

Job-related spatial mobility trajectories and their association with social structure: Evidence from Germany

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Background and Research Question

Globalization comes along with increasing demands for flexibility and spatial mobility. In this context, individual spatial mobility (like daily or weekly long distance commuting and frequent business trips), has become a widespread phenomenon in contemporary European societies.

Traditional research on job-induced mobility has mainly focused on inter- and inner country long distance relocations, with the assumption, that these moves are motivated by the opportunity for realizing economic advantages (Geist/McManus 2008: 283). But today, many individuals and couples decide to commute daily or weekly over a long distance in order to have the possibility of continuing to live in the family home, seeing friends, caring for an aging parent, allowing children to continue attending the local school and reconciling the jobs of two working adults. While the degree of residential mobility within Europe has hardly changed, types of recurring mobility, like commuting and business trips have become a frequent component of the individual's employment (Limmer/Schneider 2008).

The representative study „Job Mobilities and Family Lives in Europe” has been conducted in 2007 in six European countries (Germany, France, Spain, Poland, Switzerland, and Belgium). The survey focuses on a broad concept of spatial mobility, that involves types of recurring mobility (e.g. long distance commuting, frequent stays away from home over night), as well as types of residential mobility (migration, residential relocation). In the six countries, 16% of people working for pay are currently mobile, while 32% gained mobility experiences in the past. All in all, around half of the people working for pay are experienced with mobility.

The research on migration and mobility has been enriched by placing it within the framework of the life course (e.g. Clark/Davies Withers 2007; Geist/McManus 2008). According to this paradigm, an individual's life is composed of a sequence of different states that change over time due to activities and events (Elder 1985). “Transitions” and “trajectories” are therefore central theoretical concepts of the life course approach (Elder 1985: 31; Aisenbrey/Fasang 2010: 421). Life course unfolds in multiple life domains, that are interrelated, like career histories, family development or relocation histories.

Studies that draw upon a life course perspective, have focused on interdependencies between family events and residential mobility (for an overview cf. Kulu/Milewski 2007), as well as on the interplay between changes in occupational career and residential moves (e.g. Clark/Davies Withers 1999).

Regarding the state of mobility research in a life course perspective, two desiderata can be stated. Firstly, the bulk of mobility research (as well as the bulk of life course research in general; cf. Aisenbrey/Fasang 2010) focuses on discrete events in life course, neglecting to capture and describe whole trajectories in the empirical analysis by using pattern search techniques (but see: Stovel/Bolan 2004). This imbalance is dissatisfying, because the life course approach emphasizes, that events have to be understood in their continuity, as past decisions and experiences define the scope of future action (Aisenbrey/Fasang 2010: 421;

Huinink/Feldhaus 2009: 308). Secondly, to our knowledge there are no studies up to now, that focus on job-related spatial mobility trajectories, considering that job-induced mobility may occur in a different way than changing the place of residence.

The aim of this contribution is to fill this gap, using data from Germany which provides retrospective information about past job, family-related events and mobility experiences. For the first time, entire trajectories of occupation and job-related spatial mobility are being analyzed, accounting for different types of mobility. With such trajectories at hand, a variety of assumptions concerning the association between mobility and socio-structural characteristics (e.g. occupational achievement), that has often been examined cross-sectional, can be reanalyzed applying longitudinal information.

In the paper we will address the following two questions:

- 1) Which typical trajectories of occupational life and job-related spatial mobility can be detected and how can they be described with regard to different dimensions?
- 2) Which socio-structural characteristics are related to the identified different trajectories?

Data

The empirical analysis is based on data of the second wave of the study „Job Mobilities and Family Lives in Europe“. A first wave of this study has been conducted in 2007 and was granted by the European Commission. 7220 randomly selected person aged 25 to 54 of six European countries (Germany, France, Spain, Poland, Switzerland, and Belgium) were asked about their experiences with job-related spatial mobility.

To enlarge the scope of possible analyses concerning job-related spatial mobility, a second wave was conducted in Germany in 2010, broadened by retrospective questions about family and employment histories and spatial mobility experiences. While some of the respondents of 2007 could be re-interviewed in 2010, a random selection of job-related spatial mobile individuals was additionally surveyed in 2010.

Therefore, the analyzed data set (n=745) is composed of two partial samples:

- 497 panel cases, selected in 2007 and re-interviewed in 2010
- 248 mobile cases, newly selected in 2010

Method

To build different trajectories of occupation and spatial mobility, sequence analysis was used. We applied optimal matching analysis (OMA) to measure dissimilarities between sequences. Based on the distances between sequences, we used a cluster analysis (Ward's method) to built types of mobility trajectories. We extracted an eight cluster solution.

The trajectories can be characterized by several dimensions:

- Timing of entrance into working life
- Frequency, duration and position of unemployment periods in the occupational trajectory
- Forms of mobility
- Frequency of mobility events
- Duration of mobility events
- Position of mobility events in the occupational trajectory

Subsequent to the description of the different clusters, associations between these trajectories and central socio-demographic (like sex and age) as well as socio-economic characteristics

(like education, income and job prestige) were examined, performing bivariate and multivariate binary logistic regression analysis.

First findings

a) Description of trajectories of occupation and spatial mobility

Focusing on the criteria “timing of entrance into or exit from working life” and “dominant form of mobility” the extracted clusters can exemplarily be described as follows.

1) “Early exit from work life” (n= 56, 7.5%)

In this cluster predominantly persons are gathered that left labor market at an early age. Job-induced spatial mobility is rarely experienced.

2) “Early entrance to work life / non mobiles” (n=160, 21.5%)

The persons of this cluster entered employment at an early age and experienced mostly no job-related spatial mobility.

3) “Late entrance to work life / non mobiles” (n= 89, 11.9%)

The persons of this cluster entered employment at a high age and experienced mostly no job-induced spatial mobility.

4) “Early entrance to work life / Commuters” (n=105, 14.1%)

This cluster comprises persons, which entered employment and started to be recurrently job mobile at an early age. Long distance commuting over a long period of time is a typical experience for people in this cluster.

5) “Late entrance to work life / Multi Mobiles” (n=44, 5.9%)

This cluster is characterized by a late entrance into the labor market and a high occurrence of unemployment periods. In the case that individuals of this cluster held a job, they were frequently spatially mobile, often in more than one way simultaneously.

6) “Early entrance to work life / changeable mobility” (n=150, 20.1%)

Individuals that can be found in this cluster have experienced an early entrance into working life, followed by an unsteady occupational history pattern and changing status concerning job-induced spatial mobility.

7) “Late entrance to work life / Relocators” (n=102, 13.7%)

This cluster comprises individuals, which entered employment at a high age, often accompanied by a job-induced residential relocation at the beginning of their job career.

8) “Overnighters” (n=39, 5.2%)

Entering the labor market at an average age, individuals out of this cluster have experienced long periods of job-related recurring mobility, predominantly by frequently staying away from home over night.

The analysis has exposed eight clusters with distinct trajectories of occupation and job-related spatial mobility, four of them dominated by a certain type of mobility. Specific patterns concerning the placing of mobility events in the life course are visible for different types of mobility: While residential relocation is mostly located at the beginning of a job career,

recurring forms of mobility tend to extend to a longer period, being frequently practiced by older individuals.

b) Correlation with social structural factors

The results show, that the extracted trajectories can be clearly differentiated by socio-demographic characteristics like age and sex. Some clusters are dominated by male respondents while other clusters seem to comprise trajectories that are mainly experienced by women.

Furthermore, differences between the clusters regarding socio-economic factors, like income, are clearly visible. Traditionally it is assumed, that spatial mobility is positively associated with occupational achievement, because workers who are willing to be flexible and to broaden their area of job search “can take advantage of job opportunities elsewhere and compete for more jobs“(Van Ham 2002: 4). Therefore, persons who were highly flexible and mobile in their employment history should experience better conditions today. However, our results do only partly confirm this assumption. Moreover it depends on the length and continuity of employment and spatial mobility periods, as well as on the dominant form of mobility in the life course.

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