



# Conceptualizing Motives for Migration: a Typology of Italian Migrants in the Athens Area

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## Abstract

Migration flows from a southern European country to another one have received scarce attention so far. This is especially true for Italians migrating to Greece or, more specifically, the Athens area. Thus, there are limited insights as to the reasons why Italians are leaving and why they have been choosing Greece as their destination. This paper looks at their motives for migrating and their destination choice in order to understand the diversity of migratory trajectories through a typology. In order to do this, we carried out in-depth interviews to Italians living, both permanently and temporarily, in the Athens area, employing snowball sampling. As a result, we have identified 5 types of Italian immigrants in Athens: *Mediterranean*, *nomadic*, *work*, *entrepreneurial*, and *marriage migrants*. *Mediterranean* migrants are driven by the typically Mediterranean character of climate, landscape, food, and culture in their deliberate choice of Athens. *Nomadic* migrants have casually chosen Athens to satisfy their need of continuous physical mobility and multiple moorings as a defining aspect of their identity. *Work* migrants are motivated by the search of a job regardless of the place and work content. *Entrepreneurial* migrants are motivated by a vocation for a professional career in Athens. Finally, for *marriage* migrants, the choice of Athens is a consequence of a couple choice and shared life projects.

**Keywords** Intra-European migration · Southern Europe · Italy · Greece · Qualitative research · Typology

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## Introduction

In the growing literature on international migration, there has been little debate so far about mobility between southern European countries sharing several common features about demography, work, and welfare provisions. The purpose of our paper is to help to bridge such a gap, presenting some results of a research on the Italians living in the Athens area. Aside from a paper by Genco (2009), there is little sociological research addressed to this flow of Italian emigration. Therefore, there is little knowledge about the reasons that drive the migratory path of some Italians towards a country at the semiperiphery of Europe as Greece seems to be today.

Specifically, the paper describes the motives for leaving Italy of Italian immigrants in Athens, the reasons given by them to justify the choice of Athens as a destination area, and how the reasons behind the choice to expatriate and those behind the decision to live in Athens interact, so as to produce different migratory trajectories.

In order to address these questions, we chose a qualitative approach based on hermeneutic interviews to Italians living in the Athens area. As a result, we produced a typology of different migration pathways<sup>1</sup> allowing us to identify similarities and differences among the reasons for leaving Italy and those producing the choice of Athens as a destination. Such a typology identifies 5 types of Italian immigrants in Athens: Mediterranean, nomadic, entrepreneurial, work, and marriage migrants. In Mediterranean and nomadic migration, lifestyle considerations play an important role although, differently from previous literature, they cannot be considered the choice of privileged high-status people. Although work is central in both work and entrepreneurial migration, it seems to be a defining feature only in the latter. Indeed, work migrants prioritize meanings concerning spheres of life unrelated to work over those derived from the actual job role performed. Finally, marriage migrants accentuate family-related motivations but often find it difficult to integrate into the society and culture of the destination country.

The paper is organized as follows. The following section provides a short overview of the literature on migration as regards the drivers of intra-European mobility in the context of international migration. In the next one, we briefly outline the methodology we used in our research. After that, we explore the individual motives for migrating as well as the individual reasons that may lead to choosing a destination area. Finally, we present a typology based on the reasons identified in the previous section. In the conclusive remarks, we shortly discuss our findings.

## Drivers of Migration: a Short Overview

The recent development of an intra-European space for the free movement of people, goods, and capital has certainly played an important role in increasing intra-European

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<sup>1</sup> The paper derives from a research carried out between 2017 and 2018 by a research team composed of Domenico Maddaloni, Angela Delli Paoli, Felice Addeo, Maria Carmela Catone, Grazia Moffa and Paolo Diana. A detailed account of this research can be found in Maddaloni (2019). Particularly, the paper is a further elaboration of chapter 5 of that book which presents a pivotal typology of Italian immigrants in Athens.

mobility, amplifying the effects of globalization processes in this area<sup>2</sup> (Favell & Recchi, 2009).

Research on the new intra-European mobility has highlighted that only a part of it can be explained by referring exclusively to the problem of territorial imbalances in employment and professional opportunities. Still today, it is true that these recent mobility choices are not necessarily aimed at better work conditions or career advancements but can also be driven by a mere search of any kind of job opportunity (Pugliese, 2018: 67–84). However, alongside the migration still induced by the need to obtain an income and that induced by career opportunities, migratory paths emerge motivated by other individual needs or aspirations. For example, already in 2004, the EIMSS survey on migrants from Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain showed the role played by love and family as reasons for intra-EU mobility. Other significant reasons for moving were the quality of life meant as a better climate and natural environment and material considerations (to accept a job offer, to look for a job or intra-firm mobility within multinational companies) (Santacreu et al., 2009).

Various studies on recent intra-European migration have highlighted the role played by both economic and non-economic motivations in shaping recent migration pathways. This can be true also for recent migration from the southern European countries—that is, the area of the European Union which has been more affected by the economic downturn of 2008 and its consequences on labour market and welfare (Maddaloni & Moffa, 2019). Even among young high-skilled migrants, personal economic improvement cannot be the dominant motivation, being often complemented by other individual aspirations. Therefore, individual mobility choices can be seen as a part of a broader aspiration for self-development, a product of alternative modes of consumption and leisure, the result of a search for healthier context and better quality of life (Santacreu et al., 2009). Moreover, recent intra-European migration flows are largely independent from family and community ties (Pugliese, 2018: 87–98). This highlights even more the diversity of individual motivations and pathways in recent migration from Europe.

New lines of research have emerged in order to account for this growing diversity of migratory phenomena. This is the case of the emerging stream of research on lifestyle migration (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009, 2015; Benson, 2015; Benson & Osbaldiston, 2014) which links the choice of migration to a choice of the way in which to live aimed to improve the quality of life (Hoey, 2005: 615). This choice which prioritizes cultural and emotional imperatives is a form of elite migration typical of affluent individuals (Benson & Osbaldiston, 2014). Although there are many variants, such migratory paths are mainly undertaken by those who can afford them, privileged and wealthy people who can prioritize aesthetic and quality of life considerations such as environment, sunnier climate, rural lifestyles, and healthier life (King, 2002; O'Reilly, 2000; Buller & Hoggart, 1994).

In this case, intra-European migration is sometimes depicted as a matter of personal escape and new beginning, as the dream of starting a new life, taking advantages of a lower standard of living in a warmer social context with better weather conditions (O'Reilly, 2007). Rationales of migration is the desire of new experiences, adventure,

<sup>2</sup> For a history of free movement rights in the European Union, see Favell and Recchi (2009: 5–9).

of seeing the world, or simply leisure which depict migration as a consumption activity as opposed to that of a production one (King, 2002). Such choices may also be motivated by a low cost of life and an easy access to property ownership (Huete, 2009; Casado-Díaz et al., 2004).

Moreover, mobility can be stimulated also by weak ties cultivated during previous mobility experiences—such as those allowed in the context of the Erasmus programme (King & Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Baláž & Williams, 2004). However, networks of friends, acquaintances, and agents operating at the meso level also seem to have a role in this change of attitudes on international mobility (Schapendonk, 2015; Crawley, 2018).

In other cases, the migratory choice may be driven by a strong criticism against the institutional and political context of origin. Some research found as driving motivations the bleak prospects immigrants anticipated in their countries of origin because of political corruption and poor economic conditions (Triandafyllidou & Gropas, 2014). Other research found that anomie (intended as dissatisfaction, disillusionment, and hopelessness with the country of origin) is a non-economic reason for leaving crisis-stricken countries (Bygnes, 2017).

The shift in migration studies from macro and meso levels of analysis to micro level is theoretically rooted in the agency perspective which emphasizes the growing heterogeneity of the life course and the subjective construction of biographies. Within this perspective, individual life courses are seen as reflexive projects, chosen by individuals who are also able to adapt their plans to the changing external conditions, thus pursuing a wider variety of life trajectories (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992). This results in an increased variability in the migration processes, as well as a de-institutionalization and de-standardization of migration flows.

This does not imply that the structure-agency dichotomy (i.e. to what extent are people free agents determining their destinies or channelled by structural determinants) must be overcome in favour of agency. Indeed, migrations are the result of complex interactions between individual decisions and structured opportunities. Moreover, objective factors (i.e. labour market imbalances) will be perceived and interpreted differently by different individuals, and these circumstances may explain many variations in individual migration pathways (Verwiebe et al., 2010).

Within this perspective, the reasons given by the actors to justify the migration path are not simply personal perceptions or lists of reasons that an individual may provide, rather they may be seen as socially accepted justifications for past, present, and future actions (Gu, 2012). The ways people narrate their motives and the social contexts in which they are explained and justified shed light on the links to the larger social structures enhancing in-depth understanding and sociological imagination. As shown by previous research (Gold, 1997; Jensen & Pedersen, 2007), the “emic” analysis of personal motives underlying migratory trajectories provides a significant foundation for the understanding of the agency-structure relationship in the context of international migration.

This theoretical and methodological shift may be useful in the exploration of still understudied migratory flows, such as those from Italy to Greece. Indeed, it is well known that Greece has been severely affected by the recent global economic crisis, even more than Italy. Therefore, these mobility choices can

hardly be explained only on the grounds of economic improvement. Thus, we will offer an in-depth analysis of the narratives of Italian migrants in Athens trying to grasp their subjective interpretations, reasoning, and justifications in response to different structural and contextual factors.

## **Italians in Athens: a Demographic Profile**

As regards the Italian migration to the Athens area, the data available show that the Italian community there is not very large, although it has been rapidly growing in recent years. According to the Registry of Italians living abroad (AIRE), there is an upward trend in the number of Italians who took up residence in Greece for more than 12 months (11,872 in 2018 vs 10,179 in 2009). Obviously, this figure does not include temporary or circular migration to Greece, such as the one that often concerns retirees, professionals in smart working conditions, or managers of large companies moving from one location to another. Furthermore, this figure does not include Italians who—for a variety of reasons—avoid registering with AIRE, despite having resided abroad for more than a year. Given these premises, and considering that—according to the 2011 Greek population census data—at least half of the Italians residing in Greece live in the Athens region, a recent analysis of the Italians living in this area has estimated the demographic consistency of this community in over 10,000 people (Maddaloni & Moffa, 2020).

The Italian community living in Greece is mainly composed by women due to the consistent number of Italian female marriage migrants. This seems to be a secondary effect of the mobility of Greek university students to Italy, a process which started in the 1950s and has not yet completely disappeared. However, it should be noted that Italian women are present in other mobility flows towards the Athens area, in accordance with the increasingly active role assumed by women in migration processes (Moffa, 2014). Other channels of migration are produced by entrepreneurial activities related to the so-called made in Italy or, more recently, by transnational companies locating part of their business in countries with lower labour and productions costs such as Greece. Moreover, recently also retirement migration of Italians toward Greece has been assuming a growing relevance (Salvati & Benassi, 2020).

Under this respect, however, it should not be forgotten that the citizenship of a European Union member country is both a facilitator of mobility and a resource that allows forms of work and lifestyle not available to non-EU citizens. Therefore, the class position of Italian migrants in Greece is, on average, much more favourable than that of migrants from non-EU countries.

## **Italians in Athens: Research Methodology**

As we said before, data is mainly based on a qualitative research carried out through in-depth interviewing. Indeed, as stated in the literature (Zapata-Barrero & Yalaz, 2018), qualitative research is better suited for grasping the dimensions and connotations assumed by emerging social phenomena, such as Italian migration to Greece.

We employed hermeneutic interviews in order to derive interpretations from respondents' narrations of their migration experience (Montesperelli, 1998). Hermeneutic interviewing focuses on the central role of participants and the importance of their perspectives. Interviews were carried out with Italian citizens living temporarily or permanently in Athens at the time of the interview (September–October 2017), selected through a snowball sampling. It is well known that snowball sampling seeks to take advantage of the social networks of identified respondents to provide a researcher with an ever-expanding set of potential contacts (Thomson, 1997). Although snowball sampling contradicts many of the assumptions underpinning conventional notions of sampling, it has several advantages for “hidden” populations, as migrant communities are very often. Members of a hidden population are quite difficult to locate. Social research often requires some previous “knowledge of insiders” in order to identify initial respondents. Such prior knowledge was acquired through different chain referrals to avoid social homogeneity and balance gender and age: Facebook groups<sup>3</sup>, online websites<sup>4</sup>, and physical communities (such as the *Com.It.Es* of Athens<sup>5</sup>) from which we identified the initial respondents.

An interview guide (Silverman, 2015) was used to keep the conversation focused on three main parts:

1. The life before migration (interviewees' education, previous experience of mobility and migration, career plans, and background information)
2. Their personal experience of migration to Athens
3. Their social network inside and outside Athens

The interviews were conducted in Italian, face-to-face, had an average duration of 45 min, and were audio-taped and transcribed in full<sup>6</sup>. We followed the canonical stages of a qualitative interviewing: thematizing, designing the interview and the open-ended questions, interviewing, fully transcribing, verifying, and reporting (Silverman, 2010, 2015).

The total number of respondents was 34. This group is quite heterogeneous in terms of year of arrival in Greece, gender, age, geographical origin, and level of education. The majority of interviewees are long-term migrants having moved to Greece during the last decade (22 out of 34) and female (19 out of 34). In terms of age, the group includes 6 respondents under 30 years of age, 15 between 30 and 49 years of age, and 13 with 50 years of age or more. The interviewees come from 16 different Italian regions, balancing both the southern, central, and northern regions. The sample shows a high level of education with most respondents having a tertiary education degree (20 out of 34). Many

<sup>3</sup> *Italiani ad Atene* (Italians in Athens), *Italiani ad Atene e in Grecia* (Italians in Athens and Greece), *Vivere e lavorare in Grecia* (Living and working in Greece)

<sup>4</sup> [www.sullerivedelkifissos.it](http://www.sullerivedelkifissos.it)

<sup>5</sup> Established in 1985, the *Com.It.Es* (*Comitati degli Italiani all'Estero*, Councils of the Italians living abroad) are representative bodies of the Italian community, directly elected by Italian citizens living abroad in each consular district where live at least three thousand Italian citizens registered in the Register of Italians Residing Abroad.

<sup>6</sup> To guarantee anonymity, in the following pages, interviewees will be identified by a 5-digit alphanumeric code where the first 2 digits indicate the progressive number of interviews, the third letter indicates gender, and the last 2 digits age.

respondents have previous intra-European migratory experiences (11 out of 34), Erasmus experiences (7 out of 34), or indirect migratory experiences of their close relatives (parents, brothers, sisters) (15 out of 34). Finally, although all respondents were of Italian descent, five of them had a Greek parent. In addition, three other respondents had a Greek grandparent among their ancestors.

## **A conceptual Framework: Reasons to Leave Italy, Reasons to Live in Athens**

As we have seen, different motives may act as drivers of migration. Thus, our first step on the way to create a typology of migration pathways is to separate the reasons that lead to leave Italy from those that bring about the choice of Athens as a destination. From the first point of view, we encounter an opposition between work and lifestyle, or production and consumption, or materialist values and post-materialist ones. The logic of work/production/materialist values is mostly based on economic concerns or ambitions. On the contrary, the logic of lifestyle/consumption/post-materialist values is mainly based on emotional choices related to individual identity building (Hoey, 2014: 76; Torkington, 2012: 74). This implies that migration may be narrated as a choice driven by economic realization and/or achievement through work (production driven motives), or by consumption, leisure, and escape from the daily life. Thus, on the one hand, we can place those migrants who seem driven to leave Italy mainly by the need to find a job, enhance their standard of living, pursue a professional project, and advance their working career. They may be pushed to emigrate by a long and relatively unsuccessful job search in Italy. Alternatively, they find expatriation acceptable because—beyond the job search experiences already carried out in the country of origin—they define a professional project that requires to be carried out in a foreign country. On the other hand, we can place those migrants who live migration almost as a tourist experience, as a step on the way of achieving a better quality of life. In some circumstances, international mobility as such is emphasized as a value to be pursued. It is considered a source of personal growth in which work is often a secondary component. It is a choice related to individual lifestyle and its connotative elements—ranging from the climate, the food, the quality of human relations, the culture, and the pace of life.

In the middle between consumption and production-driven motivations, we can find family choices of those who settle in Athens to follow their partners, which can be hardly reduced only to consumption or production reasons. Such choices are the effect of cross-border marriage, that is, the union with a Greek partner. This type of mobility can be traced back to the migration flow of Greek university students to Italy. Over time, this has produced a reverse flow, in which alongside the Greek students returning home are the Italian partners who follow them into what they hope will be a new and happier phase of their lives.

Thus, considering the reasons that lead to leave Italy, we have a tripartition between consumption, family, and production motivations.



As regards the choice of Athens as a destination, we may have those who wanted to live “right here” and those who, on the contrary, narrate their experience of migration as something that “just happened”.

Those who deliberately chose Athens justify it mainly in terms of quality of life, low cost of living, low risk of moving, and/or better working environment. Some people describe their migration choice as the natural consequence of falling in love with the climate, the landscape, the people, and the historical heritage. For other people, the choice of Athens is motivated by the need to achieve a full economic independence and/or a good quality of life in a country where there is (at least for someone) a more favourable economic context and the cost of living is lower than in Italy. Moreover, the absence of barriers to overcome, such as physical distance, travel costs, different ways of life, and cultural otherness, is narrated as additional drivers of mobility.

For other people, instead, Athens is a destination that arises almost “by chance”, sometimes after other migratory experiences. From this point of view, the choice of the destination acquires an accidental connotation. It can also be a stage in a continuous movement between different places in search of a good trade-off between leisure and work, or even as a matter of destiny as in the case of love motivations.

Thus, considering the destination choice, we have a bipartition between choice and chance. In the first case, Athens is a desired destination to which specific meanings are attributed in terms of its potential for self-realization. In the second case, it is a casual landing dictated by opportunities or life paths that have led in that direction. The choice may be drawn from both personal experiences of Athens through prior tourism and travel, but it may also be derived from the collective imagination and from general cultural representations inherent in the social narratives of the places.

From these two classificatory principles, we can derive a typology of Italian migrants in Athens, depicted in Fig. 1. These types are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive<sup>7</sup>, but they offer an attempt to distinguish migration patterns.

## Mediterranean Migrants

*Mediterranean migrants*—among whom there are 5 interviewees, mainly younger but also older people, both recent and long-term expatriates—narrate their mobility pathway as a result of a reflexive choice basically related to the sphere of quality of life. They relate their choice to the Mediterranean lifestyle, seen as a vital part of their own identity, and to the geographical, social, and cultural familiarity of the host context. Their idea of migration seems to be close to those of tourism and leisure.

What I like most is basically the Greek concept to live everything on a certain aspect of calm, to eliminate the hurry, to be a bit more, let's say, relaxed, this is something I was looking for. I actually chose Greece because there are climatic conditions obviously favourable for me coming from Southern Italy. (15M32)

<sup>7</sup> A classification is considered exhaustive when all the instances find place in one of the classes and mutual exclusive when all the instances may be included in no more than one class (Marradi, 1990).



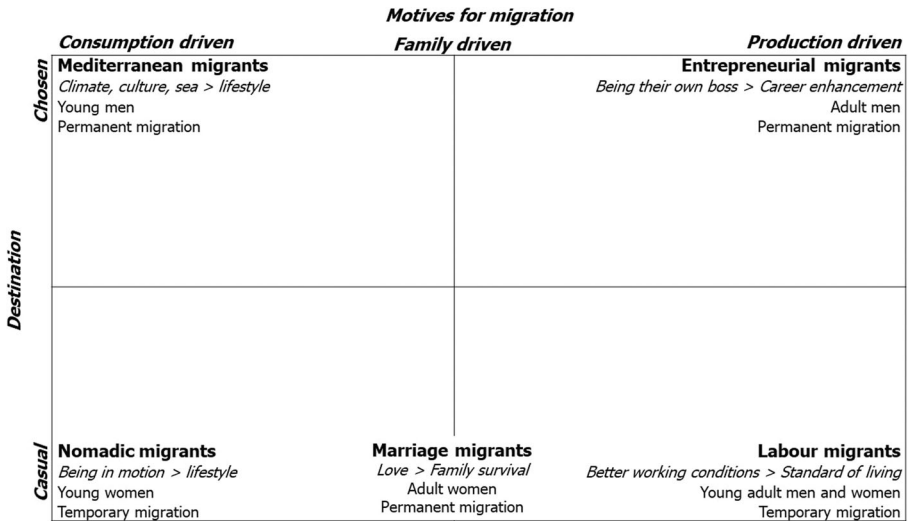


Fig. 1 A typology of Italian immigrants in Athens. Source: authors' own elaboration

Together with the above mentioned aspects, some migrants talk also of the historical and cultural role of Athens as a driver for their experience:

And you're probably wondering why I'm here [...] okay. Then I have to explain that, anyway, the passion for Greece has been alive since I was very young, in the sense that I am a person who decided to attend the classical high school for Greek history and culture. (32F38)

The familiarity of the host context seems to play a fundamental role in the choice of Athens for this group of migrants. They tend to avoid the displacement effect deriving from a radical change of culture and social relations. They are mainly interested in the reduction of risk resulting from the similarity of ways of life between the contexts of origin and destination:

At my arrival here, I went out of this airport, the smell of oranges eh, olive trees, warm air, as I set foot in Athens, I looked around: buildings, trees, olive trees and everything, I said 'I feel at home', 'I'm already starting off on the right foot, I feel at home'. (25M33)

For these migrants, the non-material meanings of life and individual well-being seem to have priority, compared with economic achievement. This type of migratory process seems to be more connected to personal fulfilment seen as a good quality of life in the leisure time. The concept of work that emerges from these interviews has leisure as its fundamental counterbalance. These interviewees apparently refuse the workaholic logic inherent in current work scenarios to regain a better balance between work and personal life. These migrants are thus driven by dual motivations of leisure and work, an approach that counters a logic of production and is lifestyle-led:

From what I have understood of my life, the priority is to choose the place in which to live. Work comes later (25M33).

These motives seem to bring this type of migratory path closer to the phenomenon of *residential tourism* (Williams & Hall, 2002; Huete, 2009). This blurring line between tourism and migration is also shared with British migrants to Spanish Costa del Sol studied by O'Reilly (2007). However, in that case, more emphasis is placed on dissatisfaction with the UK, their working conditions there, and anxiety about their personal and family life prospects in that context, describing their move as an escape.

Instead, within Mediterranean migrants' narratives, lifestyle is a reason for migrating, a part of their social and cultural construction of the destination, representing a better way of life and offering an improvement in the quality of life. These images of place as motivations behind migration are seen by many scholars at the root of the construction of migrant identities (Benson, 2015; Knowles & Harper, 2009).

## Nomadic Migrants

Like Mediterranean migrants, *nomadic migrants* give only weak meanings to the idea of work. Basically, 5 interviewees can be located within this group. They are travellers for whom territorial mobility itself has the meaning of a self-transformative experience. For these interviewees, mobility is their way of life (Urry, 2002: 256), their normative ideal (Elliott & Urry, 2010: 82), and a defining aspect of their identity (Cohen et al., 2013):

Being stable has never been a necessity. I could have found the solution to stay in one place, but it's just a fact that I don't want to stay in the same place much longer. So, I really should find my way of life by moving. (12F33)

This implies the intention to move continuously to other places, thus entailing a permanent change of residence. It is a permanent mobility pathway, which is made up of different short-term destinations without a necessary link to any of them.

I really like the feeling of being a foreigner that seems a strange thing [laughs], because it usually bothers you, one wants to integrate, to be part of the community. Instead I really like this feeling of being a foreigner, being different [laughs]. (04F33)

This implies a voluntary de-territorialized relation with space combined with multiple territorial affiliations that reinforces the nomadic immigrants' will to move, without the possibility of identifying a final destination (at least for the time being). Mobility is experienced by them as an indefinite daily practice. It can also be understood as an exploration of strangeness within and outside the self:

I can't stand staying in one place. When I start to feel ok, I have my house, I have my friends, I have my things I get anxious, I feel sick. Then I need to move again. I need [...] not to have these things. (20F24)

In this type of Italian migration, the boundaries between tourism and migration and work and quality of life are highly permeable, but they find a unifying element in the experience of continuous mobility. Such mobility is the factor that produces well-being, renewing the tourist experience as a pillar of a nomadic identity. Indeed, for this type of migrants, career is not a defining feature or an essential drive for migration. As regards their work identity, they seem to be in a condition of liminality, as they choose to accumulate erratic work experiences, sometimes without defining a final goal and a path of personal growth.

So, I started to apply [for a job] in a lot of places, on the right and misses, and the first one that answered me was Athens. And there, I had never thought about it... (30F23)

While this mobility includes work experiences, the dominant purpose of the migration pathway is lifestyle-led rather than economic driven. Career paths are rather erratic and inconsistent, often misaligned with education.

All these features bring this type of migration closer to other literature's attempt to classify the "push to move". It is the case of *neo-nomadism* as a strategy of escaping from the mainstream and dominant institutional framework (D'Andrea, 2006) toward countercultural lifestyles which locate personal identity in permanent physical mobility (Cohen et al., 2013).

However, unlike Mediterranean migrants, nomadic migrants can be found only among young people included in the recent wave of Italian emigration. This type of nomadism tends to disappear when young migrants approach adulthood, for example, when they enter a (supposedly) stable couple relationship. Until then, they try to keep their hands free in order to live their mobility experiences to the fullest.

[A stable family life in a permanent place to live?] It depends on what you want to do in life, if you want to make a family yes, when I want to make a family it will become a problem. I don't want a family right now, for the moment... (01M28)

## Work Migrants

Work migrants seem to be motivated by the search for a job opportunity regardless of the place. These 8 interviewees, mainly young-to-adult people included in the most recent wave of emigration, justify their move as a result of their experience of unemployment or bad working conditions in the Italian labour market in the post-crisis era.

Athens does not have a specific appeal to them, at least at a first sight. Many work migrants come from previous international mobility experiences and have moved to Athens because they accepted a job offer that could also have directed them elsewhere.

Among these migrants, the migratory project is often largely dominated by the search for a job. They often share a professional biography marked by repeated work

experiences without a coherent professional career development. Many of them entered the labour market without a consistent job search strategy. Thus, as the enthusiasm for new work and mobility experiences waned and the fear of becoming unemployed increased, these interviewees went so far as to sacrifice the consistency between qualification and employment in order to secure a job for themselves, even a precarious one.

Ehhhh, I completed my education full of high hopes [laughs] I had a good final grade, top marks, so anyway I hoped to find a job, to enter the labour market even with an internship, at least to get a reimbursement of expenses to be less dependent on my parents. But I didn't find anything. So, I started looking for jobs that weren't inherent to my education and training. You get to a certain point and say, "I want to work at any cost!" (04F33)

For these migrants, the job opportunities that lure them to Athens are often described as fortuitous events which help them to be spared (at least for the moment) from a destiny of strugglers, i.e. adrift subjects, resigned to a spiral of increasing marginality (Clarizia & Maddaloni, 2006, 2007). Therefore, they attribute mainly materialist values to the job opportunity, which usually is a subordinate position in the private services sector and for many of them a job in international help-desk activities. Most of the people working in this sector narrate it as a sort of a lifeline, or at least a lifeboat, which comes at a time when hopes of career seemed to turn into wistful illusions.

I worked, always worked in the summer in tourism and after a first season I said "this season I'll put money aside and go away" [...] I moved to [Northern European country], there I found no job. I was there 6 months. I returned to Italy and I did another season working as a lifeguard [...] I returned to [Northern European country] a second time, I found a job but it was only for the Christmas season [...] When I finished the job, I had some money in my pocket when I started to send my resumes everywhere, in the end they called me here in Athens. (11M41)

Their choice may be explained by disappointment and dissatisfaction with the Italian labour market. The content of work is scarcely important to these migrants who seem to be more drawn to salary:

It's a job that doesn't teach you anything, it's not like you get out of there 'well, I know how to do these things, I learnt new things, I developed new competences I can spend in another company', you don't learn anything. It's a job that gives no [career] chances. (25M33)

It is not surprising that these interviewees are not particularly frightened by the precarious nature of their contract. Although they are often employed through fixed-term contracts, there seems to be a tacit agreement between the company and the workers to renew the contract, guaranteeing work continuity. Most work migrants attribute to their move the meaning of improving the standard of living they could have with the same type of job in Italy. They are aware that the precarious nature of a

job and the working conditions in Athens are not better than those they can experience in Italy or elsewhere. What often makes the difference is the cost of living. Thus, they give a high value to the relationship between salary and cost of living, which enables them to engage in a middle-class lifestyle in a big European city which is at the same time a well-known tourist destination. These people earn on average a salary of 850 euros, which allows a good standard of living in a context where net wages are on average between 500 and 600 euros and the living costs are quite low (Maddaloni & Moffa, 2020):

Actually it's the cost of living that attracted me [to Greece], because doing two calculations, being a translator, it's clear that I would also like to return to [Northern European country] but life is very expensive there [...] Greece is one of those destinations which is quite ideal where you spend little and can manage yourself. Here there are people I knew who work part-time for 400 euros and live not well, but very well. So, if you have a thousand euros per month here, you put the money aside, you feel a bit almost privileged. (02M37)

## Marriage Migrants

Nine respondents can be considered *marriage migrants*. They are mainly adult people (most often women) who moved to Athens following a Greek partner in order to build a shared life project. Some of them gave up their career and professional ambitions for the benefit of the partner's career. According to the literature on marriage migration, which describes it as a migratory choice that can be strategically planned and irrationally made at the same time (Palriwala & Uberoi, 2008; Lauth-Bacas, 2010), our respondents seem to follow both pathways. More specifically, they describe the decision to move in an emotional way but then justify it in rational terms linking it to the priority of the partner's career. In this sense, such mobility paths cannot be framed within the consumption/production divide as they cannot be reduced to a primacy of lifestyle or economic choices. This motivation can be consumption driven because it is linked to the will of building a joint life project. However, it is also production driven because the prominence of the partner's career is justified in economic terms.

With reference to the casual/chosen destination dichotomy, they did not rationally choose Athens, they moved to Athens because of their couple choices. In many cases, they did not have much knowledge about their destination country and were somehow unprepared for what they found. Many marriage migrants report a misalignment between their expectations and the reality of migration. Integration through marriage turns out not to be an automatic process, and as soon as expectations meet reality, migrants face the limits of their knowledge of the local context and lifestyle:

My husband did his military service, what happened, he practically placed me at home with his parents, with his mother and father, he was an only child. [...] My family were very angry, so I said 'okay, let's see how it goes', but a year later when he came back from the military I said 'No, here NO. I don't want to stay here', I couldn't stay there anymore, I felt like I was in a little box. (17F50)

Some of them find it also difficult to come to terms with the local culture, seen as patriarchal and matriarchal at the same time.

It's a strange culture. It's strange, then it's a strange thing because then my ex-husband lived with a matriarch and maybe this is the reason why he tried to clip my wings [...] then it could be either a reaction to the relationship with his mother. (06F59)

They often experience a work-family conflict. Sometimes, our respondents decide to give up their career to reconcile themselves with the "housewife" stigma, in an attempt to preserve the Italian cultural heritage for their children:

My mother-in-law was very much like that, 'Go ahead and work, I'll keep the baby'. 'No, I don't want to transfer to my daughter your mindset'. I rebelled and said, 'I'll keep her', so I haven't worked for a few years. (17F60)

These family conflicts have a negative impact even on the career paths of marriage migrants who continue to work. They often cover professional roles inconsistent with their educational qualification.

I've changed so many different jobs. I worked in a travel agency, then I dedicated myself to teaching Italian. I still changed jobs working in a publishing house. And finally, I worked in a business association. (16F57)

Even when they do not give up working, they agree to delay their entry into the labour market and sacrifice part of their ambitions. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that when the marriage is unsuccessful, the divorce is narrated as a release from social and personal ties:

In Greek they say: shoes from your land, even if they are patched. (18F55)

It should be noticed, however, that in most cases, there is no return migration, mainly because of children but also because of the sentimental, friendship, and work ties that may arise as time goes by. In addition, apparently this way of living the migration experience is very dependent on both gender and wave of migration. Conflict within the enlarged family seems to be more common among female and old migrants. The few men who are among marriage migrants perceive their Greek parental network as rather supportive:

My father-in-law helped me so much [...] as far as the permits are concerned [...] he was near me, he helped me so much. (31M44)

Recent marriage migrants, on the other hand, find it perfectly natural to contribute to the family budget, or even to start a business together:

[Now we have] this thing, and this my, let's say, this activity of ours, in the sense that this is mine, it's his, it's not someone else that did it before me [...] it's us that, no, we are creating something, that is very simple, that will be very simple at the beginning, but the project we have is much more complex [...] in the sense that we then have future projects in case this goes well, it goes as it should go. (24F33)

## Entrepreneurial Migrants

A more coherent working condition is experienced by *entrepreneurial migrants*, 7 interviewees who are experiencing a business or professional career as both dependent and independent workers. They tell about their current stay in Athens, referring mainly to their job, as in the case of work migration. This group differs, however, from work migrants because they are not forced to get a job due to an unsuccessful search for a regular job in their homeland (Li, 2000; Dana, 2007). Rather, they feel to be businessmen or professionals who are experiencing a working career.

Let's say that I'm a slightly luckier emigrant. I had the economic independence to come here, I always had a home, I've never looked for a job. I'm a businessman, I've always been a person who has always worked alone, I've never worked under a boss. In short, so I never needed to go and look for a job fortunately. (03M54)

The respondents who are independent workers are mainly adult men who have chosen Athens as a place of production. Their choice is often strongly linked to the realization of their entrepreneurial project, sometimes in connection or with a reference to Italy. The relative familiarity of the places of origin and destination and the geographical proximity between them may also play a role in the development of their business. Sometimes, however, the choice is also justified by a context of origin perceived as not favourable, in fiscal and institutional terms, for their activity.

I don't think I could do the same things that I've been able to do here in Italy. What do I mean? That when I was 43 years old, I was able to do projects here that I could never have done in Italy, I should have been politically appointed. Here I don't need this. Here only with my skill - we talk about skill - I was able to have a certain type of clients. In Italy only with my skill I think that I would never have succeeded, I would have needed help, the classic political push. (22M43)

For these migrants, the social ties which allow to overcome language barriers and bureaucratic obstacles, to access business information, and to integrate themselves into the local economy and society is a significant factor in their personal migration pathway:

The presence of my wife and her family saved the situation from the bureaucratic and linguistic point of view. From the linguistic point of view, I started to speak



Greek before I came here, so in normal conversations I had no problems, I had a problem with bureaucracy – and writing in particular. Reading is easy. Writing in Greek is very difficult. (22M43)

On the contrary, the entrepreneurial migrants who are dependent workers are mainly (albeit not exclusively) women of adult age who initially came to Athens following a marriage project and then started a working career in the public sector using the qualifications obtained in Italy. There are also cases of people who rationally chose to start a career in Greece, because their educational qualification pushed them toward the Greek cultural and academic world.

Immediately after graduation I decided to move to Greece because, from an early age, this was my life and professional project, that is, to move here and to offer the Greek scientific community a, say, a window [on Italian culture]. (19M41)

In some circumstances, this caused problems, since in the past, Italian qualifications were not recognized by public authorities.

When I came here Greece still hadn't fully entered the European Community [and] those years of specialization that I did in Italy were not recognized [here], so I had to start over. (27F57)

Overcoming these difficulties, entering the Greek labour market, and having career opportunities in a public sector that does not look favourably on newcomers are what makes the personal trajectories of these migrants entrepreneurial.

## Conclusions

Our analysis was aimed at exploring the drivers of Italian migration to the Athens area by means of a typology allowing us to identify similarities and differences among individual pathways of international mobility. The main resource we used in this attempt was the narrative produced by the migrants themselves about the path taken.

Where lifestyle logics prevail, as in the case of Mediterranean and nomadic migrants, dual motivations of leisure and work are framed in a logic of consumption. Here career is not a defining characteristic, and emotional, cultural, and identity motivations prevail. However, even when work is framed as a driving motivation, as in the case of work migrants, their careers are affected by chronic flexibility coupled with fragmented trajectories: frequent job changes and the absence of a domain of expertise. Thus, these migratory choices cannot be considered cases of upward social mobility of privileged and high-status individuals. Instead, they can be considered choices aimed at not lowering a personal middle-class status. Even in these migratory paths, a polycentric conception of life emerges, in which leisure, standard of living and social life become important *loci* of personal development. Thus, work migrants seem to be satisfied with a low salary as far as it allows a middle-class standard of living. Work loses its central position also in the narratives of marriage

migrants which prioritize family and love motivations. Instead, it remains quite central in the narratives of entrepreneurial migrants who seem to improve their working conditions through migration.

It is well known that any attempt to develop a typology is based on the prevalence criterion. However, the ever-changing social reality is much stronger than any abstract scheme (King, 2012). The mutual exclusivity of the proposed types of migrants is challenged by the dualism of production and consumption (or work and lifestyle, or even materialist and post-materialist values) which, although valid for heuristic purposes, is sometimes ineffective in explaining the real individual mobility pathways at different stages of their development. Almost every individual migration path involves both consumption and production factors (Bell & Ward, 2000; Williams & Hall, 2002), to the point of pushing some authors to introduce the concept of *pro-sumption* as regards lifestyle migration (Cohen et al., 2013). The results of our analysis seem to show the usefulness of such a concept for a deeper understanding of different segments of the Italian community (Mediterranean migrants, nomadic migrant, and to some extent marriage migrants). The term “pro-sumption” is used to connote all cases in which the narrative of migration employs a set of categories related to tourism, leisure, and work. It is difficult to radically discriminate between work and lifestyle. Indeed, it is frequent that the choice of work is justified *ex post* in terms of lifestyle as in the case of some work migrants.

In many cases, migration is an individual path in continuous redefinition in which production, consumption, and identity are closely interlinked and the relationships between the different spheres can change in order to give coherence to the changes occurred. This happens because migration and post-migration are difficult to isolate, and factors such as work, income, self-fulfilment, and quality of life are often interconnected, even if their relative importance changes over the course of life. Thus, even among those who originally moved for work reasons, lifestyle-related justifications may subsequently emerge becoming important motivations to remain in the destination country. On the other hand, even those who appear to be more guided by lifestyle-related motivations, in order to survive in the host country, must have an income base (and, consequently, be part of a productive logic), so that their migration routes can share some features with those who migrate for work.

It becomes therefore useful to discuss more about *lifestyle in migration*, lifestyle-related choices in most migration paths, than *lifestyle migration* as a specific category of migration pathways (Benson & O'Reilly, 2015). The criterion adopted for the creation of the typology is to understand the narratives that are proposed by the interviewees to justify both the decision to migrate then and to stay “right there” now. Through the typology proposed in this work, we have tried to grasp the dynamic character of these mental phenomena, in relation to the continuous change of the vital experiences of individuals. Indeed, if you want to produce knowledge of real processes while respecting the complexity of both the paths and the individual narratives, it is essential to consider the overlaps among these dimensions.

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