Preface

This book is the third volume of the *eduLIFE Lifelong Learning Series* and emerged from the international comparative research project ‘*eduLIFE: Education as a Lifelong Process – Comparing Educational Trajectories in Modern Societies*’. The *eduLIFE* project is being funded by an Advanced Grant of the European Research Council and studies educational careers over the whole life course – from early childhood to late adulthood. Based on detailed cross-national comparative comparisons, this project aims at understanding the influence of country-specific institutions as well as the generalizability of findings across countries. Whereas the first two volumes focused on adult learning and the transition from school to work, this third volume investigates secondary schooling careers as well as the consequences of different models of secondary education on social inequalities.

Sociological research has a long tradition of studying social inequalities in secondary education. However, following the publication of the first PISA results, this topic gained new relevance. PISA findings revealed not only differences in pupils’ performance but also clear differences in educational opportunities in modern societies. Although the publication of PISA results triggered a new political and public awareness for educational inequalities, these results were not very surprising from a sociological point of view. Several previous studies had already discussed and highlighted this issue. Yet, thanks to PISA, this strand of research experienced a true renaissance. More recent research on educational inequalities endeavoured to disentangle the effect of social origin in more detail by drawing on Raymond Boudon’s theoretical concepts of primary and secondary effects of social origin.

However, most empirical research is still based on cross-sectional studies such as the aforementioned PISA study, or it concentrates only on specific transitions in individuals’ educational careers such as individuals’ first transition to secondary education after primary schooling. Hence, such studies can provide only a ‘snapshot’ of an individual’s educational career at one point in time and cannot map the changing (and sometimes unchanging) experiences of individuals as their educational careers progress. Any appropriate understanding of the dynamics of inequalities in secondary education requires a longitudinal perspective like that adopted in this book, because this alone allows a stepwise reconstruction of individuals’ educational careers.

By taking an international comparative perspective, this book further aims at understanding how inequalities in secondary education arise in different countries. Such an international comparative perspective is relevant because contemporary societies still employ quite different models, rules, and procedures when regulating admission, selection, and learning in secondary education. Hence, one central question in this volume is whether and how different models of secondary education impact on the emergence of social inequalities. In contrast to previous research, this book applies a wider definition of tracking within secondary education allowing us to also uncover ‘hidden’ forms of differentiation in secondary schooling such as the role of subject choice in comprehensive schooling systems.

Models of Secondary Education and Social Inequality brings together a number of cross-national and country studies (Australia, Denmark, England, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, Russia, Scotland, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States) that were conducted in close collaboration with experts. We have been fortunate in being able to profit from the expertise of the prominent educational researchers who contributed to this book. We thank all our collaborators for their highly valuable input, their commitment during the preparation of this manuscript, as well as fruitful discussions during our two project workshops.

For preparing the final manuscript, we would like to thank Jonathan Harrow for his rigorous proofreading and language editing. His contribution has been of great value. We also thank all the administrative and student assistants who have contributed to the project. In particular, we thank the *eduLIFE* project coordinator Alina Vlad as well as the PhD students Anna Kyriazi and Diana Roxana Galos for their great support and assistance in preparing this book. Nonetheless, we as editors bear sole responsibility for any remaining errors. All editors contributed equally to this volume, which is why they are ordered alphabetically. We are extremely grateful for all the support received from Tim Williams and Emily Mew at Edward Elgar Publishing and for the backing of the anonymous reviewers who recommended the publication of this volume. Finally, we would like to thank the European Research Council (ERC) for its financial support.

Shortly before this book went into print, we learned of the sudden and unexpected death of our close friend Jaap Dronkers. He made a substantial contribution to this book. We shall miss him greatly as a major figure in the field of education research and as a wonderful colleague.

Hans-Peter Blossfeld
Sandra Buchholz
Jan Skopek
Moris Triventi