

2 Research on intergenerational mobility

In this section, I shall review research on intergenerational mobility in order to embed intergenerational downward mobility in educational attainment within its broader research tradition. First, I shall summarize research on social mobility and educational inequality. Then, I shall present studies on intergenerational downward mobility.

2.1 Research on social mobility and educational inequality

Social mobility, the ‘relationship between the class position a person occupies and the class in which he or she was brought up’ (Breen, 2004, p. 1), is a core topic in sociology. In general, high correlations can be observed between the class an individual is born into, also called the class of origin, and the occupational class position that an individual achieves, also called the destination class.

Research on social mobility distinguishes between absolute and relative mobility. The former refers to the observed distribution of persons from different classes of origin over destination classes. This distribution can be illustrated by mobility tables that cross-tabulate origin class, usually as a row variable, with destination class, usually as a column variable. Thus, mobility tables show which classes persons reach given the class they were born into. Beyond this, three main types of information can be read from mobility tables. First, the diagonal shows the amount of immobility, that is, the percentage of persons reaching the same class as their parents. Second, the amount of upward mobility can be computed from the sum of the percentages of persons reaching higher classes than their parents. Third, the amount of downward mobility can be computed from the sum of the percentages of persons reaching lower classes than their parents.

Percentages of mobility between origin and destination classes can be presented in two ways, either by outflow or inflow tables. Outflow tables show, for each class of origin, the share of people in any destination class in such a way that the percentages in each origin class add up to 100 per cent. Inflow tables show, for each destination class, the share of persons from any class of origin – thus, percentages in each destination class add up to 100 per cent.

Table 2.1. Ideal typical outflow table from origin class to destination class

Origin class (Highest occupation of the parents)		Destination class (child's occupation)			
		Class 1	Class 2	Class 3	Total
Class 1	No.	100	80	20	200
	%	50	40	10	100
Class 2	No.	90	150	60	300
	%	30	50	20	100
Class 3	No.	20	80	100	200
	%	10	40	50	100

Table 2.2. Ideal typical inflow table from origin class to destination class

Origin class (Highest occupation of the parents)		Destination class (child's occupation)					
		Class 1		Class 2		Class 3	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Class 1		100	48	80	26	20	11
Class 2		90	43	150	48	60	33
Class 3		20	10	80	26	100	56
Total		210	100	310	100	180	100

As mentioned above, alongside the concept of absolute mobility, research in social mobility relies on the concept of relative mobility or social fluidity. This refers to the relative chance that persons in each class of origin have of achieving a certain destination class rather than another. It is measured as the ratio of the odds of reaching one class destination rather than another among persons of one origin class in comparison to another (e.g. Breen, 2010, p. 367). Hence, the concept of relative mobility expresses the differences in chances of access to a destination class between different classes of origin, and it can be interpreted as ‘the outcome of competition between people from different class origins to attain more desirable class positions (destinations) and to avoid less desirable ones’ (Breen & Karlson, 2014, p. 108).

The variation in levels of social mobility over countries and the development of social mobility over time have attracted particular attention in the study of social mobility. Research is ambiguous regarding whether social fluidity varies strongly between countries and whether there has been an increase in social fluidity over time. In their analysis of 12 European countries, the USA, Japan, and Australia, Erikson and Goldthorpe (1992) found few variations between countries and an almost unchanging level of social fluidity. In contrast, Breen (2004), using data from 11 European countries, reported significant variation between countries and a tendency towards increasing social fluidity in all countries except Great Britain. This is in line with an earlier study of Ganzeboom, Luijkx, and Treiman (1989) and other cohort-based studies fo-

cusing on single countries (e.g. Breen & Jonsson, 2007a; Hout, 1988; Mayer & Aisenbrey, 2007; Vallet, 2004). Although there seems to be growing evidence of increasing social fluidity, social origin remains a strong predictor of class position in all Western industrialized countries.

Most comparative studies of social mobility that include Germany are limited to Western Germany for the sake of comparability over time. Eastern Germany has experienced stronger changes in its social structure due to the transition into and out of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) during which conditions for achieving class positions had been very different and strongly determined by political loyalty to the regime of the Socialist Unity Party. In the initial period of the GDR during the 1950s and 1960s, access to tertiary education of students with working class and farming parents was promoted strongly through grants and contingents. Afterwards, the opportunities for working class and farmers' children to obtain higher class positions decreased again. This was the result of a shift in policies towards a stronger emphasis on performance and economic requirements (Geißler, 1983; Loeffelmeier, 2006; Solga, 1997).

Cross-country comparisons show that Western Germany is one of the most rigid countries with a strong origin–destination association (Breen & Luijkx, 2004, p. 73; Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992, p. 153). This remains the case, although Western Germany has joined the general trend towards increasing social fluidity in cohorts born since the 1930s (Breen, 2010; Breen & Luijkx, 2007; Mayer & Aisenbrey, 2007; Müller & Pollak, 2004a). The trend towards increasing social fluidity might be fading away for cohorts born after the mid-1960s (Breen & Luijkx, 2007; Mayer & Aisenbrey, 2007), but this is not confirmed by Breen (2010).

In Western Germany, as in other countries, the association between origin and destination class is lower for women (Mayer & Aisenbrey, 2007; Müller & Pollak, 2004a). This is due to women more often attaining a lower class than their fathers. However, female downward mobility is declining, whereas upward mobility is increasing, so that patterns are becoming increasingly similar for both men and women (Hillmert, 2015; Mayer & Aisenbrey, 2007; Müller & Pollak, 2004a). The reason is that educational attainment has increased more strongly for women than for men. Also, against the background of the strongly gender-segregated labour market, the availability of those jobs that women are more likely to choose has increased more strongly than that of those jobs that men are likely to choose (Müller & Pollak, 2004a, p. 109).

Social mobility is closely related to educational attainment. The relationship is often illustrated by the ‘OED triangle’ (Goldthorpe, 2014; see Figure 2.1): social origin (O) affects educational attainment (E), and the latter affects the social destination (D). Although there can also be a direct effect of social origin on the access to class positions, education mediates a large part of the origin–destination effect.

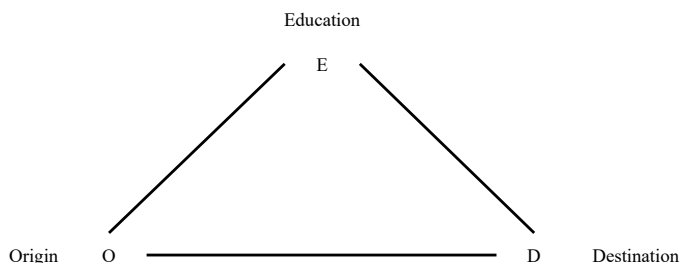


Figure 2.1. The OED Triangle

Sociological research is interested in disentangling the direct part of the origin–destination effect from the part that is mediated by education in order to determine how far chances of acquiring social positions depend on education in cross-country or cross-temporal comparisons. Modern societies legitimate the assignment of social positions more strongly by educational attainment. The conclusion that these societies are more meritocratic, however, should be drawn with caution, because educational attainment itself often depends strongly on social origin, thereby casting doubt on the meritocratic principle. It is also interesting to disentangle direct and education-mediated effects of social origin in order to examine whether educational expansion has led to more social fluidity. Educational expansion might affect social fluidity in two ways (Breen & Jonsson, 2007b). First, because education is the most important determinant of social positions, educational expansion might equalize access to social positions if it increases equality in educational attainment. Second, because the education–destination link is stronger at higher levels of education, educational expansion might equalize access to social positions because a greater share of persons obtain higher levels of education. Although, as mentioned before, Erikson and Goldthorpe (1992) found social fluidity to be quite stable over time, other comparative studies on social mobility have found that educational expansion has indeed increased social fluidity (Breen, 2010; Breen & Luijkx, 2004). This finding also applies to Western Germany, where change in social fluidity can be attributed to educational expansion

(Breen & Jonsson, 2007b; Müller & Pollak, 2004a). In Western Germany, as in, for example, France (Vallet, 2004), Sweden, or Great Britain, the origin–destination association tends to be lower at higher levels of education, although it is lowest at the lower tertiary level rather than at the upper tertiary level (Breen, 2010). This compositional effect of the educational expansion, which stems from the increased share of persons attaining higher levels of education, is stronger than the effect of equalization in Western Germany, whereas in Sweden, for example, educational expansion affected increasing social fluidity more strongly through equalization (Breen, 2010).

Due to the important and increasing role of education in mediating class origins and destinations (e.g. Breen & Luijkx, 2004; Hillmert, 2015), there is a vast body of literature concentrating on the link between social origin and educational attainment (e.g., Breen, Luijkx, Müller, & Pollak, 2009, 2010; Erikson & Jonsson, 1996a; Müller & Karle Wolfgang, 1993; Pfeffer, 2008; Shavit, Arum, & Gamoran, 2007; Shavit & Blossfeld, 1993). The starting point of these analyses is the question whether social inequalities in education have declined in different countries over the course of the 20th century. In favour of decreasing inequalities, one can follow a functionalist view (Treiman, 1970) and argue that resources are distributed more equally in more industrialized countries, and that education in these societies is more often provided for free. Thus, through industrialization, education should have become more affordable for the lower classes, and class differences should decline. According to Breen et al. (2009), this should apply particularly to the decades after World War II when economic growth decidedly improved living conditions. During this period, social inequalities should have been reduced significantly because dispensable income grew strongly whereas family size declined. As a result, resources available per child rose. The nutrition and health of the lower classes improved and were no longer major drawbacks to the performance of children with a lower social background. Direct and indirect costs of education declined. Additional costs of full secondary or tertiary education decreased because compulsory schooling was extended and the proportion of jobs requiring higher levels of education increased (Breen et al., 2009, pp. 1478–1480).

Raftery and Hout (1993), however, found that it is only under certain conditions that educational inequalities decrease during a period of educational expansion: the chances of obtaining a certain level of education in one class relative to any other class remain roughly the same despite the educational expansion as long as the highest class has not reached a saturation level of nearly 100 per cent. They call this pattern ‘maximally maintained inequality’. Lucas (2001) extended maximally maintained inequality

with the concept of effectively maintained inequality. Accordingly, if saturation is achieved and class differences in the chances of attaining this level decrease, higher classes find other means to distinguish themselves from lower classes and to ensure better chances to access higher class positions for their offspring. Given a nearly universal level of schooling, ‘the socioeconomically advantaged seek out whatever qualitative differences there are at that level and use their advantages to secure quantitatively similar but qualitatively better education’ (Lucas, 2001, p. 1652).

Both maximally and effectively maintained inequality are observed patterns rather than mechanisms that explain the generation and persistence of social inequality in education. Moreover, functionalist theory, predicting that the education–destination link will strengthen through industrialization and that, thereby, the origin–destination link will weaken, is not equipped with micro-social mechanisms. In order to understand how macro phenomena are perceived by individuals and how they trigger certain actions that have results on the macro level, these macro approaches need to be complemented by micro theories (cf. Goldthorpe, 2014).

One attempt to explain social inequality in education is cultural reproduction theory (e.g. Bourdieu & Passeron, 1964, 1971). This argues that the class structure reproduces itself through the transmission of economic, social, and cultural capital from parents to their children. Children thus are differently equipped for educational careers respective to their social origin. Even if economic resources are distributed more equally, higher classes still find ways to mark their distinction from lower classes through cultural and social capital. Schools are considered to represent more strongly the culture of the middle classes, so that students from the lower classes feel less at ease and have more difficulties in fulfilling their requirements. For example, children learn strategies from their parents regarding how to interact with teachers in class, and these affect their success in school. Whereas middle-class parents coach their children to include their teachers in problem solving, working class parents direct their children to solve problems on their own without involving the teacher (Calarco, 2014). Second, in case of difficulties in meeting the educational standards, persons from a higher social origin can rely on their parents’ resources, be it financially by paying for private lessons, be it socially by using their parents’ contacts, or be it culturally by hiding insufficient skills behind good manners or cultural knowledge.

Other attempts to explain the generation and persistence of educational inequalities are rational-choice-based theories (e.g. Boudon, 1974; Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997; Erikson & Jonsson, 1996b; see chapter 3.2 for a more detailed discussion). These as-

sume that educational inequalities are the result of rational decisions by which actors maximize utility. Individuals are considered to decide for an educational option based on their subjective assessments of returns, costs, and probabilities of success. All these depend on the level of resources related to a certain class position of origin.

Although there is a broad consensus that social inequalities in educational attainment remain strong despite educational expansion, the literature is ambiguous regarding whether social inequalities in education declined during the 20th century. Some studies find that, despite an impressive and comprehensive uplift across all classes, differences in educational attainment have not declined in most countries (e.g. Pfeffer, 2008; Shavit & Blossfeld, 1993; see Shavit et al., 2007, regarding post-secondary education). Blossfeld and Shavit (1993) found an equalization of educational attainment in relation to social background only for Sweden and the Netherlands, whereas social inequality in education remained stable in the eleven other countries in their analysis. Moreover, they showed that in some countries, the expansion of secondary education was accompanied by a growing differentiation into academic and vocational tracks so that tertiary education remained roughly as exclusive as before.

Focusing on eligibility and access to tertiary education in a study of thirteen countries, Arum, Gamoran, and Shavit (2007) reported that inequality in eligibility to higher education was stable in nine, increased in one (Italy), and declined in five countries. Regarding inequality in the transition from eligibility to higher education, they found stable inequality in six countries, an increase in three, and a decline in four. These findings supported the hypothesis of maximally maintained inequality. In the case of actual or near saturation (eligibility to tertiary education of 80 to 100 per cent), inequality in enrolment and access decreased, whereas expansion alone did not lead to reduced inequality (Shavit et al., 2007, p. 18). The authors classified countries according to the degree of differentiation within the tertiary education system, distinguishing unitary systems with low differentiation, binary systems with two kinds of tertiary education institutions, and diversified systems with a variety of different institutions. Consistent with effectively maintained inequality, they found that expansion is related to differentiation: Those countries with the highest enrolment rates have diversified systems that include very heterogeneous institutions and programmes in terms of quality, selectivity, and prestige. However, contrary to expectations, diversified systems are more inclusive than less differentiated systems. Thus, a higher degree of differentiation does not necessarily lead to greater within inequality. Indeed, a strong tendency to divert students with a lower social background to the lower tier institutions is found

in the binary systems that differentiate mainly between academic and occupationally oriented higher education.

Whereas the aforementioned studies placed more emphasis on the persistence of inequalities in educational attainment, other studies (e.g. Breen & Jonsson, 2005; Breen et al., 2009; Henz & Maaz, 1995; Müller & Haun, 1994; Shavit & Westerbeek, 1998) have provided evidence that class inequalities declined during the last century. Breen et al. (2009) found decreasing inequality in educational attainment for the birth cohorts 1935 to 1954 in all nine European countries included in their comparative analysis. This fits in with their expectation that inequalities in education have declined due to improvements in living conditions and economic growth in the post-World War II decades. The decline in inequality seems to be due primarily to the improvement of the educational chances of children from farming and working class origins (2009, p. 1514).

A robust finding in cross-national comparisons of social inequalities in educational attainment is that the effect of social origin tends to decline from earlier to later transitions in the educational system (e.g. Blossfeld & Shavit, 1993; Jackson & Jonsson, 2013). There are different explanations for this phenomenon. According to the differential selection hypothesis (Mare, 1980), students with a lower social background but the same level of ability have fewer chances of proceeding to the next level. Thus, those who proceed upwards have, on average, higher levels of ability, motivation, or other characteristics that are rewarded in the educational system than the levels to be found in their counterparts with a higher social origin. If it is not possible to control for these characteristics, differences in transition probabilities will therefore decrease at subsequent levels. According to this argumentation, decreasing effects of social origin are, therefore, a statistical artefact due to unobserved heterogeneity. A second explanation is provided by the life-course hypothesis (Blossfeld & Shavit, 1993). This posits that parents are strongly involved in educational decisions when their children are young, but become less involved as their children grow up because of their increasing autonomy. Another reason is that uncertainty regarding the future performance of students is higher at younger ages. Therefore, when assessing what is feasible for their children at these ages, parents refer more strongly to their own experience in the educational system. At later decisions, in contrast, students have gained their own experience in the education system; and, as a result, decisions are less influenced by parental background. This hypothesis postulates a genuine reduction of social background effects over the life course.

Although social inequalities in educational attainment exist in all countries and tend to be stronger at earlier transitions than at later ones, there are considerable cross-country differences. These differences relate to differences in the institutional characteristics of educational systems. The degree of stratification of an educational system is one of the characteristics that are considered to affect the level of social inequality. Stratification is defined by ‘the proportion of a cohort selected to attain the maximum number of school years provided by the system’ (Allmendinger, 1989, pp. 234–235), and this relates to the vertical differentiation introduced through tracks or schools of different quality (Jackson & Jonsson, 2013, p. 308). In highly stratified systems, only a small proportion of students reach the highest educational level. Countries with more stratified educational systems have been found to have higher levels of social inequality (Pfeffer, 2008).

Jackson and Jonsson (2013) examined how countries with different institutional characteristics differed with regard to social inequality in performance (primary effects) and choice (secondary effects). In addition to stratification, they introduced selectivity as a characteristic of educational systems defined as ‘the degree to which track placement is a function of previous school performance rather than the free choices of students and their parents’ (Jackson & Jonsson, 2013, p. 308). They argued that stratification and selectivity should affect choice conditional on performance rather than performance in itself. Also, they assumed that higher stratification should relate to stronger inequality in the choice of educational options conditional on performance, because track choices are more consequential in highly stratified systems and, thus, upper class parents strongly support the choice of more advanced educational options. As for selective systems, they assumed the opposite effect: strong selection based on performance should limit the effect of free choice and, thus, reduce the effect of parental background (Jackson & Jonsson, 2013, p. 311). However, although they found that some highly selective and strongly stratified systems such as Germany (including Eastern Germany) and the Netherlands do indeed have higher levels of educational inequality at the first transition, whereas countries with weak selection and stratification have lower levels of inequality, the group of countries classified as intermediate in both categories did not show the expected results (Jackson & Jonsson, 2013, pp. 319–320). As the authors acknowledged, the contradicting effects of selection and stratification are difficult to disentangle because both dimensions are interrelated in the sense that more stratified systems are also more selective (Jackson & Jonsson, 2013, p. 329).

In a cross-country comparison, Western Germany shows high social inequalities (e.g. Pfeffer, 2008; Shavit & Blossfeld, 1993), but, according to Breen et al. (2009), these seem to have declined within the cohorts born between 1925 and 1945. With respect to social inequality in educational attainment, Western Germany resembles France, Italy, and Ireland, which had larger class inequalities at the beginning of the 20th century and a considerable decline afterwards, rather than countries with traditionally lower class inequalities such as Great Britain, the Netherlands, or Sweden (Breen et al., 2009, p. 1513). The first transition in Germany takes place at 10 to 12 years, which is comparatively early (see Figure A.1 for an overview on the German education system). According to Jackson and Jonsson (2013), social inequality is, therefore, particularly high at the first transition although not as high as in Italy. As in other countries, social inequality is higher at the first transition than at the transition to tertiary education for the population of pupils at the *Gymnasium*. However, secondary effects (i.e. effects of social origin conditional on performance) are higher at the transition to tertiary education than at the first transition. These secondary effects at the transition to tertiary education are high in cross-national comparison, surpassed only in Italy and the Netherlands (Jackson & Jonsson, 2013).

Because educational attainment during educational expansion increased more strongly for women than for men, it is interesting to ask whether social inequalities in educational attainment have developed differently according to gender. Following Breen and Goldthorpe (1997, p. 297), social inequality in education should have increased more (or decreased less) for women than for men. They argued that women's access to class positions in earlier decades of the 20th century had relied more strongly on marriage. In the subsequent decades, education has become an increasingly important determinant of women's class position. Thus, women's class inequalities in education should have become more similar to those of men. Another explanation for differences in the educational inequalities of men and women is that parents might invest differently in the education of their sons compared to their daughters, especially in the classes of farmers and the self-employed (Müller & Haun, 1994). This is based on the reasoning that men in these classes are more likely to inherit the farm or family business, making them less dependent on education, whereas the siblings who do not inherit are more dependent on education.

In their analysis of seven European countries, Breen et al. (2010) found that trends in the social inequality of education for women were quite similar to those for men. Significant gender differences in the development of social inequalities over cohorts

were found only in Italy and Poland. In these countries, inequalities diminished more strongly for women than for men. As expected, the male advantage in educational attainment decreased over time in all countries. In Western Germany, gender differences in upper secondary or lower tertiary education declined comparatively late, but almost disappeared in the youngest cohort born 1955 to 1964. The authors also found support for the hypothesis that, relative to parents from other classes, business- and farm-owning parents invested more strongly in the education of daughters compared to sons. These class-specific gender differences seemed to be quite stable over time.

The main findings from comparative research on social and educational mobility reviewed in this chapter can be summarized as follows: studies on social mobility and on social inequality in education are divided over the question whether there has been a trend towards more equal chances to obtain educational levels and social class positions. However, according to the more recent studies using larger datasets and more advanced methods, evidence seems to lean towards a decrease in inequalities. Apart from this dividedness, research agrees that there continue to be large differences in educational and occupational chances based on social origin, that education plays the major role in the link between origin and destination class in modern societies, that earlier transitions in education are influenced more strongly by social origin than later ones, and that female patterns of social mobility and social inequality in education are becoming increasingly similar to male patterns. Germany, with its very selective and stratified educational system, has been found to have a comparatively high level of social inequality in education and rather low levels of social mobility.

2.2 Research on intergenerational downward mobility

As described above, both theoretical and empirical analyses have invested much effort in explaining and analysing the stability of educational or occupational chances by social origin or, in the case of changes, their upward mobility. However, less attention has been paid to the portion of persons who do not attain the educational level or the class position from which they originate. Nonetheless, downward mobility is addressed as a minor topic in some studies, and a few studies even focus on it. For example, studies on social mobility that report absolute mobility rates usually also include rates of downward mobility. These give some idea on the extent of downward mobility in relation to upward mobility and stability. Thereby, it has to be considered that the extent of downward mobility also depends on the underlying classification

scheme of classes and on whether classes are combined for the sake of clarity or because they contain low numbers of cases. A widely used classification is the EGP (Erikson–Goldthorpe–Portocarero) class scheme, also referred to in the literature as the Goldthorpe, or CASMIN (Comparative Study of Social Mobility in Industrial Nations) class scheme.

When describing the intergenerational class mobility of men, Breen and Luijckx (2004, pp. 47–48) showed that the mean percentage of downward mobility in 10 European countries and Israel ranged from 18.7 per cent in the 1970s to 16.2 per cent in the 1990s. Upward mobility was higher, lying between 28.0 and 33.4 per cent. Thus, vertical mobility is composed of about one-third downward mobility and about two-thirds upward mobility. Among the countries considered in this study, Germany had the lowest rates of downward mobility, ranging from 12.4 in the 1970s to 13.0 per cent in the 1990s, whereas its rates of upward mobility were about average and in line with the other countries. Hungary started with the highest percentage of downward mobility in the 1970s (26.2 per cent), but this decreased strongly to 17.8 per cent in the 1990s. In the same time period, upward mobility increased in Hungary from 26.9 to 35.9 per cent. In general, Breen and Luijckx (2004, p. 49) reported moderate change over time and high similarity among countries on all measures of mobility.

Based on a seven-category version of the Goldthorpe class schema, Goldthorpe and Jackson (2007) reported that male downward mobility in social class in Great Britain attained 26.5 per cent in the cohort born in 1958 and 29.6 per cent in the cohort born in 1970 against upward mobility rates of 45.2 and 42.2 per cent in the same cohorts. Among the women in these cohorts, 36.8 per cent and 34.5 per cent were downwardly mobile, whereas 39.0 per cent and 40.8 per cent were upwardly mobile.

As for Western Germany, Pollak (2013) reports that the downward mobility of men increased slightly from 15 to 17 per cent for cohorts born 1976–1980, 1981–1990, 1991–1999, and 2000–2010. For women in Western Germany, downward mobility decreased from 33 per cent in the 1976–1980 cohort to 27 per cent in the 2000–2010 cohort. Similar to Goldthorpe and Jackson (2007) above, this study showed a slight trend towards increasing similarity between men and women due to decreasing downward mobility in women. However, the decrease is not very strong and women still show higher rates of downward mobility.

Hillmert (2015) finds rather stable downward mobility in occupational positions of parents and their children for the eight cohorts born between 1919 and 1971 of the West German Life History Study. Regarding women there is a longterm decrease be-

tween cohorts born 1929–1931 and those born 1954–1956, however, there is not much variation in younger cohorts born after World War II.

As well as *class* mobility, *educational* mobility also depends partly on the underlying categories. The following study uses the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) 1997, collapsing level four (Post-secondary non-tertiary education) and 5 (First stage of tertiary education) into one category. Focusing on Western Germany, an analysis of educational mobility based on data from the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) including persons born from 1938 to 1962 showed that about 15 per cent of persons over all classes attained a lower educational degree than their parents (Fuchs & Sixt, 2007a, p. 12). When at least one parent had a tertiary degree, chances of downward mobility even reached 46 per cent (Fuchs & Sixt, 2007a, p. 13). Holtmann (2010) using SOEP data including persons born in Western Germany from 1920 to 1979 found that 12.5 per cent of all persons and 47.8 per cent of persons whose parents had a tertiary degree did not reach their parents' qualification level (see also: Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2012, p. 213). This study distinguishes between the categories 'no qualification', 'lower school diploma', 'intermediate school diploma', 'tertiary education entrance diploma', and 'university/university of applied sciences degree'. This has the disadvantage that it generally does not include other professional qualifications apart from tertiary degrees.

The OECD study 'Education at a Glance 2012' reported that, in Germany, 22 per cent of non-students aged between 25 and 34 years did not attain their parents' educational degree. According to this study, Germany was the only country apart from Estonia and Iceland in which downward mobility in educational attainment was higher than upward mobility (OECD, 2012a, 2012b, pp. 3–4). Compared to the above-mentioned studies, this percentage is rather high. One reason for these differences might be that the OECD study included more recent birth cohorts. Another reason, however, might be the grouping of educational categories used when measuring intergenerational mobility. These distinguished between 'low levels of education (ISCED levels 0–2 completed, the person has not completed upper secondary education); mid-levels of education (ISCED levels 3–4 completed, the person has completed upper secondary or post-secondary, non-tertiary education); and high levels of education (ISCED levels 5–6 completed, the person has completed tertiary education)' (OECD, 2012c, p. 65).

In summary, absolute rates of downward mobility in Western industrialized countries usually seem to be above 10 per cent; they usually make up about one-third of total mobility. Downward mobility in women seems to be decreasing, whereas down-

ward mobility in men seems rather stable. Germany, being a country with rather low social mobility, has comparatively low levels of downward class mobility. Nevertheless, even in Germany, based on the above-mentioned percentages (Müller & Pollak, 2004a, p. 91), about one in every eight men and one in every five women does not reach the social class of their parents. Downward mobility in educational attainment seems to reach similar levels: about one in every seven to eight men or women does not reach the parents' educational level; regarding persons with tertiary educated parents, nearly every second person is downwardly mobile (see the above-mentioned percentages reported by Fuchs & Sixt, 2007a; Holtmann, 2010).

One of the rare studies on intergenerational downward mobility examined the educational careers of persons in Switzerland with at least one parent who had a tertiary degree (Schmeiser, 2003). Based on 30 qualitative interviews, Schmeiser (2003) distinguished four types of downward mobility careers in education. The first type describes careers in which downward mobility is delayed as long as possible but, finally, takes place very abruptly. Persons classified to this type take it for granted that they will complete a tertiary degree. They keep following this path despite being increasingly over-challenged because they fear being cast out of their social environment. Institutional barriers bringing about, for example, dropout from tertiary education due to weak performance finally demarcate a turning point. At this point, they can no longer deny their inability to meet demands. The second type is characterized by an early breaking away from the career leading to a tertiary degree. Cases in this type cope with the cross-pressure situation by completely rejecting the values and norms of their social environment of origin and integrating into an alternative milieu with different values and norms. Within this alternative social environment, as Schmeiser (2003, p. 225) observes, they nonetheless once more wish to prove successful. The third type comprises persons who integrate in neither the social environment of their origin nor that of their destination. Similarly to persons assigned to the first type, their aspirations are higher than their performance. However, in contrast to the first type, this type does not ignore failures to meet the demands of school. Failures are typically attributed to external reasons. Cases assigned to this type do not accept a lower occupational career. They typically try to catch up by investing in further education. Nonetheless, they do not feel at ease working in their environment of origin because of feelings of inferiority. The fourth type summarizes persons whose parents are of two different social origins and/or are divorced and who are, consequently, following occupational careers that switch between both classes. The parents' expectations that their

child should attain a high social status are lower in this type. Changes in the career result from changing loyalties to either of the parents. The first three types can be considered as different approaches to coping with the cross-pressure situation of high demands and low performance in the educational system. According to Schmeiser (2003, pp. 228–230), consequences of downward mobility differ between the ideal types. In the case of the first type, downward mobility leads to social isolation because of the long period during which the persons conceal their inability to cope with the chosen career. In the case of the second type, in contrast, persons are well integrated in an alternative community. Downward mobility in the third type prevents integration into either the social environment of origin or that of destination. In the fourth type, in contrast, there are no difficulties with social integration. In summary, Schmeiser (2003) documented the influence of career expectations related to social origin on the educational and occupational career of persons with highly educated parents. He showed that the dissonance between individual ability and expectations of status maintenance shapes life courses in a specific way with, in most cases, strong consequences for social integration.

Another study on intergenerational downward mobility concentrated on the mobility of higher white-collar to lower white-collar and blue-collar positions using data from the Stockholm Birth Cohort Study (Alm, 2011). Based on the concept of cultural capital and habitus, Alm (2011) argued that upward mobility of parents and lower levels of education should increase risks of downward mobility. According to cultural capital theory, higher levels of education are related to higher amounts of cultural capital that can be transmitted to children. Furthermore, individuals in each social class share a habitus, that is, class-specific dispositions, attitudes, and perceptual schemas (Bourdieu, 1982, pp. 278–283) that affect the individual's thinking and acting. The habitus is considered to ease interactions with other persons from the same class and to constitute a barrier between persons of different classes. Persons who are upwardly mobile adapt to the new habitus; however, they do this only slowly. In line with the Don Quixote or hysteresis effect (Bourdieu, 1987, pp. 116–117), upward mobility in the parents should increase the risk of downward mobility in their children, because upwardly mobile parents have not entirely internalized the new habitus and do not possess the same amount of cultural capital as parents who were born into that class. Multivariate analyses revealed that the effect of parental upward mobility was not significant in this study (Alm, 2011). However, the level of education of white-collar parents had a strong effect on their children not reaching a white-collar position. This ef-

fect even remained after controlling for the children's academic ability. The study also included direct measures of cultural capital (number of books in the household) and habitus (parental attitudes towards theoretical knowledge and their preferences concerning the child's future occupation). Although attitudes to theoretical knowledge and occupational preferences impacted on downward mobility, they did not mediate the influence of parental education. Thus, the results did not support the hypothesis that lower risks of downward mobility in the children of better educated parents are due to cultural capital.

Based on similar theoretical arguments, Fuchs and Sixt (2007a) used data from the German SOEP to examine the chances of attaining a tertiary education entrance certificate in children with upwardly mobile parents compared to children of immobile parents. In contrast to Alm (2011) (regarding Sweden), they found a significant effect of upward mobility in the expected direction in Western Germany: children of upwardly mobile parents have lower and children of downwardly mobile parents have higher chances of attaining a tertiary education entrance certificate than children of immobile parents. Cultural, social, and economic capital – as operationalized in this study – affects the chances of the children, but it does not completely explain the effects of parental upward and downward mobility. Nonetheless, Fuchs and Sixt (2007a) argue that persons who are upwardly mobile are more likely to choose a partner with a lower, and those who are downwardly mobile a partner with a higher educational level. Furthermore, persons who are upwardly mobile gain lower and those who are downwardly mobile gain higher rates of return from their qualification level. These are additional determinants that have consequences for the level of resources available for the child and, thus, for that child's educational chances. Indeed, when additionally including the relative educational level of the partner and the relative prestige of the first occupational position, mobility of the parent ceases to be significant. Thus, together with cultural, economic, and social capital, these determinants seem to explain the negative impact of upward mobility on chances of attaining a tertiary education entrance certificate. From the finding that children of upwardly mobile parents have lower educational chances than children of immobile parents, Fuchs and Sixt (2007a) conclude that educational upward mobility induced by educational expansion is only partially sustainable beyond one generation.

In a reanalysis, however, Becker (2007) challenged this result and its conclusions. Using data from the German Life History Study, he found – in contrast to Fuchs and Sixt (2007a) – a positive effect of upward mobility of parents on children's chances of

gaining a tertiary education entrance certificate or an intermediate degree. The most important difference is that Becker's (2007) analysis included the educational level of the grandparents instead of the parents. He still controlled for the educational level of the parents; however, he did this by distinguishing whether upwardly mobile parents attained an intermediate or a tertiary education entrance certificate. As well as showing that chances of attaining a tertiary education entrance certificate are higher if grandparents have higher educational degrees, Becker (2007) found that chances are higher when parents are upwardly mobile, especially when they have attained a tertiary education entrance certificate themselves. Based on additional analyses, Becker (2007) argued that the contrary results in Fuchs and Sixt were due to multicollinearity between the parental educational level and their upward mobility. Unlike Fuchs and Sixt (2007a), Becker based his theoretical argumentation on Boudon (1974), arguing that educational chances depend on the motive to maintain the parents' social status and on resources related to the social position of parents. In line with this argumentation, he found that educational upward mobility increases the children's educational chances when it is related to upward mobility in class positions.

Responding to Becker's (2007) critique, Fuchs and Sixt (2007b) pointed out that what seem at first glance to be contrary results actually refer to different reference groups and, therefore, do not actually contradict each other. Compared to those who stayed at the lower educational level, upwardly mobile parents pass on better educational chances to their children. However, they pass on lower chances of educational attainment compared to those who had already reached the higher educational level a generation before (Fuchs & Sixt, 2007b).

The studies summarized above (Becker, 2007; Fuchs & Sixt, 2007a, 2007b) stress the importance of intergenerational mobility and show its consequences for the next generation. Alm (2011) and Fuchs and Sixt (2007a, 2007b) base their theoretical argumentation on the idea of the inertia of the habitus and resources connected to social origin that increases or reduces those resources that are related to the educational level of destination. Becker follows Boudon (1974), arguing that educational qualification translates into social status that is related to resources. These can be invested in the education of children and are supported by high motivation to maintain this status.

In the following, I shall focus on intergenerational downward mobility in educational attainment, that is, on the link between the level of educational qualification a person gains and the educational level of her or his parents. Intergenerational educational mobility can be considered as the core of class mobility, because the transfer of

educational attainment from one generation to the next is the most important mechanism of intergenerational social mobility (Breen & Jonsson, 2005). Furthermore, I shall concentrate on persons whose parents have the highest educational degrees, that is, tertiary degrees. This group is particularly interesting with regard to downward mobility because – although they have the highest relative educational chances due to their social background – they have the highest structural risks of downward mobility due to their need to complete the highest and most demanding educational careers in order to reach the educational level of their parents.

There are different ways to measure social origin, and the education of the parents is only one of them. Other common measures of social origin are social class or social prestige. However, following Pfeffer (2008, p. 544), parental education is a strong determinant of parental social class and prestige and can be considered to temporally precede other measures of social origin. Furthermore, it usually has the strongest direct effects on children's educational attainment.

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Attainment

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