

Preface

This volume is part of the *eduLIFE* project (Education as a Lifelong Process), funded by the European Research Council, and the first volume of the *eduLIFE Lifelong Learning Series*. This five-year project analyzes educational careers over the whole life course – from early childhood to late adulthood – in relation to family background, educational institutions, workplaces, and life events. This is achieved by focusing on four specific phases of the educational career: early childhood education, secondary and tertiary education, the transition from school to work, and adult learning. Based on detailed cross-national comparisons, *eduLIFE* aims to establish the generality of findings as well as the impact of specific institutional contexts.

The study of educational opportunities has a long tradition in sociological inequality research, and many sociologists have argued that education is the key variable for researching stratification in modern societies. Over the last decades, industrial societies have evolved into knowledge-based economies in which the role of education and the organization of educational institutions have become important in all phases of the life course. More than in the past, education is today a lifelong process in which individuals acquire skills and competences in formal and non-formal learning settings throughout the entire lifespan. However, most empirical research on education is based on cross-sectional studies (for example, the OECD's PISA and PIAAC studies) and does not analyze education as a time-dependent process.

Adult Learning in Modern Societies provides a state-of-the-art analysis of adult learning in different institutional settings. Although the importance of adult learning has been widely acknowledged over the last decades, empirical evidence on the topic is still scarce and stems mostly from studies of individual countries. Much can still be learned from the use of longitudinal data and the rigorous analysis of causal mechanisms over the life course. This volume brings together a number of cross-national and country studies (Australia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, Russia, Spain, Sweden, and the United States), which were conducted in collaboration with country experts and using high-quality longitudinal data. Our main contribution to the literature consists of exploring the potential of adult learning for reducing social inequality. In order to

achieve this aim, our chapters analyze how successful different countries have been in encouraging equitable participation in formal and non-formal labor-market-related adult learning and whether different types of adult learning are converted into positive labor market outcomes.

We have been very fortunate in being able to draw on the expertise of prominent researchers, who contributed country-specific and cross-national chapters to the book. We thank all our collaborators for their efforts in preparing and revising their manuscripts, and all their commitment to our shared purposes. During the preparation of the book, we have benefited from intensive debates with our collaborators at two workshops. Thanks to the creativity of the scholars involved in this project, we have achieved excellent solutions to our theoretical and methodological issues.

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Hans-Peter Blossfeld

Elina Kilpi-Jakonen

Daniela Vono de Vilhena

Sandra Buchholz