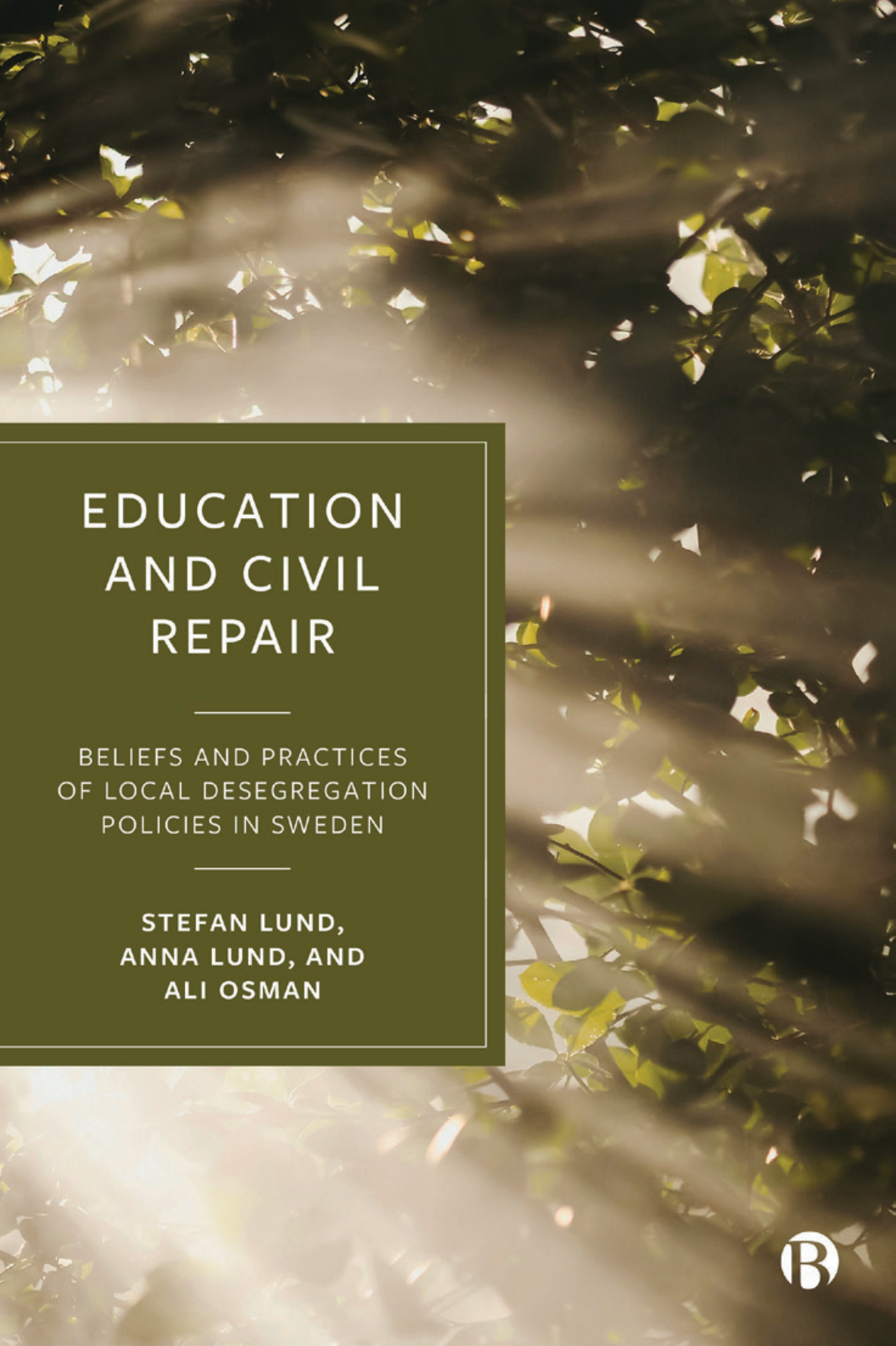




EDUCATION AND CIVIL REPAIR

BELIEFS AND PRACTICES
OF LOCAL DESEGREGATION
POLICIES IN SWEDEN

STEFAN LUND,
ANNA LUND, AND
ALI OSMAN



Afterword: Choosing Hope

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Education and Civil Repair powerfully reminds us that schooling is about far more than transmitting knowledge. It is about socialization in the broadest sense of that term, about constructing meanings and emotions that mediate the more forgiving and intimate worlds of family and the more demanding and impersonal worlds of adult life. Schools do more than impart reified, already-made values. Schools have autonomy. They are micro-worlds with logics of their own. And this logic is not given.

If school leaders are creative and their students passionate, schools can become engines of innovation that create social change. If leaders lack imagination, schools merely reproduce social structure. If society segregates and stigmatizes lower-class immigrants, schools can take the easy way out and just go ahead and do the same. The most important takeaway from this remarkable book is that another way is possible. Schools can desegregate and destigmatize. Think of this as a choice between the cynical French structuralist Pierre Bourdieu and the hopeful American pragmatist John Dewey. We can choose Dewey; we can infuse democracy into education. We can choose hope.

Choice is possible, in social theory and in everyday social life, if we understand that external circumstances do not directly determine the nature of social action. Subjectivity intervenes; it makes the effects of objective forces variable. What creates this variation is culture. Culture mediates external circumstance; it mediates perception and structures motivation. To escape objectivism, we need a cultural sociology, and with this symbolic understanding in hand, we can appreciate the plasticity, the reparability, of the civil sphere.

The practical implication of such theoretical considerations is that failing schools – schools that reproduce class and ethnic stigma – cannot be changed through ‘compositional effects’ alone. It is not a matter of ecology, of putting kids from different ethnicities and races into face-to-face contact with one

another. If it is only the participants in interaction that are changed, majority students will continue to insult and bully minorities.

It's not what we see but how we see, not just whom we interact with but how this interaction is discursively mediated. So, it's the discursive framework – the cultural practice – that needs changing. Administrators and teachers must create a new school culture, one that shifts the symbolic coding of routine practices from resigned acceptance to indignant rejection. To get beyond 'othering', we must get beyond the demand for assimilation. There must be a shift from the assimilative to the multicultural mode of incorporation, from 'why can't you become more like us?' to 'it must be really neat to be like you!'

Magnolia School is the star witness that testifies to the case in point. It was started by young immigrant intellectuals who remember the earlier and better days of Swedish schooling, before ethnic nationalism made school choice a vehicle for reproducing hegemony, when expanding, not narrowing, the 'we' was the mandate for national schools. Fuelled by such memories and their inner moral convictions, these idealistic reformers dedicated their new school to creating a vivid sense of solidarity among teachers and students, what Stefan and Anna Lund and their co-author Ali Osman call 'a local civil sphere in uncivil times'. They valorized 'translanguage' and minority cultures, recognized rather than ignored structural barriers, decolonized curricula, and created 'interactional rituals of recognition'. These strategies constitute a 'critical pedagogy of multicultural incorporation' that allows schools to effect democratic social change. If pedagogy is earnest and imaginative, rather than undercutting civil solidarity, schooling can become a vital force for repairing it.

Education and Civil Repair is an antidote to despair. A manual for resisting the depressing trends of our current times, it also provides a blueprint for reconstructing them. It gives us a reason for choosing hope.