

Preface

The present book is the result of a fruitful collaboration during a research project – IRIS (Interests and Recruitment in Science) – which brought together researchers from six academic institutions in five



European countries. Our aim was to achieve a better understanding of how young people evaluate science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) as an option when making their educational choices. The book aims to provide more developed theoretical frameworks, a more robust empirical knowledge base, and policy-relevant guidelines concerning how both levels of participation and gender balance in the STEM disciplines may be improved. All the chapters are written by IRIS project members with the exception of two (Chapters 6 and 10) which are contributions from related research projects.

Our main target audience is researchers in STEM education in both secondary and higher education. In a sense, we have written the book that we as researchers would have liked to have been available when we entered the field of educational choice research. However, the book also aims to be of relevance to a number of stake-holders: educational policy-makers, faculty and administrative staff at universities, companies and professional societies wanting to improve STEM participation and extend the future workforce, teachers and administrators at schools, textbook writers, curriculum makers, career advisers, the media, and the informal science sector (museums, science centres, science fairs).

IRIS began as a response to a call for applications to the European Commission's *Science in Society* programme within the 7th framework programme. We would like to acknowledge the support from the European Commission without which the project (and this book) would not have been realised. Also, we acknowledge the administrative staff at our home institutions for facilitating our work with IRIS.

Dr. Camilla Schreiner, Prof. Svein Sjøberg and Prof. Jonathan Osborne played important roles in establishing the project but moved on to other duties during early

phases of the project. Thank you for your invaluable contribution in this early phase! We also wish to thank colleagues at Springer for their enthusiastic support and helpful guidance.

Finally, we would like to thank our colleagues within education research for providing the stimulating environment, the discussions and perspectives that have helped us move research forward through the IRIS project. Royalties from the sale of this book will be donated to UNICEF's work within Basic Education and Gender Equality.

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