

## PREFACE

This book summarizes the results of a large-scale, international research project on the consequences of social transformation in Central and Eastern Europe for young people's transition from school to work. We brought together researchers from Eastern and Western Europe to analyze how young people have been affected by the momentous historic events unfolding after 1989 and how they fare on labor markets today. The project has been generously financed by the Volkswagen Foundation under the funding initiative "Unity Amidst Variety? Intellectual Foundations and Requirements for an Enlarged Europe" and has involved, at different stages, altogether twenty-one researchers from Central and Eastern Europe. Bringing together experience and expertise from across the region, the project has provided a glimpse of the diversity among post-socialist countries that sometimes eludes Western observers. It has been a great collective learning process and opportunity for exchange for everyone involved.

A workshop in Mannheim, Germany, in June 2006 marked the beginning and laid the groundwork for a first book documenting the enormous heterogeneity in education systems, labor markets, and welfare regimes across Central and Eastern Europe (Kogan, Gebel, and Noelke 2008). In November 2007, we proceeded with an in-depth analysis of longitudinal data on labor market entrants in ten Central and Eastern European countries, comparing young people's outcomes over time and countries. The results of this project phase are summarized in this volume.

We follow the tradition of historical-comparative stratification research as it has been carried out within the Research Committee on Social Stratification and Mobility (RC28) of the International Sociological Association (Shavit and Blossfeld 1993; Shavit and Müller 1998; Breen 2004;

Arum and Müller 2004; Arum, Gamoran, and Shavit 2007). So far, there has been virtually no comparative research that addresses the consequences of transformation for education systems and labor market integration of young people in post-socialist Central and Eastern European countries. With this volume, we have tried to fill this research gap, but we also tried to extend existing research on the school-to-work transition (e.g., Blossfeld et al. 2008; Müller and Gangl 2003; Müller and Shavit 1998) not only geographically, but also conceptually and in terms of research design. We hope that this book can make a contribution to theory-driven, comparative research on social stratification in transformation societies and that it may serve as a reference for future research in this field.

The unique transformation experience of post-socialist countries offers an exceptional opportunity to assess the effects of institutions and institutional change on patterns of social stratification. Our analyses focus in particular on changes in the education system triggered by the transformation from socialism to capitalism and their consequences for educational attainment and labor market integration. In Chapter 1, we survey the countries covered in this volume, outline their transformation experiences and differences in their education systems, and discuss the impact of system change on the transition from school to work. Chapter 2 analyzes in greater detail the relationship between educational institutions, educational attainment, and the transition from school to work, and surveys the methodology underlying the chapters published in this volume. Chapters 3 to 12 comprise in-depth analyses of specific countries, revealing the heterogeneity of transformation experiences and outcomes. Chapter 13 presents results of some additional comparative analyses, and summarizes and discusses the key results of this volume.

A project of this magnitude would not have been possible without great support from a number of people. We thank the Volkswagen Foundation for generous support, as well as all members of the project for their enthusiasm and persistence. The project has been hosted by the Mannheim Centre for European Social Research (MZES) at the University of Mannheim. The MZES has provided a stimulating environment and excellent scientific infrastructure. It has also generously hosted research stays of visiting scholars for extended periods. We are grateful for having had the opportunity to collaborate closely with excellent researchers from across CEE countries and

hope that our cooperation will not stop with this volume, but will translate into new research ideas and projects.

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