

## Foreword

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Comparative stratification and mobility research has developed rapidly since the 1950s (Ganzeboom, Treiman and Ultee 1991; Treiman and Ganzeboom 2000). It has moved through four distinct generations, which began with the post-war examination of national probability sample surveys that offered a first glimpse of stratification patterns across different societies in terms of observed percentages. The 'openness' of societies was measured by absolute upward and downward mobility in intergenerational (father to son) occupational mobility tables. The main observation was that mobility rates and patterns were roughly the same across industrialized societies (Lipset and Mendel 1959).

The second generation shifted the focus of research from bivariate intergenerational comparisons to multivariate models of transmission of status, both intergenerational and intragenerational, using newly developed hierarchically scaled occupational measurements (Duncan 1961; Treiman 1977). New statistical techniques also permitted the assessment of the relative importance of various paths to status attainment and separation of direct and indirect effects (for example, via education). Blau and Duncan (1967) established the central significance of education as a core mechanism that transmitted status from generation to generation.

The third generation returned to the analysis of bivariate intergenerational occupational mobility tables, this time armed with refined log-linear statistical techniques. Researchers were now able to disaggregate observed mobility patterns in order to show the shifts in the distribution of the underlying differences in the chances of success for people from different social origins. This generation of comparative mobility research culminated with Erikson and Goldthorpe's (1992) *The Constant Flux*, drawn from the Comparative Analysis of Social Mobility in Industrial Nations (CASMIN) project. Using 12 large-scale national surveys, CASMIN researchers could draw upon highly comparable educational and occupational data to study mobility processes and develop much-used comparative measures (for example, the EGP class scheme and the CASMIN education scheme).

The main conclusion of *The Constant Flux* was that there was a core mobility pattern common to all industrialized countries, with small variations between nations attributed to idiosyncratic historical and political

circumstances. The book also claimed that there is little evidence that mobility has increased over time. However, since the project had access to data from only one point in time, the authors were forced to make the questionable assumption that there are no career effects on mobility and that age differences may be interpreted as cohort effects. The conclusion of no change was challenged by other comparative studies (for example, Ganzeboom, Luijkx and Treiman 1989), and has been disproved for a large number of countries rigorously by Breen (2004).

It can be maintained that the first three generations of stratification research constitute a clear case of growth of knowledge by using ever more rigorous data collection and data harmonization procedures, and by adopting ever more sophisticated statistical methods. Yet, this was at the cost of narrowing the research questions from more general questions about the determinants and consequences of status and mobility to a focus on the bivariate relationship between the intergenerational occupational mobility between fathers and sons.

Treiman and Ganzeboom (2000) therefore characterized the upcoming fourth generation of mobility research as a return to the broader questions posed by earlier generations of stratification research. Once again, this generation has the opportunity to be increasingly comparative both across time and between nations, by benefiting from improved data conditions and more sophisticated statistical tools, in particular for the analysis of complete careers and the life course. This current volume, which studies men's mid-career mobility, is indeed a return to some of the fundamental questions that have vexed comparative mobility research. Blau and Duncan's (1967) elementary model of occupational career differences examined the variation between an individual's first and last (current) job. This created the opportunity to ask questions such as: how strong are the connections between the first and last job? Do social origin effects primarily occur at entry into the labor market? To what degree and in what pattern do returns to education develop further after entry into the labor market? The classic work of Blau and Duncan studied these questions by examining only the difference between first and last job. Their evidence suggested that there is much mobility between first and last jobs. A surprisingly large part of the similarity between father's and son's occupation arises after career beginnings, that is, after educational attainment and the level of the first job has been taken into account. The same turned out to be true for returns to education: most of those arise after career beginnings, and current jobs may be more strongly related to education than first jobs.

The Blau-Duncan model currently appears to be somewhat primitive as we now have the data and methods to examine what happens in between. Blau and Duncan indeed demonstrate that much happens between labor market entry and last job – but not when and how. We need more information about where people build their careers and how they do it. We need to know how social background and educational differences rise or vary during all

occupational career moves. In other words, we miss the process of change when we examine only the differences between first and last job. For this reason, there is a clear relevance and need to study middle careers. More importantly, the study of status attainment processes has never fulfilled its comparative promise (but see Treiman and Yip 1989 and Rijken 1998), and we are still unable to answer these questions in a cross-nationally comparative perspective.

The cross-national analysis of men's middle careers presented in this volume not only takes major steps in that direction, but also sets new standards. Using standard occupational status scales from stratification research such as the ISEI (Ganzeboom, De Graaf and Treiman 1992) and the EGP schema, the authors are able to compare and understand how the occupational paths of mid-career men have evolved over time and relate cross-nationally. We see that indeed much occurs between men's entry into the labor market and their last job, including many vertical moves and entry into and exit from unemployment. It furthermore brings us closer to understanding how educational differences play out during the process of careers.

This volume also challenges us by connecting classic mobility research to new research questions within the field of globalization, thereby forcing us to think outside of the national context and to reconsider the underlying mechanisms behind basic predictors such as education. For example, this volume connects the impact of the knowledge-based economy and information and communication technologies (ICTs) with the generation of an upward skill bias and the higher demand, premium and returns for workers with tertiary educational qualifications. It also forces us to consider that not only nation-specific context is essential in creating the distribution of career prospects, but that regional and global regulation and transformations play a large role (for example, growing competition from low-wage countries).

This volume not only brings stratification researchers to the field of globalization research, but also empirically challenges some of the currently prominent theoretical literature in sociology on this topic (for example, Beck, 2000), which argues that individuals will increasingly experience 'patchwork' careers or that we are entering a 'post-class' society. It enters this largely theoretical debate with empirical evidence showing that inequality persists in accordance to occupational class and educational level. It also opens our eyes to consider how the occupational careers of individuals are positioned in a larger global context.

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# Globalization, Uncertainty and Men's Careers

An International Comparison

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