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Invitation

Social Mobility and Equality of Opportunity

Richard Breen

Karl W. Deutsch Lecture

Monday, December 13, 2010
5 p.m., Room A 300

Equality of opportunity is a principle that commands almost universal popular support and which many governments seek to promote. Social mobility – the degree to which people and families move between positions of social and economic advantage and disadvantage – is sometimes proposed as a way of assessing the extent of equality of opportunity. However, once we pay close attention to how social mobility is defined and measured and how equality of opportunity is conceptualized, we find that there is, in fact, no straightforward relationship between them. Contrary to claims made by politicians and sometimes by social scientists, differences in social mobility do not necessarily reflect differences in the extent to which equality of opportunity has been realized.

Richard Breen is Professor of Sociology and Co-Director of the Center for Research on Inequalities and the Life Course at Yale University. He works mainly on social stratification and inequality. Recent publications include „Social Mobility in Europe“ (Oxford University Press 2004) and „Non-Persistent Inequality in Educational Attainment: Evidence from Eight European Countries“, co-authored with Ruud Luijkx, Walter Müller and Reinhard Pollak which appeared in American Journal of Sociology, March 2009. He is a Fellow of the British Academy and a Member of the Royal Irish Academy.

Please reply by December 9, 2010 to Marie Unger, e-mail: marie.unger@wzb.eu.

The WZB provides child care during the lecture. If you are interested, please respond by December 3, 2010 to Marie Unger, e-mail: marie.unger@wzb.eu.

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