

QUIT Seminar – Barcelona, February 18, 2025

Residential Mobility, Agency and Social Capital Over the Life Course

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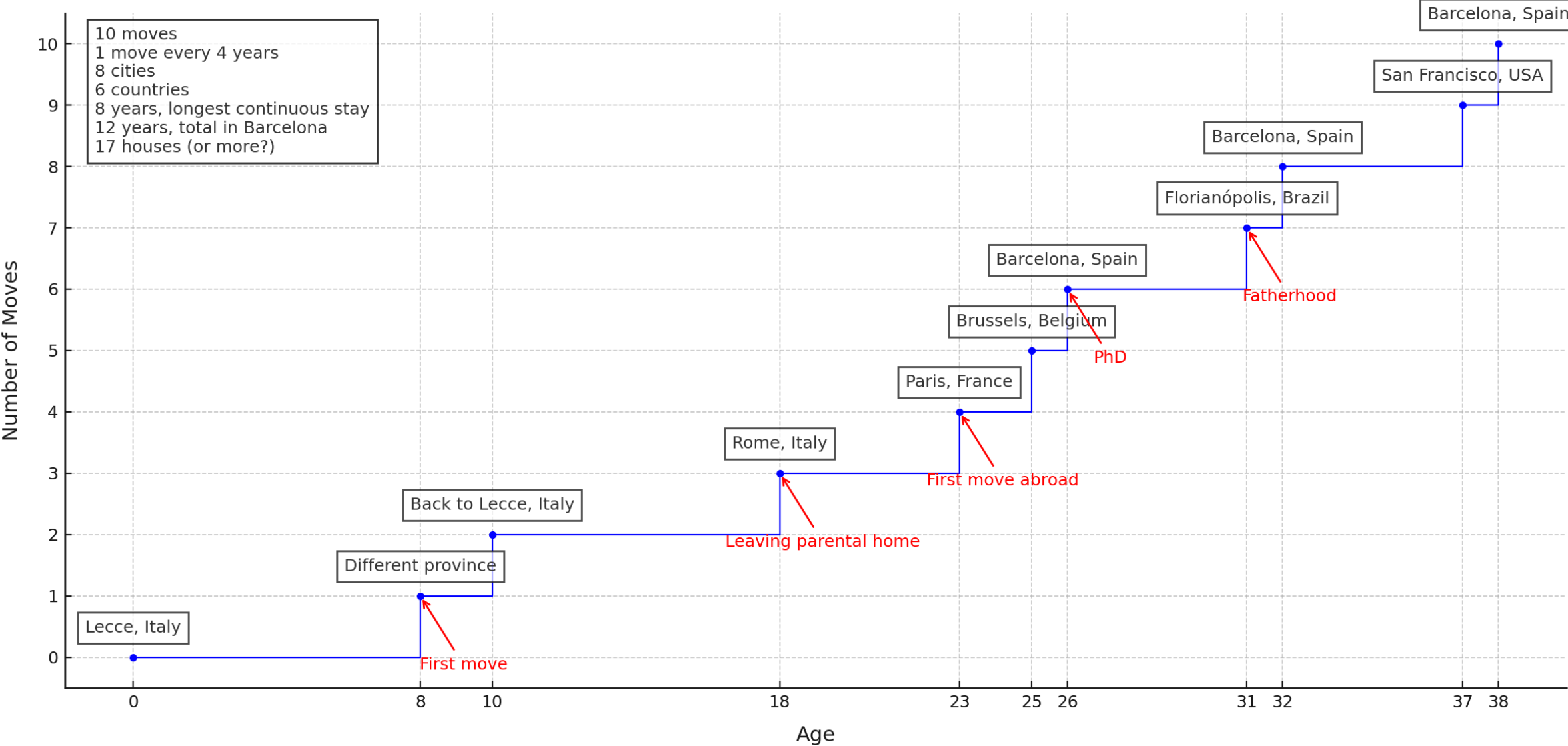
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Residential Mobility Over Time with Life Turning Points



Intergenerational mobility

Father's family: France, Belgium, Switzerland, Northern Italy

Mother's family: Germany, Switzerland

Social mobility

Father's family: working class

Mother's family: farm workers

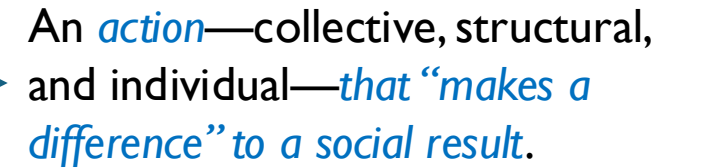


Route des Acacias, Geneva



Professional career history

- Bachelor's degree in *political science* + Master in *sociology*
- PhD (2016) with a dissertation on fear of crime (*social psychology*, and *criminology*) in urban settings (*urban sociology*)
- I have had positions in 4 universities (departments of *education*, psychology, *geography*, and sociology)
- Visiting in Brazil, the US, and Switzerland (*different traditions* in social sciences) + EU projects (*cultural differences*)
- Starting from September 2025, I'll be a Ramón y Cajal Fellow at the Centre for *Demographic Studies*



According to Giddens (1984), the agency is the degree to which an individual feels a sense of control about his or her life.

According to sociologist James Coleman (1990), “like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that would not be attainable in its absence”. *‘Utility’ dimension*

Changes of address. Movement of a person either across an international border (international migration) or within their country's borders (*internal migration*).



LIFELONGMOVE

*Understanding spatial mobility from
early life into adulthood*

European Research Council
Consolidator Grant (CoG)

Ref: 101043981

Period: Jan 2023 – Dec 2027



European Research Council
Established by the European Commission



Schweizer Haushalt-Panel
Panel suisse de ménages
Swiss Household Panel

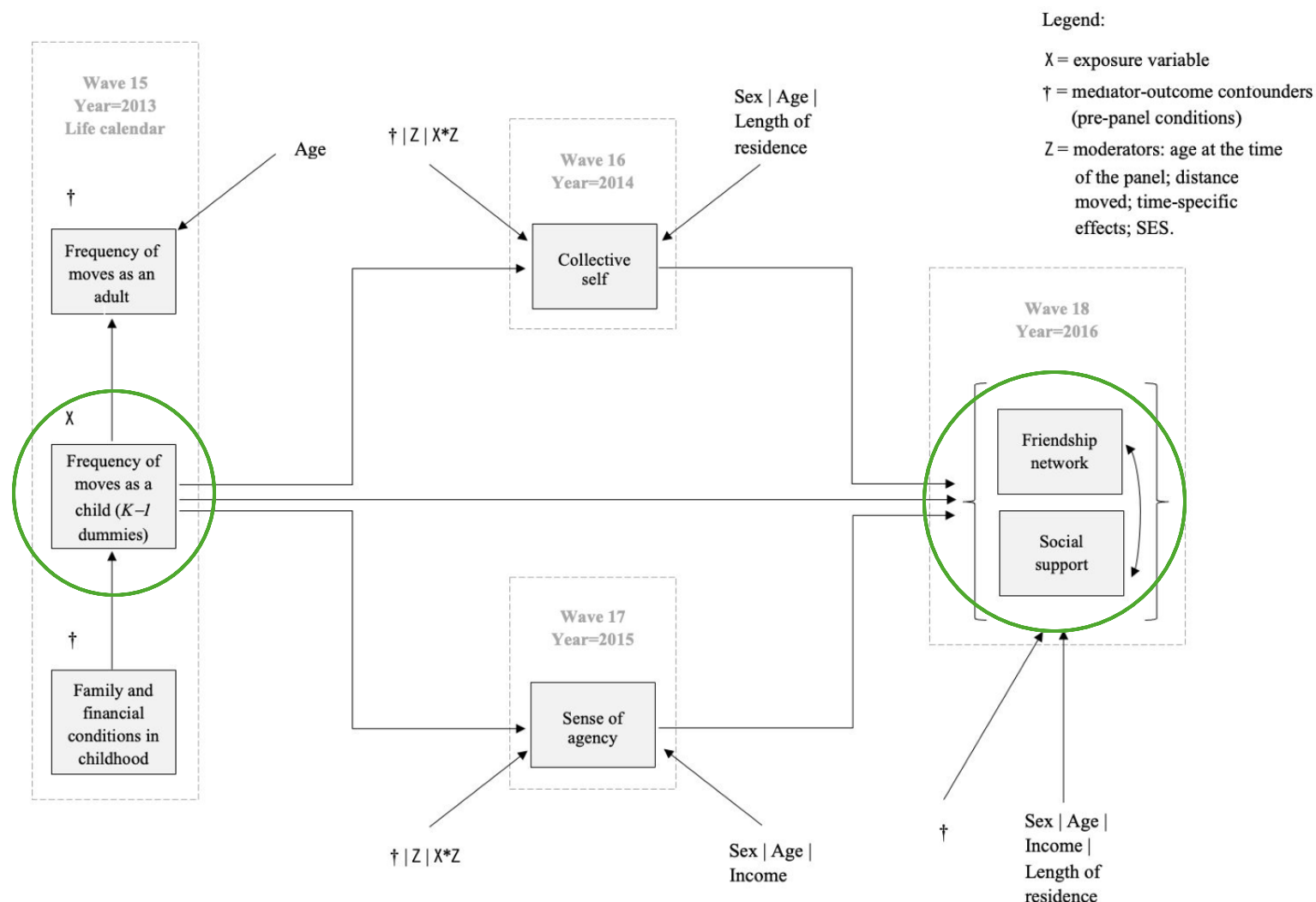
Swiss Household Panel

- 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)

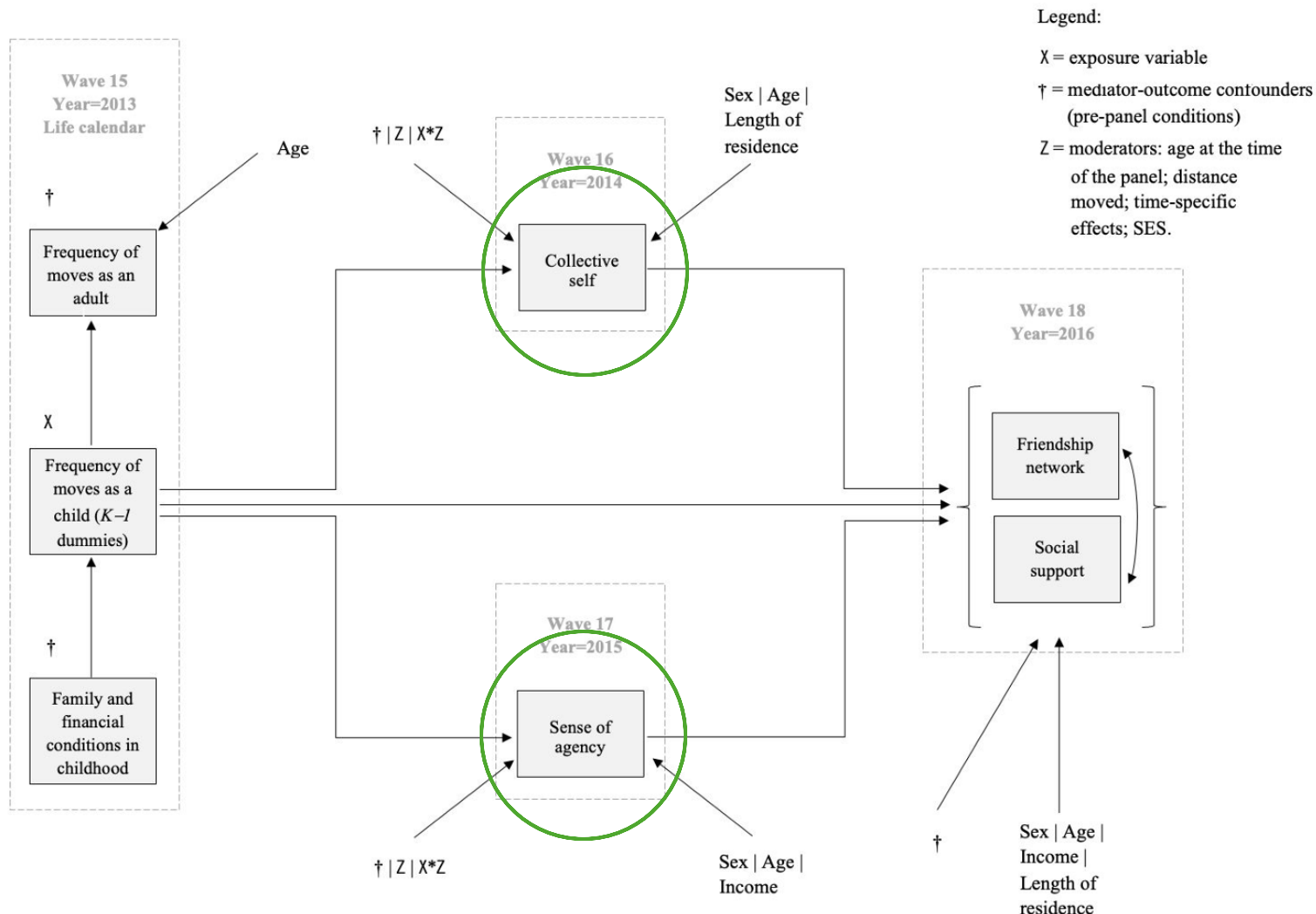
How does *frequent mobility* in childhood impact *social capital* in adulthood?



Exposure / Outcome:

- *Frequency of moves* (categorical): zero (ref.=54.6%), 1, 2, 3+ (8.7%)
- *Social capital*: (1) *structural*: number of friends, and frequency of contacts; (2) *instrumental*: expected emotional or concrete support from close friends

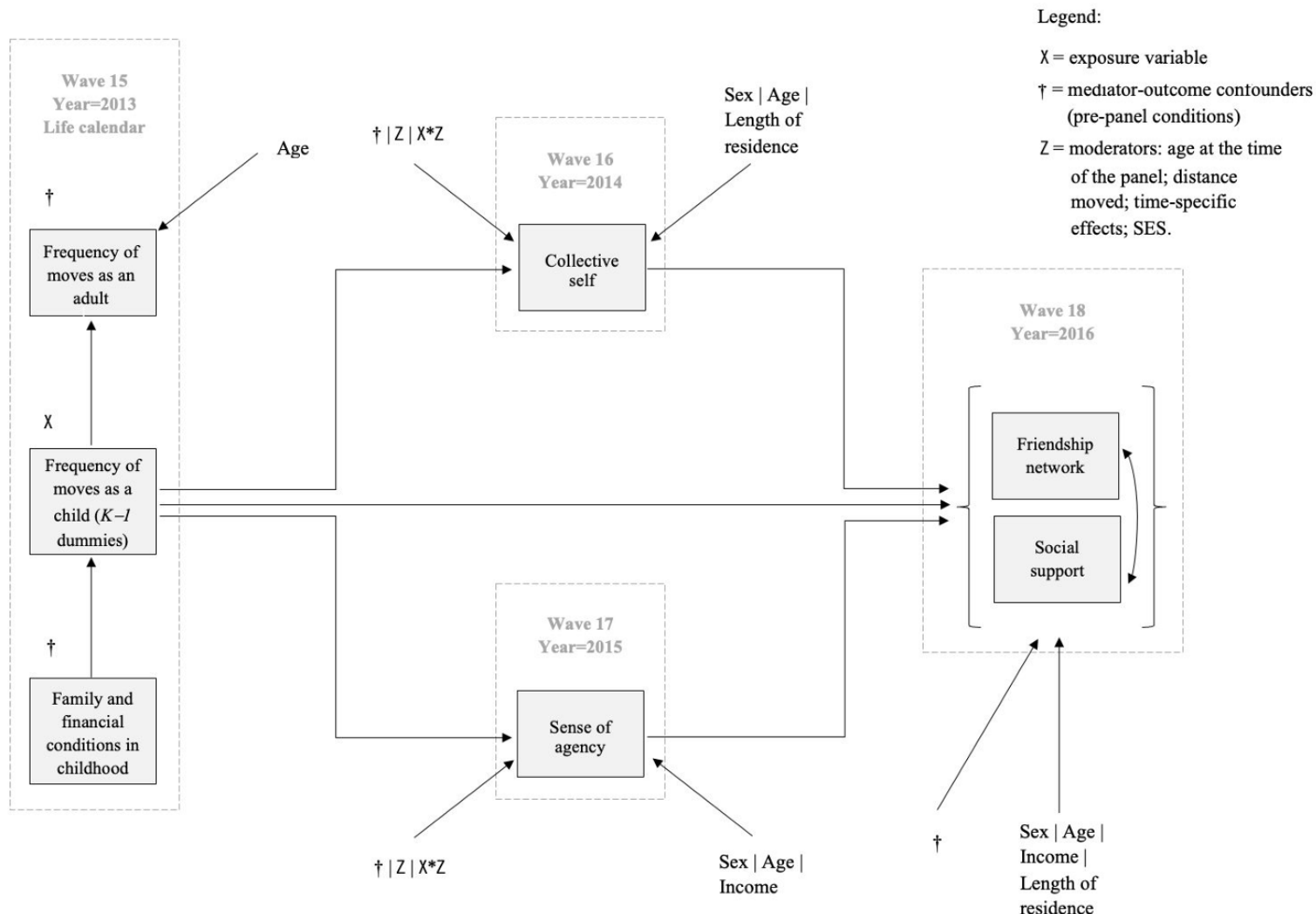
Mediators



- **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 Strodtbeck (1958). 4-item indicators: e.g., 'I feel like I have little influence on the events of my life'

Highlights

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



- frequent mobility in childhood (3+) is associated with a higher perceived social support in adulthood. No effects were found on the size of the friendship network
- the association is mediated by an increased sense of agency among frequent movers
- frequent mobility prevents the construction of a sense of local self, but this does neither directly nor indirectly impact social capital levels
- *rather than disrupting social capital resources, residential moves play a role in their rearrangement, at least on the long run*

Sensitivity checks

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 ($\beta_{ind}=.021$; $p \leq .05$).

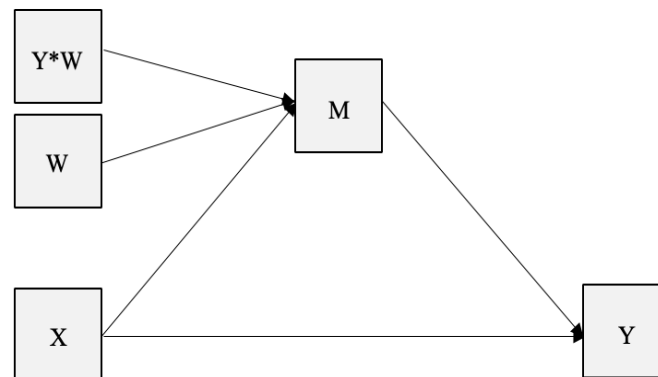
Y = Social capital
X = Frequency of moves as a child

Mediators (M):

M₁ = Collective self
M₂ = Sense of agency
M₃ = Friendship network

Moderators (W):

W₁ = Age at the time of the panel
W_{2a} = Relocation before the age of 6
W_{2b} = Relocation between 7-11
W_{2c} = Relocation between 7-16
W₃ = Moved outside the canton



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.

Is it spatial mobility or *social mobility in disguise*?

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 ($\beta=.329$; $p \leq .01$).

Cultural specificities? ...

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).

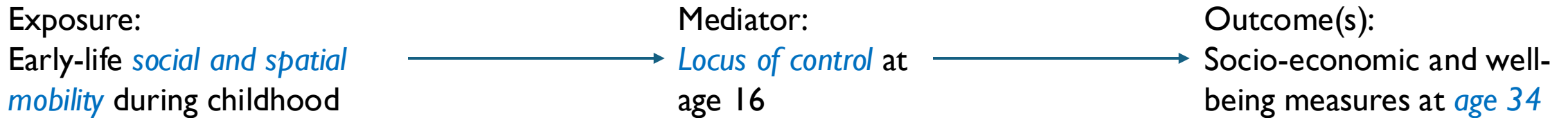


1970 British Cohort Study

- First edition in 1970; original sample ~ 17,000
- Babies born in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in the week of April 5-11, 1970
- Most recent sweep in 2021 with cohort members aged 51
- BCS70 has collected information on health, physical, educational and social development, and economic circumstances among other factors

Analytical sample (N=8,367)

- Focus on the original birth cohort (1970), three childhood surveys at ages 5, 10 and 16 (1975, 1980, and 1986) and a fifth follow-up in adulthood at age 34 (2004)



Combined measure of:

- Residential moves (0, 1-2, 3+)
- Social class trajectories (linear, upward and downward)

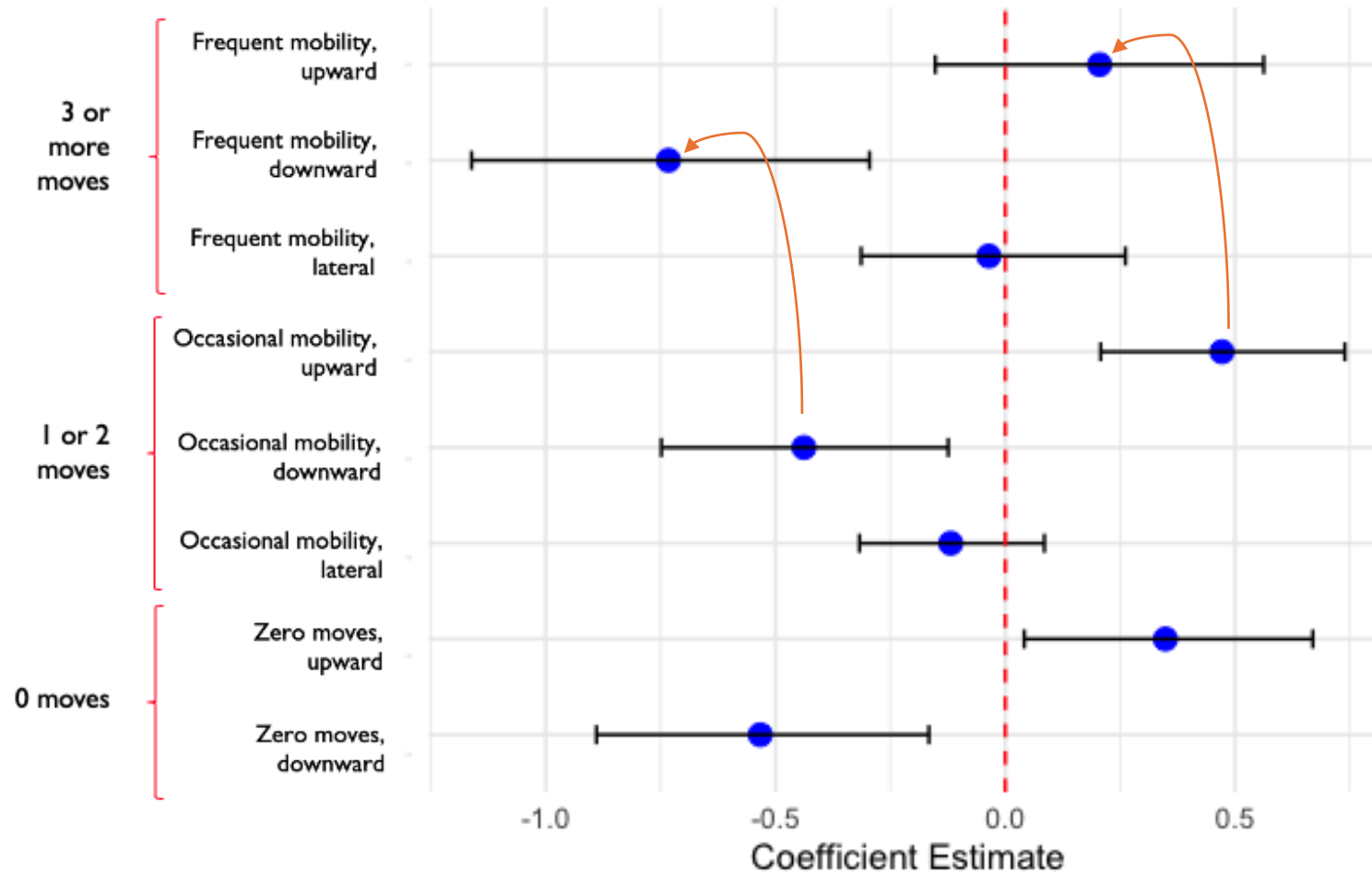
The locus of control scale at age 16 in BCS70 consists of 19 items. Examples include:

- “most of the time it is not worth trying hard because things never turn out right anyway”
- “a high mark is just a matter of luck for me”.

Test with four outcome variables:

- Educational attainment
- Log income
- Psychological distress
- Self-perceived health status

Effects of Socio-Spatial Mobility on Locus of Control at Age 16



The *'double penalty' of frequent mobility*: repeated relocation increases the negative effect of downward social class trajectories on locus of control; also, it shrinks the positive effects of upward mobility

Highlights

- *Residential mobility is challenging but can also foster a greater sense of agency* if it is occasional and is undertaken in the framework of an upward social class spiral
- The *'double penalty' of frequent mobility*: repeated relocation increases the negative effect of downward social class trajectories on locus of control; also, it shrinks the positive effects of upward mobility
- Through the locus of control, the combined measure of social and spatial mobility exerts *long-term effects* on socio-economic and well-being outcomes almost two decades later (at age 34)
- Tests with *mediator competitors* (self-esteem and stress) point to LoC-specific effect.

Valente and Vidal (in progress)

Open ending

Agency is one of Glen Elder's *key principles of life course analysis*: "Individuals construct their own life course through the choices and actions they take within the opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstances" (Elder, 1998: 961–962; Elder and Johnson, 2003).

Two significant problems, one methodological and one theoretical:

- While agency is frequently invoked, it is seldom actually measured or operationally defined; rather, *it is simply assumed to be operative*
- Current formulations fail to apprehend *the dialectical interrelation of structure and agency*

Social capital holds a key to understanding the effects of family moves.

- However, there is a lack of studies on social capital from a life course standpoint, and less so with a focus on *how children develop and utilize stocks of social capital*

Mobility measures need refinements.

- Moving *beyond binary approaches*
- Increase *geographical granularity*
- Dig into the *heterogeneity of mobility experiences*

Thanks!

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