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LOOKING BACK TO LOOK FORWARD: THE ITALIAN ACTIVE AGEING IN BETWEEN THE OLD AND THE NEW MILLENNIUM

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1. Introduction

According to the World Health Organization, active aging implies the optimization of physical, social and mental health opportunities which enable older people to play active roles in society as well as enjoy an independent and quality life. Based on that definition, during the last two decades, most of the developed countries have gradually consolidated strategies and planned means in order to push older people to carry on social and work activities (CE, 2008). Thus, different policies and practices on urban planning, rural development, access to health care, family, education, social security, employment, social engagement, free-time, and so on, have been reviewed in order to identify those suitable tools that allow older people to age in good health (enabling them to actively support both labor market and societies), as well as allow to cope with demographic challenges in a fair and sustainable way for all generations.

Although the Italian legislative framework in terms of active ageing is still quite scarce and rather fragmented at local level (Mirabile *et al.*, 2009; Ciccarone, 2012), we can shortly say that the main areas involved in its action range regard: 1) participation to the labour market; 2) lifelong learning; 3) active engagement; 4) health and quality of life; 5) transportation and mobility services.

Based on what has just been stated, we intend to assess how much those dimensions solely related to health, active social-participation and lifelong learning have influenced the choice of the Italian male population[1], aged between 55 and 75 years old, to remain active on the labor market over the past two decades, thus postponing transition to inactivity.

[1]The choice to only take into consideration the male population is due to the different Italian pension provision deserved to both sexes. In response to the European Commission requests, Italy has just recently (in 2010) made the first legislative step towards a gradual equalization of males' and females' pension provisions.

In view of planned policy-interventions and empirical research-outcomes, we assume that the worsening of health-conditions among older males will result in a greater propensity to anticipate inactivity-status (Zucchinelli *et al*., 2010; Innocenti, Vecchiato T., 2013). Moreover, by taking into account health improvements among the Italian population which, e.g., have entail significant increases in the residual-life-average among the 55 year-old people (in the case of the male population, it rose from 23.1 years in 1993 to 26.7 years in 2012 (Istat), we assume that there is a much greater capacity to lengthen the labour-cycle nowadays than there was in the past.

The "active social participation" issue, thus far considered as "social engagement", will be even analyzed by considering the different historical backgrounds and, therefore, the policies in force at that very moment. In this regard, based on some empirical researches (Attwood *et al*. 2003; Population Reference Bureau, 2011), we assume there is a positive relationship between active-status on the labor market and social engagement.

Finally, we will examine what role the lifelong learning (assessed by the use of modern technology, e.g., computer, internet, mobile phones, etc.) plays in the choice, made by the 55 year-old Italian males, of keeping up active. Previous researches have positively associated the use of technology to the prolongation of activeness on the labor market (Ala-Mutka *et al*., 2008; Peacock, 2009) and, in this sense, the 2012 statistical data enables us to appraise how much technological-means are crucial for the Italian older males in order to keep their active-status up.

2. Reference data

This analysis takes into account the database of the *Indagine Multiscopo sulle Famiglie* (Multipurpose Survey for Households) - carried on by the Italian Institute of Statistics - which collects important information about Italian families' everyday life. Furthermore, since Italian pension-provision differs by gender, for the purpose of this study only the male population has been taken into consideration: thus, the sample made up of 5,382 males refers back to the 1993 Survey, while the one of 5,570 males, to the last 2012 Survey[2]. Before examining the determinants that have pushed older males to keep up active on the labour market, it is necessary to specify what we exactly

[2]Yet, there are many other surveys focused on active aging such as *The Survey on Heath, Ageing and Retirement in Europe* (SHARE) which collects a large amount of data and allows comparisons among countries involved in this initiative. However, this particular survey provides information since 2004/2005 only (i.e., the first year that the survey was carried on) and, for this reason, does not fit our kind of analysis aimed at grasping the changes of the Italian population over twenty years, i.e., in the transition between the Twentieth century and the Twenty-first one.

mean by "older population" and "active status on the labour market". Generally, "older population" refers to the ones aged between 55 and 75 years old, as 55 represents the minimum age-threshold at which people can be categorized as "older workers" or "emerging older generation", and 75 is the maximum age-threshold which marks the end of the "older" condition and the beginning of the "very old" one[3]. Besides, the "active on labour market status" is generally given to those who declare in the survey to "be employed" or "be looking for a job", while the ones belonging to other categories (disable to work, retired, and other conditions) are considered "inactive". As explicative variables, we have considered three different dimensions: the first one is related to socio-territorial aspects (age, current residence, education, family); the second one regards healthcare and other features involved in political actions which strongly encourage active aging (health condition, social participation, economic status); the third one concerns lifelong learning and is assessed by the use of technology (mobile phones, PCs, iPads, etc.) which - particularly during the last two decades - have pushed lots of seniors to acquire skills to manage it. Yet, technological aspects are available just from the 2012 Survey.

3. The active aging in Italy: its determinants in the past and at present

As the descriptive analysis shows, afterward the Italian social security reforms (aimed at delaying the exit from productive lifecycle either by raising the retirement age and/or improving the health conditions) were implemented, the quota of those males aged 55-75 years old and active on labor market, has boosted from 30.7% in 1993 to 35.1% in 2012.

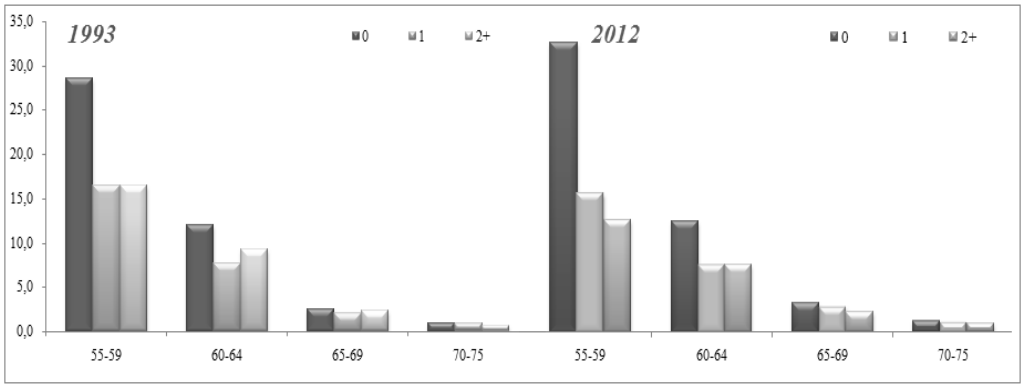
The profile of the "healthy older worker" clearly stands out in both years (Figure 1): it refers to a "young older person" aged 55-59 years old, who has not suffered from any chronic disease, and therefore has a positive view/opinion of his own health condition. Besides, the 2012-data shows that over one third of the whole male-sample uses Internet, half of which is active on the labor market, thus shaping the profile of a "web-surfing older worker".

As the analysis gets on with the binomial logistic regression, "age" clearly becomes the most important variable of the model. Thus, as age raises, the propensity to remain active on the labour market decreases. When age is divided into five-year groups and

[3]In a longitudinal perspective, this means that data will highlight active-condition for two different cohorts: the one born by the end of the World War I (1918-1938) and collected by the 1993 Survey; the other one born during the pre- and post-World War II period (1937-1957) and collected by the 2012 Survey.

the "55-59 age-threshold" is taking as reference, it comes out that the propensity to remain active drastically falls down at the next age-threshold (i.e., 60-64 years old), thus reaching very low values as it goes on at older age-groups: besides, this kind of relationship seems to be more pronounced in 2012 than in 1993.

Figure 1 – *Active older males by age and number of chronic diseases contracted.*



*Source: own elaborations based on the data set "Indagine Multiscopo sulle Famiglie", 1993 and 2012***.**

For what concerns healthcare, data confirms that the worsening of males' health conditions (both objective or subjective) lowers the propensity to remain in the workforce. Both years (1993-2012) show no changes with regard to the relationship between work and health conditions, measured in terms of presence of chronic diseases: e.g., the propensity to remain active is about 31.0% lower for those who suffered from a chronic disease compared to those who have never contracted any.

On the other hand, according to the perceptions males have about their own health conditions, outcomes reveal some important differences: in fact, in 2012, the ones who negatively judged their health-status disclose a 27.0% lower active-attitude than the ones who positively assessed it, whereas in 1993 this gap was much more marked.

Moreover, even the relationship between activeness on the labor market and social engagement seems to have changed along the twenty years. Although the logistic regression model does not explain the causality between those variables, we can give a valuable interpretation about it: the ones who where active on the labor market in 1993 had somewhat 1.2 times greater propensity to social engagement than the ones who were inactive, whereas, in 2012, the active ones in the workforce show a 25.0% lower

propensity to social engagement than the inactive ones. In other words, twenty years ago, social engagement was a prerogative for workers, nowadays, it seems instead to be related to work-inactivity[4].

Table 1 – *Odd ratio to be active on the labor market, 2012 and 2013.*

Variables	Mod. 1-1993 Exp (ß)	Mod. 2- 2012 Exp (ß)	Mod. 3 – 2012 Exp (ß)
CHRONIC DISEASE (ref. None)			
One	0.682***	0.693***	0.688***
Two or more	0.574***	0.602***	0.601***
RECEIVE MEDICAL CARE (ref. No)			
Yes	1.018	1.145	1.159
SOCIAL PARTICIPATION (ref. Never o Occasionally)			
Frequently	1.215*	0.779**	0.735***
SATISFACTION FOR HEALTH CONDITION (ref. Positive)			
Negative	0.612**	0.736**	0.731**
SATISFACTION FOR ECONOMIC CONDITION (ref. Positive)			
Negative	1.088***	1.252***	1.276**
RESIDENCE LOCATION (ref. South and Islands)			
North-West	0,493***	0,753**	0,724***
North-East	0.549***	0.874	0.847
Center	0.787*	0.875	0.853
EDUCATION (ref. None or Elementary School)			
Middle School	1,212*	1,264*	1,180
High School and over	2,512***	2,504***	2,060***
FAMILY (ref. No children)			
By himself	1,324	1,139	1,160
With his children	1.730***	1.274**	1.273**
AGE (ref. 55-59)			
60-64	0,289***	0,165***	0,169***
65-69	0,063***	0,045***	0,047***
70-75	0.028***	0.019***	0.020***
INTERNET USE (ref. No)			
Yes			1.287**
MOBILE PHONES USE (ref. No)			
Yes			1,421***
Pseudo R^2	42,9%	49,2%	49,6%

*Source: own elaborations based on the data set "Indagine Multiscopo sulle Famiglie", 1993 and 2012***.**

[4] As already mentioned in the introduction of this analysis, that change can be explained by the particular national *policies* that promoted social activeness among older pensioners (Cfr: Davis Smith J., Gay, P., 2005. *Active ageing in active communities*, Bristol, The Policy Press) and the historical events experienced by the cohorts. In fact, the post-war generation reveals different attitudes with respect to the generation who experienced war, as they have lived - albeit from different perspectives - the deepest, most complex and widespread Unionization of the Italian Republican history which, by the way, has created a civic culture transformed only later on in Associations (Mirabile *et al*, 2009).

Besides, two additional issues have been analyzed: formal education - i.e. the second most important variable in the model after "age" - and use of technology as explanatory element of the lifelong learning for older people. In this regard, our analysis detects a greater propensity to activeness among those who have higher educational qualifications. The main explanation of this outcome resides, of course, in the institutional mechanisms: due to longer educational-paths/training-programs, graduated males use to get into the labor market much later and, consequently, develop much later his rights to retire. Furthermore, as regards our hypothesis about the "surfing workers", the ones who have acquired Internet skills tend to remain 1.3 times more active on the labor market, even at old ages (Model 3).

With reference to the socio-territorial determinants, it should be noted that older males who develop a negative perception of their economic status have a greater propensity to activeness than those who consider it quite satisfactory. These outcomes can be read even in terms of active-propensity-differentiations between older males living in the North-West, the most economically developed Italian area, and the ones residing in the South, less developed than the former one. In fact, the propensity of the North-Western older males to remain active is far less than the one shown by the Southern males; yet those differentiation between the two Italian geographical areas seems to have decreased a lot along the two periods of time observed. Then, as family-composition is taken into account, outcomes show that older males keep up active when living with their children: this relationship was more marked in 1993 than it is in 2012. Yet, such data suggests a general lifecycle postponement: as a matter of fact, in Italy, as parents postpone childbearing and their children's postpone housing and economic self-sufficiency, even retirement gets postponed, i.e., parents tend to delay their exit from the workforce.

4. Concluding remarks

The outcomes of this research, about active aging performed by Italian males in 1993 and 2012, reveal that the propensity to remain active on the labour market:

a) slows down as age raises, diminishing more markedly from 60-64 years old onwards;
b) is strongly linked to both health and economic conditions (either real or perceived ones) of older males: as their health gets worse, their propensity to

remain active gets low; still, as their economic situation gets more unreliable, their propensity to remain on the labour market gets higher;

c) is related to different kinds of social engagement, depending on the pre- and post-war generations;
d) is affected by place of residence (older males show to be more active in the Southern than in the Northern) and family setting (older males are generally more active when they live with their children);
e) increases as higher is the education/qualification level held by older males. Nevertheless, propensity to activeness is also marked when technological knowledge is possessed, somewhat, even when no higher education has been accomplished.

This analysis cannot be disregarded from those aspects that inevitably marked differentiations between the two periods observed. Thus, in transition between 1993 and 2012, the propensity to remain active has been strongly affected by the retirement age-raising imposed by the various Italian legislations, the progress had among healthcare and prevention, the national absolute/relative poverty escalation (recently, poverty has much affected the older population, particularly the one living in the Southern), the evolving of "social participation" for the older population, the technological knowledge which is significantly influencing activeness among older people regardless their education level, though it is still nowadays, as it surely was in the past, a decisive active-component.

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SUMMARY

L**ooking Back To Look Forward: The Italian Active Ageing In Between The Old And The New Millennium**

This research is aimed at analyzing the determinants which have influenced the choice of the older (i.e., 55-75 year-old) Italian men to remain active on the labor market at the beginning of active-ageing policies implementations (in 1993) as well as twenty years later on (in 2012). This research takes into account the national representative dataset "*Indagine Multiscopo sulle Famiglie*" (carried on by ISTAT) in order to assess active-ageing determinants through binomial logistic regression. Even though "age" represents the main determinant of activeness, some other important outcomes have emerged as regards health, social participation and use of technologies.

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