

Preface

In March 2000, the then 15 European leaders committed the European Union (EU) to become by 2010 ‘the most dynamic and competitive knowledge based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, and respect for the environment’. The research project sustaining this book started in 2005, five years after the formulation of the 2010 goals. The Lisbon strategy, as it has come to be known, was a comprehensive but interdependent series of reforms which have significant implications for a whole range of social policies, including policies for learning. As part of the Lisbon strategy, the European Union set the goal of raising the number of adults participating in lifelong learning to 12.5 per cent by 2010. However, the proportion of learning adults in Europe differs widely across countries. This book is dedicated to identifying the reasons behind these differences and to studying the policies and practices related to adults’ participation in and access to lifelong learning in a number of European countries.

The research focused on the contribution of the education systems to the process of making lifelong learning a reality and its role as a potential agency of social integration in 13 European countries: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, England, Estonia, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, Norway, Russia, Scotland and Slovenia. We addressed several pivotal problems. Are there differences in terms of lifelong learning between EU countries and, if so, do these depend on country-specific institutions? To what extent may lifelong learning in reality (as opposed to merely rhetoric) be allocated a residual role in national policy-making? What are the barriers to lifelong learning and how can these be overcome? How could employers, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), promote the participation of adults in lifelong learning? Which are the main obstacles for SMEs to invest in lifelong learning? How can educational institutions promote the access of adults to the education system? Are schools and universities ready to change their admission policies and become institutions of lifelong learning?

The above questions were scrutinized in five subprojects all reported in this volume, which is one of two compilations of the research stemming from the international research project ‘Towards a Lifelong Learning

Society in Europe: The Contribution of the Education System' (LLL2010), financed by the European Union's 6th Framework Research Programme. The first volume, entitled *Lifelong Learning in Europe: Equity and Efficiency in Balance*, was published by Policy Press in 2012. The strategic objectives of the project, now terminated, included the following: (1) achieving a better understanding of the tensions between a knowledge-based society, lifelong learning and social inclusion in the context of EU enlargement and globalization; (2) analysing the role that education systems play in the enhancement of lifelong learning – and in particular, the role that institutions play at micro, meso and macro levels; (3) providing an analysis, based on evidence, of the adequacy of lifelong learning policies for different social groups (especially the socially excluded). Any further information about the project can be found at <http://LLL2010.tlu.ee>.

An important goal of the LLL2010 project was to create and utilize an international research network that collectively pursued specific, substantive and methodological analyses of lifelong learning. This volume depended on the contributors to this volume of experts working in their respective countries. Our gratitude goes to all participants of the project (see the List of Contributors) for their enthusiastic, professional and supportive teamwork during the project.

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