

Research frontiers in Economic Sociology and Labour Studies (ResFron ESLS)

Seminar

*Is education the great equalizer? Social origins
and returns to schooling in fourteen countries*
Gabriele Ballarino (University of Milan)

10 December 2014
Room A, h. 13.00-14.30
Graduate School in Social and Political Sciences
via Pace 10 - Milan

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Whether education is the “great social equalizer” is a recurrent topic in public debate and a disputed question in academic research. Loosely speaking, the argument would be correct if a person’s socio-economic position in society was exclusively determined by his or her achieved education (supposedly reflecting his/her merits). However, if a direct effect of social origin (DESO) on labour market success can be observed over and above own education, a flagrant deviation from any scenario of equality of opportunity occurs, in particular if such an effect does not decrease over cohorts.

In the seminar the main findings of EDUREU, a comparative research project on DESO, will be presented. The research covered DESO in 14 countries (12 European, the US and Japan), focussing on four research questions related to the supposed equalizing role of education. First, is there a DESO on labour market success (occupation and wage) over and above the effect of own education? Second, has DESO declined over time? Third, does it vary depending on the level of education achieved? Finally, did the direct effect of education on the labour market success change? Results show DESO to exist in all observed countries, with remarkably similar values. Almost everywhere DESO is stable, while direct returns to education decrease. Finally, the interaction between DESO and education changes according to the chosen measure of labour market success: it is positive for wages (boosting effect) and negative for occupational class (compensation effect).

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