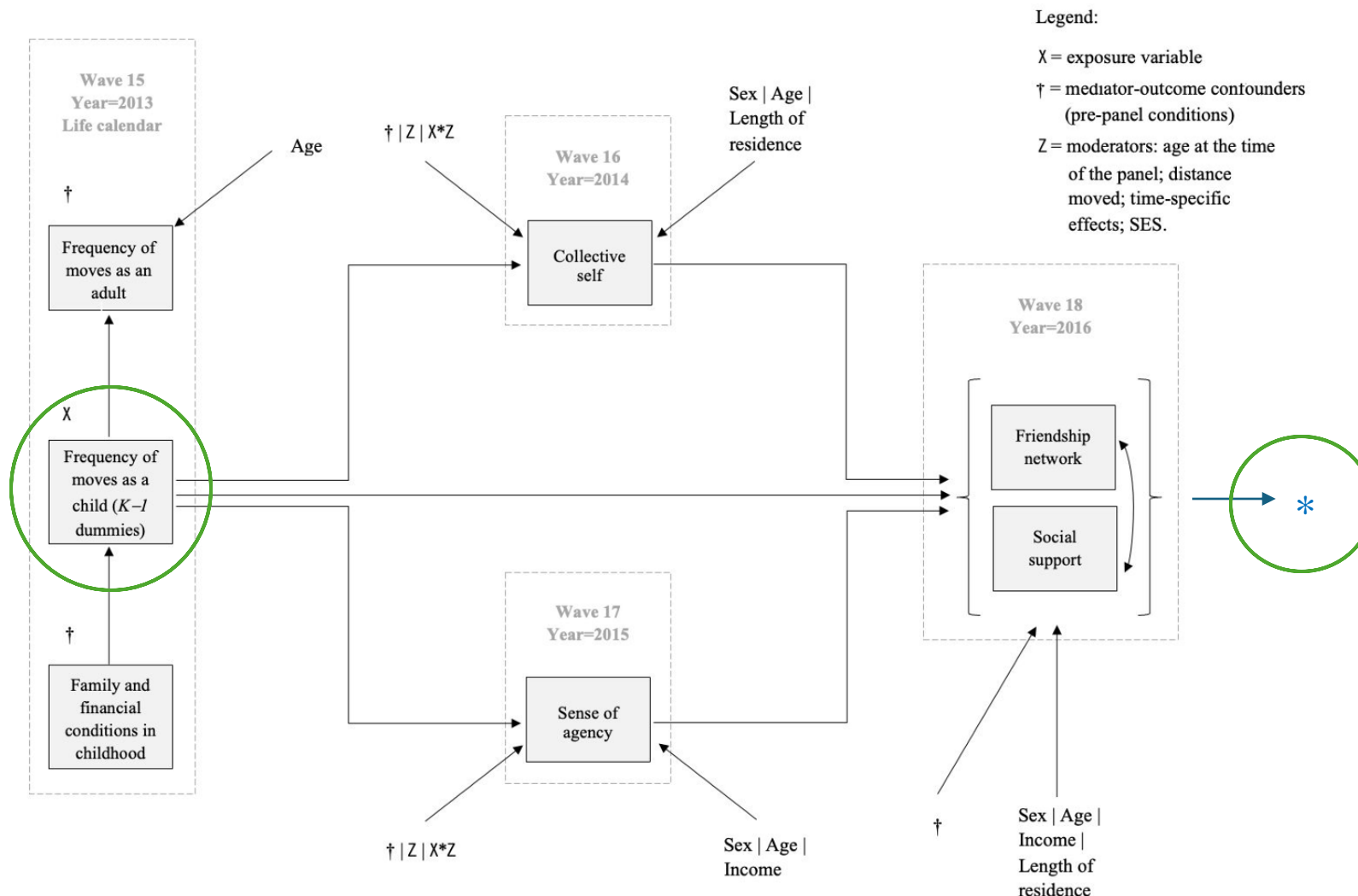
**Fig. 3.** The moderating role of extraversion in the link between residential moves in childhood and mortality risk in adulthood. Adapted from “Residential Mobility, Well-Being, and Mortality,” by S. Oishi and U. Schimmack, 2010, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 98, p. 986. Copyright 2010 by the American Psychological Association. Adapted with permission.



Sociological  
approach



How does *frequent mobility* in childhood impact *social capital* in adulthood, and *psychological distress*\* in turn?

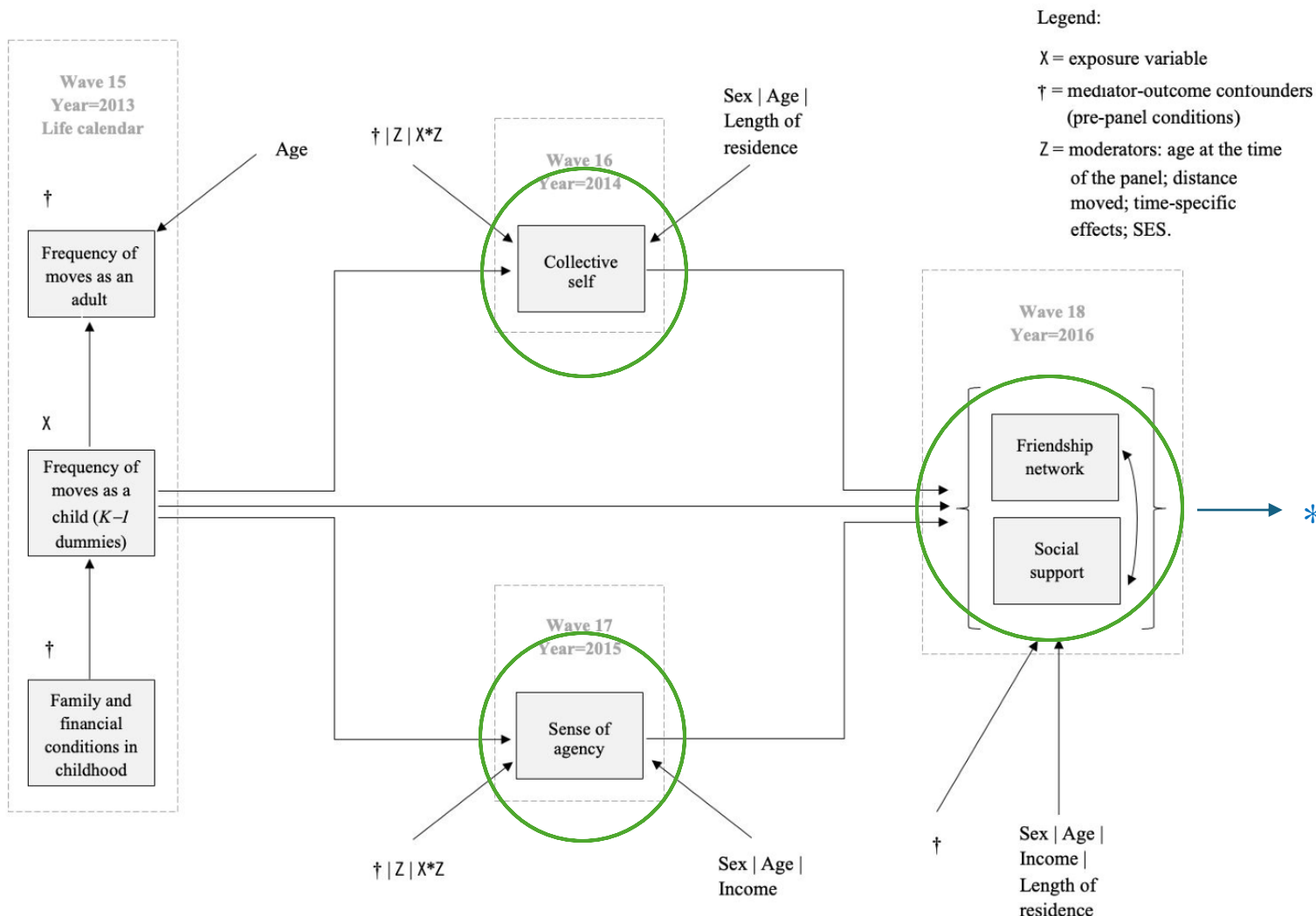


Exposure / Outcome:

- *Frequency of moves* (categorical): zero (ref.=54.6%), 1, 2, 3+ (8.7%)
- *Psychological distress*: composite mean score of two measures extracted from the following questions: ‘do you often have negative feelings such as having the blues, being desperate, or suffering from *anxiety or depression*?’; and ‘are you often full of *strength, energy, and optimism*, if 0 means never and 10 always?’ (reverse-coded).



## Mediators



- **Collective self**: ‘to what extent is belonging to the [municipality of residence; the canton; the linguistic region; and Switzerland in general] important for your identity’
- **Sense of agency**: achievement orientation scale proposed by Strodbeck (1958). 4-item indicators: e.g., ‘I feel like I have little influence on the events of my life’
- **Social capital**: (1) **structural**: number of friends, and frequency of contacts; (2) **instrumental**: expected emotional or concrete support from close friends

### Highlights

- frequent movement in childhood (3+) is associated with a higher perceived social support in adulthood (instrumental social capital), *but not* to a greater size of the friendship network (structural social capital)
- the association is mediated by an increased sense of agency among frequent movers
- enduring effects on social capital benefit psychological health in turn
- on the other hand, frequent movement prevents the construction of a sense of local self, but this does neither directly impact social capital nor indirectly on psychological distress levels
- *rather than disrupting social capital resources, residential moves play a role in their rearrangement*

Valente and Vacchiano (under review – *European Sociological Review*)

OK, but ...

Is it because of the elapsed time?

The *mean age* when filling in the first individual questionnaires in 2014 was 49.9 (i.e., 34 or more years after the last move in childhood).

When age is 1.5 SD below the mean (i.e., the respondent was 20 years old in 2014), the indirect effect is stronger ( $\beta_{ind}=.105$ ;  $p \leq .01$ ) than when at the mean ( $\beta_{ind}=.042$ ;  $p \leq .01$ ). As the respondent gets older, the indirect effect progressively decreases, but it is still statistically meaningful at age 60 ( $\beta_{ind}=.021$ ;  $p \leq .05$ ).

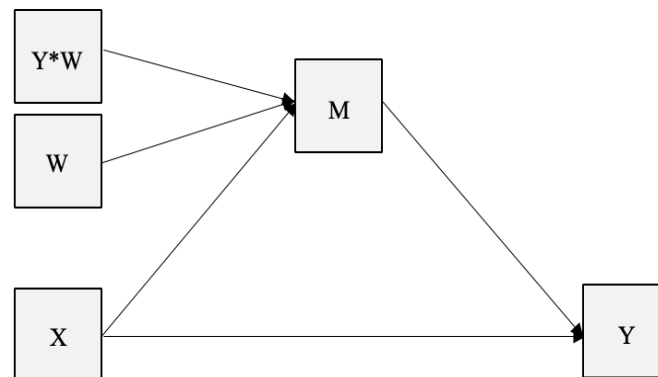
Y = Social capital  
X = Frequency of moves as a child

*Mediators (M):*

M<sub>1</sub> = Collective self  
M<sub>2</sub> = Sense of agency  
M<sub>3</sub> = Friendship network

*Moderators (W):*

W<sub>1</sub> = Age at the time of the panel  
W<sub>2a</sub> = Relocation before the age of 6  
W<sub>2b</sub> = Relocation between 7-11  
W<sub>2c</sub> = Relocation between 7-16  
W<sub>3</sub> = Moved outside the canton



Spatial mobility or *social mobility*?

1 SD away from the mean of *income* corresponds to an increase in the effect of moving 3+ times as a child on instrumental social capital ( $\beta=.329$ ;  $p \leq .01$ ).

Any *age-specific* effects? Or due to the *distance* moved?

Some indications from these tests that residential mobilities after the age of 12, and over longer distances, might downsize the positive effects of childhood residential mobility on social capital. However, the hypothesis of a statistically significant moderated mediation is not supported by our tests.

*Cultural* specificities? ...

OK, but ... at the end of the day, *how do these mechanisms take place?*

Residential mobility functions as an identity moratorium for kids. They must strategically deploy personal skills to integrate into a social environment (*agentic learning*).

Frequent residential moves urge the activation of a network of support that is “more oriented toward actual needs” (Nisic and Petermann, 2013: 200). Over the short term, this activation reduces the consequences of residential relocation, whereas over the long term, it can improve *movers’ familiarity with social capital functional mobilization*. This hypothesis needs further testing but seems to align with Bernard’s (2022) idea of *internal migration capital* and provides initial indications that this form of capital accumulation starts at an early age.

According to *social convoy theory*, our most meaningful relationships (e.g., kinship and intimate ties) can accompany us through transitions and turning points, such as changes of residence (Antonucci et al., 2010).

### *Limitations*

- Poor geographical granularity
- Temporal mismatch of the mediators
- No access to direct measures of social capital in childhood at the individual and family levels

### *Punchline*

Previous literature often assumes frequent residential mobility as a child to be an adverse childhood experience per se. However, it seems to play a more multifaceted influence on self and social outcomes. Indeed, it can represent a risk for social capital in adulthood, but only if it undermines movers' sense of collective belonging without compensating them in terms of their sense of agency.

Overall, however, our results suggest that *children's experience with frequent relocation may also better prepare them to cope with life's uncertainties*, mainly if they can rely on responsive social safety nets.

***Thanks!***

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