

Cities' industrialization and social mobility: evidence from Turin

This paper studies the impact of industrialization on social mobility at the urban level. I contribute to the social mobility literature by focusing on the industrialization process of a historical city, while most of the literature analyzes countries or regions. I focus on pre-WWII Turin and rely on the information content of surnames (ICS) to estimate the evolution of social mobility during a period of rapid industrialization. Using unique data on surnames and imputed labor incomes that I manually digitized from multiple historical censuses of Turin, I find that ICS decreases from 0.232 in 1911 to 0.124 in 1936, which implies an improvement in the social mobility level. Such improvement is driven by upward shifts from the bottom of the income distribution. Furthermore, I show that most of the mobility gains at the city level are spatially concentrated in areas that are at a walking distance from the industries. Lastly, I document a significant persistence in social mobility between 1705 and 1911, which rapidly declines between 1911 and 1936. Results are robust to imputation adjustments for random noises in individual income, the exclusion of “Non-Turinners” surnames and cohorts analysis. Overall results support the hypothesis that industrialization improves social mobility at the urban level.