Labour Market Success of Young European Graduates

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Introduction

Higher education is no longer a guaranteed investment providing permanent contracts, a high salary and meaningful and fulfilling positions. Rather, it is a risk investment which does not provide successful employment opportunities for all graduates (Kivinen & Ahola 1999). Graduates' problems in finding a meaningful and appropriate job result partly from higher education reforms and partly from changes in the labour market. Both the higher education system and the labour market have witnessed major changes during the previous decades and these changes have a straightforward effect on graduates' employment opportunities.

The expansion of higher education in all Western countries is the main reason behind the difficulties experienced by graduates in their transition from education to work. In Britain, for example, less than two percent of each age group were enrolled in higher education institutions before World War II, whereas nowadays over one third of each age group in Britain graduates from universities or other institutions of higher education (Reay, Davies, David & Ball 2001). In Finland the development has been very similar, although the expansion was even more radical and took place a couple of decades later than in many Central European countries. At the moment about half of the Finnish age group studies in higher education institutions. (Ahola 1995; Nevala 1999; Ministry of Education 2004).

Since the number of graduates who try to squeeze themselves into the labour market has multiplied, the competition between graduates for appropriate jobs has become very intense. Possession of a degree is not enough to guarantee the best possible labour market success. A student also needs to have the right kind of background and make the right decisions during her / his higher education studies in order to guarantee a smooth transition from education to work. In today's complex higher education system - which offers numerous degrees, training programmes and fields of studies - making the right decisions is a highly demanding task for young people.

On the labour market side, the factors that have had the greatest effect on graduates' transition from education to work are the unstable labour market conditions, the increased use of new technology and globalisation. The instability of the labour market brought with it a high unemployment rate in many European countries. In some countries, such as Finland for example, this development was linked to the economic recession of the1990s. Paradoxically, the use of innovative technology both creates and destroys work opportunities. On the one hand it creates employment possibilities for highly-skilled experts who have a command of technological innovations, but on the other it destroys opportunities to use knowledge and skills now considered obsolete. Globalisation for its part has led to increased competition for vacancies in both the private and public sectors.

In these circumstances of heightened competition, companies and public sector employers have cut expenses, flattened their organisational structures, reduced personnel and downsized operations. All these reforms have at least some influence on graduates' transition from education to work being less smooth than was the case a few decades ago (Kasvio 1997; Rinne & Salmi 1998.)

In a situation where higher education has expanded and become more complex, and where the labour market has become tougher, it is important to discover the means by which graduates can succeed in the demanding employment conditions of the 21st century. It has been argued that demographic factors are the main contributors determining graduates' labour market success (e.g. Arnesen 2000; Hodginson & Sparkes 1997; Mora, Garcia-Montalvo & Garcia-Aracil 2000; Paul & Murdoch; Russell & O'Connell 2001). Of demographic factors, gender and family background are the most crucial indicators of an individual's likely labour market success. Young people from academic families also have a great advantage in the competition for jobs (Brennan, Lyon, Schomburg & Teichler 1996; Hansen 1996; Vanttaja 2002). Similarly, males have an advantage over females in graduates' pursuit of the best labour market positions (Brennan et al. 1996; Einarsdottir 2007; Lyon 1996).

To examine gender issues in more detail, it has to be said that before enrolling in higher education women have certain advantages over men. More women have academic secondary education, their grades are slightly higher and – in international terms - they are more mobile than men. However, after entering the labour market the situation changes and men gain a position of advantage. Four years after graduation men earn generally 22-24 per cent more than women. Men also work as managers and professionals and have full-time employment more often than women. The clearest explanation behind these differences is gendered choices in the educational field. However, women's disadvantageous position holds true even inside each field of study. It is also clear that educated women take more responsibility for child and family care than their male counterparts. Working hours in the household are still significantly longer for women. Men, meanwhile, spend between three and seven hours per week more in paid work than women. Despite women's increased human capital and decreased fertility, men seem to have a clear advantage over women in the labour market. Although there are country-specific differences, the same general results can be found in all 11 European countries studied (Einarsdottir 2007.) However, Stavik and Arnesen (2007) considered the disparity between men and women in their early careers as surprisingly small given that it is in the early career stage that young people generally start a family and when women commonly stay at home with the children.

Other studies suggest that factors related to higher education and choices made during one's studies (Kivinen & Ahola 1999; Mora et al. 2000; Schomburg 2000; Teichler 1998; Woodley & Brennan 2000) define graduates' possibilities to succeed in a competitive labour market. Professional fields of study, a master's degree and studies in universities guarantee better chances of labour market success than more general disciplines, a bachelor's degree and studies in polytechnics (Arnesen, Baekken & Næss 1996; Brennan et al. 1996; Lyon 1996; Moscati & Pugliese 1996). In addition, the reputation and quality

of the higher education institution attended have an impact on graduates' labour market success, even when the previous academic achievement and parental background of the graduates are controlled. The impact of the institution attended is at its greatest in the early part of a career (Black & Smith 2004; Brunello & Cappellari 2005; Chevalier & Conlon 2003).

Moreover, the graduate's work history (Arnesen 2000; Kivinen, Nurmi & Salminiitty 2000; Russell & O'Connell 2001) and competencies (Hodges & Burchell 2003; Rinne & Salmi 1998; Vermeulen-Kerstens 2006) define possibilities in terms of achieving labour market success. Previous work experience usually makes the transition from education to work easier (Carr, Wright & Broady 1996; Peteri 1999; Russell & O'Connell 2001); additionally, the applicant should be motivated, eager to learn new things, flexible, capable of tolerating insecurity, sociable and cooperative (Hodges & Burchell 2003; Peteri 1999; Rinne & Salmi 1998).

The theoretical framework in this paper takes influence from Pierre Bourdieu's reproduction theory, gender inequality debates and theories related to beliefs about the power of education. Bourdieu argues that privileged social status is transmitted to younger generations through education, and thus the education system is one of the most important mechanisms reproducing social inequality. Children from privileged families tend to inherit the statuses of their privileged parents. Social, cultural and economic capital plays a decisive role in this equation (Bourdieu 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron 1990.) In addition to social inequality, education also tends to reproduce gender equality. Jacobs (1996), Kivinen & Rinne (1995) and Mickelson (1989) argue that even though women's participation in education has increased radically, even surpassing men's participation, it has not led to the desired labour market success. Academics have explained women's disadvantaged situation through gender-specific study choices, biological factors, gender-specific values and skills, and historical traditions (Blackburn, Browne, Brooks & Jarman 2002; Egerton & Halsey 1993; Jacobs 1996). In addition to the inequality debate, the theories either defending or contradicting beliefs in the power of education offer fruitful frameworks for this study.

The explicit research questions that answered in this chapter are as follows:

1) *Which factors help graduates gain the greatest success in the European graduate labour market?*
2) *What kind of differences are there between countries in the factors that help graduates achieve the labour market success?*

Data

The quantitative data used in this study are part of a larger REFLEX[1] data set. The data set used in this study consists of almost 5,500 graduates from Spain, the Netherlands and

[1] REFLEX (The Flexible Professional in the Knowledge Society - New Demands on Higher Education in Europe) is a project financed as a Specific Targeted Research Project (STREP) of the European Union's Sixth Framework Programme. The aim of the project is to find out which competencies higher education

Finland. They graduated in 2000 and the data were collected in 2005, when the graduates had been working for five years after graduation. To be young is defined here as being less than 30 years old at the time of data collection. All the older graduates were excluded from the data.

The data include a wealth of information about graduates' higher education studies, their transition from school to work, their competencies and their work careers after graduation. The most salient demographic factors are also included in the data. In this study I use only a small fraction of the data, focusing on the variables related to graduates' labour market success and on those by which labour market success can be explained. In this study graduates' labour market success is measured by using their annual gross income and their own evaluations about the correspondence between education and work as indicators. Independent variables in this study, through which the degree and possibility of graduates' labour market success will be explained, include nationality, gender, family background, field of study and type of degree earned in higher education.

Although I decided to measure graduates' labour market success in this study through their annual salary and their own evaluations about the correspondence between education and work, I am fully aware that labour market success does not consist of only these two factors. People tend to evaluate their positions in the labour market in terms of contract type, job satisfaction, self-fulfilment, status, security, service to the community, training possibilities and other qualitative measures. There is no universal definition for labour market success, but criteria need to be set case-specifically. Using two disparate measures, I wanted to draw a multidimensional picture of graduates' labour market success in this study, whilst at the same time recognising that my choice of measures is not the only possible one.

Of the data set's 5,500 graduates, over 2,400 come from Spain, which means that 45 percent of graduates in the data set are Spanish. Dutch graduates, for their part, comprise 37 percent of the data set. Thus, about 19 percent of the graduates come from Finland. All the graduates have studied at a university or polytechnic; 58 percent of the graduates have earned a bachelor's degree and the rest possess a master's degree. The most popular fields of study among graduates in the data set are business studies (20 percent), engineering (14 percent) and health and welfare (14 percent). The gender distribution is such that two thirds of the graduates are female and one third is male. About 40 percent of the graduates come from academic families, whereas 30 percent of the graduates' parents have secondary education diplomas and a further 30 percent have participated in elementary education. This means that the graduates of the data set come from rather academically oriented families.

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graduates need in order to function adequately in the knowledge society and how higher education institutions can contribute in helping graduates to develop these competencies. The project includes a country study, a qualitative study and a survey. The project involves fourteen European countries and Japan.

Countries of Comparison

This study is comparative, focusing on three European countries. The countries were selected in order to represent some aspects of the diversity of Europe: in terms of geography, political culture and history. My decision to choose Finland, the Netherlands and Spain for comparison was grounded on the aforementioned multidimensionality and on the fact that the data from each of these countries included enough graduates in order to carry out reliable analyses.

In this study Finland represents a traditional welfare state, which is common to all Nordic countries. The Finnish education system is based on the ideal of equal opportunity. Although education in Finland is free at all levels, and although studies in secondary and tertiary education institutions are heavily subsidized by the state, the education system has not turned out to be as equal as politicians have dreamed (Kivinen & Rinne 1995; Kivinen, Ahola & Hedman 2001). The Finnish economy is quite solid and stable, but it has been affected by a fairly high unemployment rate since the early 1990s. Fortunately, the employment statistics have shown brighter figures in the past couple of years, but long-term unemployment is still a serious problem in Finland. Other severe problems in the national labour market include fixed-term contracts, which are very common in the country (Eures 2007; Ministry of Education 2007).

The Netherlands, for its part, represents a Central European country with a strong national economy and low unemployment rate. The GDP of the Netherlands is remarkably high and it exceeds European averages greatly. The unemployment rate, meanwhile, is one of the lowest in Europe. However, working part-time is very common in the Netherlands. The education system is reasonably equitable, though not to the same degree as systems in the Nordic countries. In the Netherlands children need to choose between academic and professional schooling at a rather young age, which leads to a situation where family background tends to define a child's schools career. Generally speaking, the Dutch are a highly educated people and nowadays one out of three school leavers complete a first university degree (Eures 2007; Eurydice 2006; Suuntana Alankomaat 2003).

The last country of comparison is Spain, which brings a South European breeze to the study. Spain represents a country with severe unemployment problems and a GDP that undercuts European averages. Although the national economy of Spain has recently undergone positive developments and the unemployment rate is slowly decreasing, the unemployment problem in Spain is one of the severest in Europe. The education system of Spain is relatively selective. Tuition fees for higher education institutions are rather high and private schools are even more expensive than the public ones. To be able to attend the most prestigious institutions requires a relatively privileged family background (Eures 2007; Suuntana Espanja 2003).

Results

The analysis of the data starts off by counting the median salaries and correspondence between education and work for the whole data set and for the various independent variables. The median salary for the whole data is 1,920 euros per month and the mean is about hundred euros higher. Correspondence was evaluated on a scale from one to five, with the median being 4 and the mean 3.9. These figures are fairly meaningless and for this reason the data were split into smaller pieces in order to receive more detailed information. From table 1 we can see represented the salary means for the countries, genders, fields of studies, types of degree and different family backgrounds that are the focus of this study.

TABLE 1. *Monthly salary means for the countries, genders, family backgrounds, fields of study and types of degree.*

	Monthly Salary		**Monthly Salary**
Countries		**Field of Study**	
Finland	2,500	Educational	1,600
The Netherlands	2,400	Humanities	1,600
Spain	1,500	Social Sciences	1,900
		Business	2,200
Genders		Law	2,100
Male	2,300	Science	2,000
Female	1,800	Engineering	2,500
		Health and Welfare	2,000
Family Background		Other Fields	1,900
Academic families	2,200		
Secondary education families	2,000	**Type of Degree**	
Basic education families	1,900	Bachelor's	1,900
		Master's	2,100

From the table above we can see that there are huge salary differences between the groups. The Finnish graduates earn on average 2,500 euros per month and their Dutch peers earn only 100 euros less. However, the salary level of the Spanish graduates is totally different, since they earn up to 1,000 euros less on average than their Dutch and Finnish counterparts. Money-wise, Spanish graduates are clearly the underdogs. Salary differences between genders are as clear as between the countries. Males earn notably more than females and the gap in average salaries is 500 euros. Also family background has a great influence on graduates' salaries. The more educated a graduate's parents, the greater the graduate's salary.

In addition to demographic factors, educational choices also have an impact on graduates' average salaries. The graduates with master's degrees earn more than those with bachelor's degrees. Of the different fields of study, engineering seems to be the most profitable one, but also business and law are shrewd choices in terms of salaries. The least economically profitable fields of study seem to be education and the humanities.

TABLE 2. *Means of correspondence between education and work for the countries, genders, family backgrounds, fields of study and types of degree.*

	Correspondence Mean		Correspondence Mean
Countries		**Field of Study**	
Finland	4,1	Educational	4,0
The Netherlands	3,9	Humanities	4,0
Spain	3,8	Social Sciences	3,9
		Business	3,7
Genders		Law	4,0
Male	3,9	Science	3,8
Female	3,9	Engineering	3,8
		Health and Welfare	4,3
Family Background		Other Fields	3,8
Academic families	4,0		
Secondary education families	3,9	**Type of Degree**	
Basic education families	3,8	Bachelor's	3,9
		Master's	3,9

Comparing the correspondence levels between different groups reveals that differences are not as striking here as they were in the salary comparisons. Gender and type of degree do not have any influence on the level of correspondence. However, between countries, fields of studies and different kinds of family backgrounds, some differences can be observed. Finnish graduates receive the highest scores in correspondence comparison and their Spanish peers have the lowest correspondence between education and work. The Dutch graduates place themselves somewhere between these two ends. Parents' educational attainment increases the graduate's possibilities to achieve high correspondence between education and work, as do professional fields of study (especially studies related to health and welfare).

To broaden readers' understanding about the factors that help graduates achieve the best possible labour market success, I have drawn a fourfold grid with two axes. The horizontal axis represents the salary and the vertical axis depicts the correspondence between education and work. The intersection of the axes is the point where both the salary and the correspondence have their mean values. For salary, this intersection point is 2,000 euros and for correspondence it is 3.9. Labels of all the independent variables can be found in the figure in their correct places. Locations of the labels are, however, based on rough estimates and are not exact. Exact figures of salary and correspondence means were presented in tables one and two.

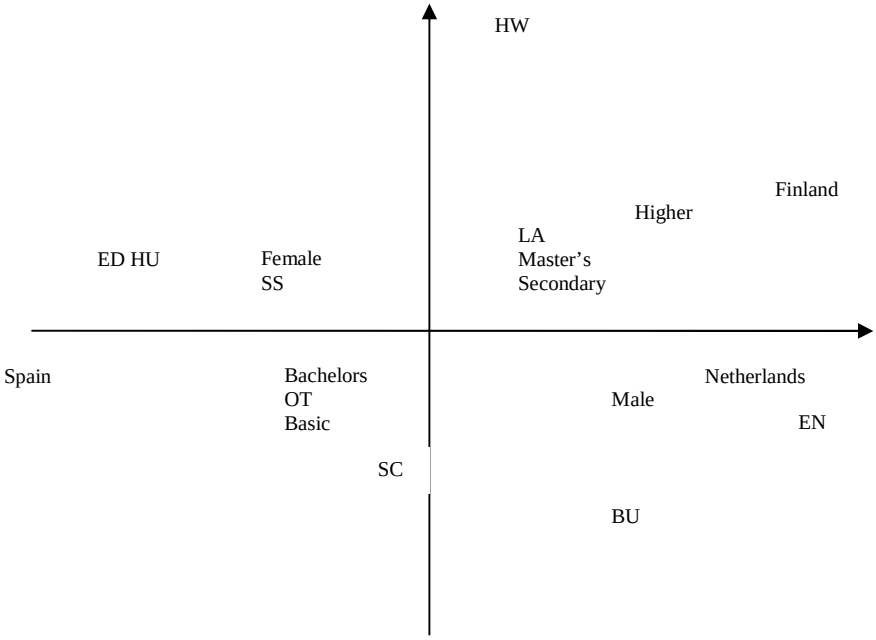

FIGURE 1. *Graduates' salary and correspondence between education and work. (ED=educational, HU=humanities, SS= social sciences, BU=business, LA=law, SC=science, EN=engineering, HW=health and welfare, OT=other fields of study, Basic=parental basic level education, Secondary=parental secondary level education, Higher=parental higher education)*

In the upper right quarter of the grid, we can find graduates who have both high salary and good correspondence between education and work. Finnish graduates and the graduates whose parents have at least secondary education can be found in this quarter. Also graduates who have studied law or subjects related to health and welfare and those who have a master's degree are placed in it. In the lower left quarter one can find the graduates whose salary and correspondence level undercut the averages. Spanish graduates and graduates from non-academic families can be found here, as well as those who have studied science and taken a bachelor's degree.

The upper left quarter also proved to be interesting: graduates with poor salary but good correspondence between education and work are placed in this quarter. In this quarter we can find female graduates and graduates who have studied educational subjects, humanities and social sciences. In the reverse quarter, for its part, one can find males and the Dutch graduates, as well as graduates who have studied business or engineering. These graduates enjoy a high salary, but their work does not match their education that well.

Since the upper right quarter of the grid is the most desirable spot for graduates to be placed in, I will next present the odds for different graduate groups to end up in this quarter of 'achievers'. Since the grid gave us only a tentative idea of who the achievers are, I will now analyse the group of achievers in more detail, using logistic regression analysis as a method in order to find out which factors increase graduates' odds of

becoming an achiever. By using logistic regression analysis it is possible to predict the effect of the independent variable on dependent variable when other variables are controlled.

TABLE 3. *The odds for young European graduates to become an achiever by logistic regression analysis.*

		β	Exp. (β)
Fields of Study	Humanities	-0,358*	0,699
	Social Sciences	0,179	1,196
	Business Studies	0,402**	1,495
	Law	0,665**	1,944
	Science	-0,222	0,801
	Engineering	0,807***	2,241
	Health and Welfare	0,582***	1,789
	Other Fields of Study	0,003	1,003
Parental Education	Higher Education	0,260**	1,297
	Secondary Education	0,188*	1,207
Country	The Netherlands	2,252***	9,508
	Finland	2,106***	8,216
Gender	Male	0,527***	1,693
Type of Degree	Master's Degree	0,993***	2,699
Overall Percentage			70,6 %

According to the results presented above, we can see that the majority of the factors included in the regression model are significant in predicting graduates' likelihood of becoming achievers. When analysing the fields of study, education was used as the control group. According to the results of this logistic regression analysis, graduates who have studied engineering have the best chances of becoming model achievers. They have 2.2 times higher chances of achieving both a high salary and good correspondence than education graduates. Law students' odds are also high – they have almost a twice higher chance of succeeding in the labour market than the control group. Also, the type of degree has a great influence on graduates' possibilities of achieving labour market success. Holders of a master's degree have up to 2.7 times higher chances to achieve success than those with a bachelor's degree.

From demographic factors, country seems to be the most decisive influence on labour market outcomes. Compared with Spanish graduates, Dutch graduates have 9.5 times higher and Finnish graduates 8.2 times higher chances to achieve labour market success. Gender is also crucial, since men attain the achiever status 1.6 times more often than women. A high level of parental education also predicts good labour market success, since graduates from academic families have 1.3 greater chances to achieve both a high salary and good correspondence than graduates from non-academic families.

To answer the first research question, it can be concluded that the country of origin is the greatest predictor of graduates' labour market success. In addition, the type of degree earned in higher education is decisive. However, I still need to conduct a further analysis

in order to find out which factors are the best predictors of young graduates' labour market success in each country of comparison. In the next table I present the odds for different graduate groups in each country to end up in the achievers' group.

TABLE 4. *The odds for young European graduates to become an achiever in Finland, the Netherlands and Spain.*

		Finland		**The Netherlands**		**Spain**	
		β	Exp. (β)	β	Exp. (β)	β	Exp. (β)
Fields of Study	Humanities	-0,666	0,514	-0,297	0,743	0,048	1,049
	Social Sciences	0,540	1,716	0,554*	1,741	0,305	1,356
	Business Studies	-0,138	0,871	0,545**	1,724	0,606	1,834
	Law	0,676	1,966	1,125**	3,081	1,051**	2,860
	Science	-0,823	0,439	-0,092	0,912	0,385	1,469
	Engineering	0,119	1,126	0,447*	1,563	1,828***	6,225
	Health	-0,406	0,666	0,272	1,313	1,865***	6,455
	Other Fields	-0,600	0,549	0,040	1,041	-0,133	0,876
Parental Education	HE	0,147	1,159	0,023	1,024	0,645***	1,906
	Secondary	0,274	1,315	0,090	1,095	0,246	1,279
Gender	Male	0,659***	1,933	0,337**	1,401	0,657***	1,928
Type of Degree	Master's	0,945***	2,573	0,949***	2,583	0,697***	2,008
Overall Percentage			65,2 %		61,4%		84,7 %

To start with the demographic factors, it can be seen that gender predicts graduates' labour market success in all countries. In Finland and in Spain men have almost two times higher chances of becoming achievers than women, whereas the Netherlands seems to be subtly more equal gender-wise. Parental education also has an influence on graduates' labour market success in each country, but the influence is strongest in Spain. Spanish graduates from academic families have almost two times higher chances to achieve both high salary and good correspondence than graduates from non-academic families.

The master's degree guarantees better chances for labour market success in each country than the bachelor's degree; in Finland and in the Netherlands the chances are 2.6 times and in Spain two times higher. The most profitable fields of study vary according to the country. In Finland law graduates have the greatest chances for labour market success and this holds true also for the Netherlands, whereas in Spain studies related to health and welfare and engineering are the most profitable.

From these results I can conclude that demographic factors have the same kind of influence on graduates' labour market success in each country. This also holds true for the type of degree the graduate has earned. The greatest differences between countries become apparent when the relationship between the field of study and labour market success is analysed. The most profitable field of study varies between the countries.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study are fairly similar to those of previous works showing that demographic factors and higher education-related issues have a great deal to do with graduates' labour market success. The results suggest that the country of origin has the highest influence on determining graduates' labour market success. Other demographic factors are also decisive in predicting graduates' salary and the correspondence between education and work. Men tend to gain more success than women, and if a graduate's parents are highly educated the graduate has better chances to do well in the labour market. The type of degree earned in higher education also has a notable impact on possible success. Taking a master's degree guarantees better chances for labour market success than the bachelor's degree. In Finland and the Netherlands law studies seem to open the path to success as well, whereas in Spain studies related to health and welfare or engineering do the same trick.

There are three main conclusions that can be drawn from this study. Firstly, we can sum up that in different parts of Europe ways of gaining success in the graduate labour market differ to some extent. However, the most essential factors forecasting success are fairly consistent in all countries and the most decisive factor is the country of origin. It still needs to be remembered that when talking about the salaries, countries are not directly comparable. Costs of living, state and municipal taxes, level of social services and so forth vary greatly across different countries and this will have a direct impact on citizens' standard of living. In the countries where the cost of living is lower, a graduate can afford to have a lower salary than a graduate from a country where cost of living is significantly higher. In some cases, therefore, the actual standards of living may be comparable.

Secondly, it can be said that higher education reproduces inequality in terms of gender and family background. Despite the many years graduates have spent in education, demographic factors still hold a decisive influence on graduates' labour market success. Thus, education cannot remove the inherent inequality between graduates, even though it can undoubtedly diminish it. The results are, thus, consistent with Bourdieu's theories as well as with the theories of gender inequality.

The aim of this study was not to find out the mechanisms behind the reproduction of gender and family background related inequalities. However, since the study supports social reproduction theories, I am persuaded that some of the explanations provided by previous studies, have at least some explanatory power in this case. I do agree with Egerton & Halsey (1993, Jacobs (1996), Blackburn, Browne, Brooks & Jarman (2002) and Einarsdottir (2007) that gender-specific study choices are one major reason behind the differences in women's and men's labour market success. Motherhood is also one decisive factor, since women still generally undertake the role of primary carers for children and families (Einarsdottir 2007). Maternity leaves, working part-time and more inflexible attitudes towards work and its requirements make it harder for women to gain the best possible labour market success. In countries where family policy guarantees paid maternity leave, subsidised day care facilities and child allowances - and where family policy encourages men to take part in child care alongside women – it is reasonable to

suppose that men and women should be more equal. This study did not, however, support this supposition. Indeed, it was found that female graduates from the Finnish welfare state did not have any greater chances of labour market success than their Dutch and Spanish peers.

Pierre Bourdieu (1986) claims that inequalities related to family background are reproduced through cultural, social and economic capital. It is my view that this holds true also in the case of higher education. Academic parents have the cultural capital to advise their children about the most profitable study choices and the most successful ways of finding a job after graduation. They also provide their children with the right language and habits, which help their offspring to succeed both in higher education and in the labour market. The goals of children from academic families are also usually higher than those of children from non-academic families. In Bourdieu's work the term social capital can be equated with the concept of 'useful connections'. Families with broad social networks can promote their children's career, and usually these families are those with high cultural and economic capital as well. Finding a job is much easier through connections than by responding to job advertisements. Parental economic capital gives more study choices to a graduate. S/he can choose to study in a private institution, take extra lessons or study abroad. All of these options tend to be useful in achieving success in education and the labour market. In the countries where education is free and studies are subsidised by study grants, the impact of economic capital should, however, be less obvious. In this study family background was operationalised in terms of parental education and thus we can only conclude what kind of connection there is between parental education and graduates' labour market success in different countries. When family background was operationalised in this way, state policy did not seem to have had a great effect on educational equality. Although the Finnish education system is regarded as very equal, the outcomes of Finnish higher education graduates are less equal than those of the Dutch graduates. Thus, removing the financial obstacles from higher education does not seem to guarantee equal outcomes.

Finally, this study reveals that higher education is not, on its own, an adequate route to success; the choices made during one's studies are more crucial. A student needs to know that a degree is not enough guarantee success, but that one also needs to pay attention to subject choice and the type of degree. If the graduate has the wrong kind of background and if he or she makes 'wrong' choices during his/her studies, higher education can turn out to be a poor investment for him/her. However, for those with privileged backgrounds and 'correct' study choices, higher education is still a very profitable and rational investment. The belief in the power of education is thus partly justified, but also partly challenged.

The results of this study indicate the need to conduct further research. It would, for example, be interesting to measure labour market success by using various indicators, such as job satisfaction, status, quality of working life and job security. It would also be worthwhile concentrating on only one explanatory factor and studying it more thoroughly. One could, for example, analyse how gender and labour market success are interconnected in different countries. Moreover, it would be useful to consider this whole

area with closer reference being made to the other quarters of the fourfold grid. By studying other quarters in more detail one could shed light on the key question of who are those graduates with a low salary, low correspondence rate or both. Ultimately, the results of theoretically informed empirical research always stimulate further questions. It is to be hoped that this important field of inquiry therefore receives further attention by scholars in the near future.

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