
Book Review

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Social Inequality Across the Generations: The Role of Compensation and Multiplication in Resource Allocation

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The issue of social inequality is a topic of significance at any time but it is of particular interest at present given the changing distribution of income favouring people at the top in, for example, the US, the UK and Canada. Income flows and stocks of wealth appear to generate advantages to future generations in terms of education, health and inheritance accentuating the importance of research into how embodiments of resource allocation might be used to mitigate inequality. *Social Inequality Across the Generations* explores how resources are used to increase and decrease inequality across generations through an exploration of three themes: intrafamilial compensation, extrafamilial compensation and institutional compensation. The book uses three academic papers on each of the three themes to unpick the impact of acts of compensation for social inequality. Any interested reader should be aware that the papers rely quite heavily on statistical analysis to reach their conclusions and that they might prove challenging for those who find quantitative methods either unconvincing due to issues of causality or are unfamiliar with the techniques employed.

The book is the output of two editors, who provide a detailed introduction to the themes, and seventeen contributors, who have authored between them the nine papers used. The introductory chapter provides an overview with an excellent coverage of different types of compensation such as compensatory accumulation and multiplicative accumulation. This section is a thorough explanation of social inequality that helps to set the scene for the three themes.

The three papers on intrafamilial compensation explore the role of economic and cultural resources on the intergenerational transmission of education in Estonia; the likelihood of compensation behaviour following parental separation; and the month of birth issue. Each of the three papers are readable, particularly the research on the potential educational disadvantages of being born late in the school year, which concludes, via statistical analysis, that parental education compensates for month of birth positively.

The theme of the impact of extrafamilial compensation inquires into the role of aunts and uncles in compensating for low parental education; the impact of extended family wealth as a compensating factor; and the importance of immediate and extended family wealth on school performance.

The final theme of institutional compensation is probably the most important in terms of policy making, although the earlier papers can be seen as making a case for the transfer of resources via progressive tax regimes. The three papers investigate the role of adult education in overcoming initial disadvantages; the impact of the social investment state; and the influence of education and family policies. All three papers are written in a reader friendly manner with copious quantitative analysis and diagrams. The paper on the role of adult educational is particularly interesting and concludes that men are more likely to seek education for economic capital enhancement. The conclusion is that men view adult education as more compensatory than women but this might reflect different potential labour market trajectories between the genders. This point demonstrates the evaluative quality of all the nine papers.

Overall, *Social Inequality Across the Generations* is a significant addition to inquiries into social inequality. The introduction alone would act as an excellent primer on the issue and recent research. The nine papers are thoroughly researched, making this book invaluable as a source. My one reservation concerns the issue of causality and the subsequent need for statistical testing. Inequality is an issue of interest to qualitative researchers, with some unhappy with the view that issues can be resolved through numbers that can have a tendency to ignore the importance of the socially situated nature of inquiry and the need to listen to what people say. It would be a pity if people sympathetic to a more qualitative approach might be put off reading the book as it has much to say for both quantitative and qualitative researchers. I say this as someone who was initially trained in the positivism of economics and then I explored inequality, using qualitative research, within a sociology of education perspective.