

OLD AND NEW INEQUALITIES: THE HIGHER EDUCATION IN ROMANIA

This paper concludes the results of the study we have made in the summer of 1997 among the faculties of the 'Babes-Bolyai' University from Cluj. This research can be ranged among the other ones we have initiated in order to reveal the problems the Romanian system of higher education is confronted with (especially after the fall of the communist regime from 1989 (in concern of the structural changes of the global social system of Romania).

In the context of changes education has an important advantage compared to other microsystems. This way the reform which has been initiated in the field of education in 1991 keeps in view the *structure of institutions of higher education (the diversification of faculties and sections as well as the content of the education (the renewal of the curricula of the disciplines to study as well as the renewal of the curricula of the different sections).*

The reform which's main purpose is to "rub out" the heritage of the communist regime in this field did not emphasize the problem of equalities of access to higher education. Although the possibilities to access to the great majority of faculties have become greater as the number of faculties has grown, the *numerus clausus* which still exists can be taken as one of the great obstacles for the young graduates of highschool.

Inequalities of the Romanian higher education

Before we speak of inequalities in our higher education we would like to outline some of the aspects of the reform in this field. The reform which has two main phases, has started soon after the breakthrough from 1989.

The *first* "reparatory" phase came to restore the situation of the "years of glory" of the seventies, especially for the social sciences, when the "witchhunt" wasn't so intense. The *second* phase, initiated in 1991 is the *phase of total renewal*, in the structure of institutions of higher education as well in the curricula of the faculties. This phase tries to modernize the whole system in order to catch up with the system of the industrialized world.

Even if the principles which facilitate the equality of chances (free and compulsory education of eight years, identical curricula for the same type of schools nationwide, same material advantages for all of the teachers and professors who have the same training, the equality of chances in using the diplomas of the same level, inconsidering the social origin of the graduates etc.) were maintained across the period from 1991 until 1997 (the year this study is written), the liberalization of education, the rise of the individual demand for education has led to the appearance of the perverse effect (studied by R. Boudon) of growth of costs in education (the

growth of costs in equipment's and schoolbooks, the raise of costs for upholding—food, dressing, lodging).

As we have appreciated in one of our articles based on a research effectuated three years ago among the faculties from the university center of Cluj-Napoca, the new socio-economical conditions contribute to the growth of inequalities in the educational system, as it follows: these conditions contribute in a great deal to the deepening of the gap between the urban and the rural, between graduates having different backgrounds (considering the occupations of parents).

If the equality of chances is one of the basic principles of democracy (in the opinion of A. de Tocqueville the most important (this perverse effect of deepening of inequalities of acceding to higher education for short term can have negative effects, considering the reportation of the social categories most affected (negatively) to the reform in the sense of an outlining of a reticent attitude towards the global reform in order to introduce the democratic system.

This is why we consider that in order to prevent excessive polarization which can easily appear in periods of transition the knowledge and revealing of this phenomena is necessary in order to elaborate strategies which can estompeate these effects, being aware of the fact that the preventive measures cost less than the reparatory ones.

So we consider ourselves adepts of the basic book for a new sociology which has appeared as a result of the collaboration between B. Bernstein, M. Young and P. Bourdieu and which has to be established on knowledge and control.

Those who beside the cultural capital (the concept of which P. Bourdieu is so fond of) are as well owners of the material capital are contributing to the phenomenon of raise of inequalities of chances to access to higher education, this way perpetuating it and having a great contribution in the social reproduction of the new system.

Otherwise the researches which were made in the majority of European countries in the sixties-seventies on different samples based on diverse methods had one thing in common: the fact that they have established the existence of the inequality of chances to education for the different social groups, fact shown by the statistics.

The White book of the EU ("The European Social Policies") lay stress on the necessity of the existence of a *real equality of chances* and of practical measures in order to implement them in all the fields of the macrosocial system in every country of the Union. These measures would be the more important in Romania and the other countries of the ex-communist block where the new social structure and so the middle class are in formation.

Short reference to the sample and the methods of the research

Our research which has been made this summer was based on a sample of 831 students from the first year from three faculties having a different interest (very much, medium, low) on the premise that the inequalities which exist in the system of higher education affect all the faculties and sections of the university. So these three faculties are:

- Faculty of Law(high interest): 169 students
- Faculty of History of Philosophy(medium interest): 425 students
- Faculty of Chemistry and Chemical engineering(low interest): 237 students

Our main method was that of the document analysis: the secondary analysis of the statistical documents of the faculties and the one for the whole university as well as the paper for matriculation. From the information enclosed in these papers we have used only the information referring to the residence of the students and the occupation of parents. We found this very important to mention as we are "fans" of the systemic approach for the causes of inequalities of chances this time we have limited the analysis of inequalities of chances to access to higher education : the social status of the family (occupation of parents, residence). We did not take into our study the conditions referring to the quality of schooling (the quality of the institution including the quality of the didactic staff) nor those which refer to the characteristics of highschoolers.

After consulting the papers for matriculation of the students from our sample we have included them into four main groups which try to be a mirror for the new social structure of our country. So these four categories from those who are economically active are: intellectuals (occupations with superior studies), technicians functionaries, workers, agriculture's, enterprises. We still had three categories which (considering that this paper was not elaborated by specialists) did not fit into our skeleton of above: retired ones, deceased and unemployed. In the case of mother's occupation we had the category of housekeepers. This stratification hasn't got the positive correlation between cultural capital (the level of studies) and retribution as in the most countries from Western Europe and United States.

Analysis of the results of research

Considering the place of residence, in our sample we have found more students from the urban residence. As we can see in the whole of the population, the percentage of the urban population is majority (54,9 %, versus 45,1 % for the rural area) but in a very interesting way the percent for the national population for the age group between 20-24, the age group considered most frequently as being that of the students, as the national data for 1995 show it, proves to be higher (46,65 %) in rural (of cause there are regional differences in the age structure of the rural)! Still we must say that there are some considerable differences in that of whole population and that of our sample's. Here you can see that the students coming from urban places have a much higher percent than those from the rural. This is valid for the whole sample, but one can observe slight differences between the three faculties as it comes: the great majority of students from the faculty of history and philosophy come from urban areas (81,88 %). This is valid for the other two faculties, still we can observe that for the faculty of law the percentage of students from the urban area is over 91 %, this means that the faculties for which there is a great interest among highschool graduates the inequality of access is higher than for the others. Although present even in the case of faculty of chemistry, where the

interest is low, still the percentage of urbans is much higher than for the whole of the population (75,1 %).

*The dispersion of students from the sample by their place of residence
Faculty of History and philosophy*

Section	Total (100 %)	Urban	Rural
Philosophy	108	93 (86,11 %)	15 (13,89 %)
History	95	74 (77,89 %)	21 (21,11 %)
Sociology	82	66 (80,49 %)	16 (19,51 %)
Social work	65	51 (78,46 %)	14 (21,54 %)
History of art	39	31 (79,48 %)	8 (20,52 %)
Biblioteconomy	36	33 (91,66 %)	3 (8,33 %)
Total faculty	425	348 (81,88 %)	77 (18,12 %)

Faculty of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering

Section	Total (100 %)	Urban	Rural
Chemistry-physcis-rom	55	35 (63,6 %)	20 (36,4 %)
Chemistry-physcis-hung	26	20 (76,9 %)	6 (23,1 %)
Chemistry-physcis-germ.	9	9 (100 %)	-
Chemistry	67	52 (77,6 %)	15 (22,4 %)
Chemical engineering	80	62 (77,9 %)	18 (22,5 %)
Total faculty	237	178 (75,1 %)	59 (24,9 %)

The explanation of these great inequalities is due to the fact that there is another inequality of great proportion, that of the chances to access in higher education caused by the occupational "background" of the parents. We shall mention the fact that because of the great migration ratio from rural to the urban in the socialist period, mostly after the midsixties (as known this was a consequence in all socialist countries of the collectivization of agriculture and paralelly the forced industrialization and urbanization) in the rural area we can observe a pronounced aging of the population for some of the areas of the country, but as you could see the percentage of the young rural population (20-24 years) is greater than for the whole of the population.

In the same time if we correlate the medium of residence with the parents' occupation, the high percent of those coming from urban area can be also explained by the much higher percent of the intellectuals in urban area (15,2 % on national scale) for only 2,1 % in rural area.

Analyzing the social status of the father, item used in the majority of inequality studies in the countries of Europe and United States we can point out an overthrow of the proportions, so that at the level of the sample we have studied 34,2 % of the students father is an intellectual having (at national level only 9 % of the active population). In the same time 24,5 % of the student's fathers are workers and only 1,6 % agriculture's, social categories which in the total social structure have a higher percentage.

The inequality of chances caused by the occupational background of the parents has a different distribution depending of the level of interest of the faculty (high, medium, low). This way at the faculty of law which is first in the rank of faculties considering the interest towards it the percent of the intellectuals is of 53,3 % versus 10,7 % students coming from workers. The sons of agriculture's were not represented at this faculty!

At the extreme pole, the university with low interest-chemistry and chemical engineering- the percent of intellectual sons decreases to 26,2 % and logically the percent of sons of workers is much higher: 31,1 % and we have sons of agriculture's-3,1 %.

The great interest towards the faculty of law can be explained by the fact that the graduates after finishing up have the great advantage of an elevate social status doubled by possibilities of high retribution. This cannot be said for the other two faculties, where after graduating the chances are not so great, as the specialization's from the other two faculties do not assure possibilities of financial well-being.

In the case of the faculty of history and philosophy the data are most comparable to the whole of the sample: sons of intellectuals: 30,7 % sons of workers: 26,5 % and sons of agriculture's 1,5 %.

For the intermediate category of functionaries and technicians we have found the following situation: for the whole of the sample they have 21,97 %, for law 27,2 %, philosophy and history 19,4 % and for chemistry 22,7 %.

Together the two categories from the economically active population (intellectuals and technicians) from the top of the social structure are represented in higher education in more than 50 % for all the three faculties.

Conclusions

Finally we would like to say that the inequalities of chances to accede higher education have been accentuated after 1989 as one could have expected this according to the economical, political and social changes. This inequality could be atenua in the future – as we have mentioned before – in the context of the strengthening of the middle class, which is very low in its representation.

In the present time although not so important than before 1989, "cultural capital" still plays an important role in choosing the future for the young graduates of highschool. So intellectuals still send their children in a higher percent than the others to faculties of higher education. This process of social reproduction can be observed for the specialization's with a group of double advantages (high social status and in the same time high retribution-like for economical and law specialization) but in the same time it is present for the specialization's which form didactic and medical personnel. The reform of education started in 1991 tries to adjust these inequalities by helping financially those outcoming from the social categories mostly affected in a negative way by the course of the global reform of the Romanian society.

MARIA DAN – ENIKŐ VERESS

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Raymond Boudon: L'inegalité des chances, Paris, Armand Colin, 1973.
- Sociology de l'education. Dix ans de recherches, INRP, L'Harmattan, Paris, 1992.
- Cherkaoui, Mohamed: Sociologie de l'education, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1986.
- Rotariu, Traian, Dan, Maria, Veress Enikő & Mezei Elemér: Higher education between inertia and change, in: Revista de cercetări sociale, nr,1/1995, pp.53-62.
- U.B.B.-Info RECTORATUL: Buletin Statistic, Nr.4/1996, Cluj-Napoca.
- Traian Rotariu, Maria Dan, Iulian Pah, Enikő: Invatamantul superior intre inertie si schimbare, in: Campul universitar si actorii sai, Ed. Polirom, Iasi, 1997.