URBAN SEGREGATION AND SCHOOL INEQUALITIES: STRUCTURAL CHANGES AND THE IMPACT OF THE SCHOOL DISTRICT POLICY REFORM

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introduction

- increasing parents’ concern and mobilization for their children’s education – for all social classes, and for many immigrant parents
- more intense competition in the school, more intense competition for educational resources
- significant inequalities between public schools, in spite of the “republican model”
- the school district system (*carte scolaire*): school segregation is a reflection of residential segregation
- the moderate level of residential segregation (socioeconomic as well as ethno-racial) may become a more intense school segregation:
  - demographic reasons: immigrant parents are younger and have more children -> stronger ethno-racial segregation of children
  - upper-middle class parents’ strategies to obtain access to “better” schools
the school district reform

- goals claimed:
  - “free choice” for all parents without consideration of social background and place of residence
  - reducing the spatial constraint for working class pupils living in very disadvantaged neighborhoods, giving them more opportunity to have access to “better” schools

- six criteria to evaluate applications:
  - handicap
  - medical reasons
  - social background: beneficiaries of grants based on social criteria
  - choice of a specific curriculum
  - sisters or brothers in the school
  - residential proximity

- but the priority for pupils living in the school district is maintained, and no additional resources for attractive schools are planned
areas researched: two contrasting départements in the Paris metropolis
no explosion of applications, but a growing number...
…with a declining rate of approval
...and a marginal share for beneficiaries of scholarships.

% social scholarships

Hauts de Seine
Seine Saint Denis

2007 2008 2009 2010
contrasting criteria for successful applications
### all applications by social profile of the school Hauts de Seine 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>social profile of school</th>
<th>outgoing appl.</th>
<th>incoming appl.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SUPSUP</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUPMOY</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOYSUP</td>
<td>795</td>
<td>772</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOYMOY</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PIMMOY</td>
<td>860</td>
<td>521</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PIMOUQ</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PIMONQ</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>2690</td>
<td>2495</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- upper status schools (with very few foreign pupils) very attractive
- working class & immigrant schools very repulsive
approved applications according by social profile of the school Hauts de Seine 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>social profile of school</th>
<th>outgoing appl.</th>
<th>incoming appl.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SUPSUP</td>
<td>1,3%</td>
<td>2,8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUPMOY</td>
<td>2,2%</td>
<td>4,1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOYSUP</td>
<td>3,6%</td>
<td>4,2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOYMOY</td>
<td>5,8%</td>
<td>6,2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PIMMOY</td>
<td>5,3%</td>
<td>4,2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PIMOUQ</td>
<td>8,2%</td>
<td>3,3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PIMONQ</td>
<td>4,5%</td>
<td>1,9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3,8%</td>
<td>3,9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- upper status schools have little overall variation
- middle status schools have a stronger flux but balanced
- working class & immigrant schools lose significantly
other results

- contrast between areas due to local social structure and school provision
- moderate impact on the social and ethnic profile of many schools
- applications for private schools are increasing, private schools become more selective
- strong changes in parents’ expectations, strong reactions to refused application
face to face interviews

- 41 long term interviews (about 1 hour and a half, 21 in Hauts-de-Seine/West side, 20 in Seine-Saint-Denis/East Side)

- Two contrasted research areas:
  - East side (Bondy, Clichy-sous-Bois): Few applications, more people refusing individual interviews
  - West Side (More localities). Greater territorial diversity in terms of experiences, discourses and social background

- Our selection: more than half Foreign born or second generation (the majority from North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa, some families with Portuguese and Haitian origins)

- Research question: how do parents interpret the reform, how do they react when they receive a negative answer, with which impact on their perception of social and school inequalities and discrimination?
seggregation and social and ethnic mix

- clear perception of social, urban and ethnic inequalities at different scales on local space. Strong opposition between neighborhoods in the same locality (Nanterre, Clamart, Bondy, Clichy). "all neighborhoods and all schools are not equal".
  - =>typical behavior: showing a photo of the class and asking: "how many French pupils do you see?" or proposing to pick up his or her child after school to see
  - "when you put your child in a class where there are only two Whites, the teacher and him, « ça fait mauvais genre »...”
    (Ms Pollet one son, single mother, no occupation, Bondy (93))

- denunciation of the ghetto perceived as the result of an intentional process of concentration of immigrants. The fear of the ghetto is based on the perception of the ethno-racial profile of the school. They use spontaneously the term "ghetto".
segregation and social and ethnic mix (2)

- to apply for a different school is a move to avoid ethno-racial segregation, because the presence of “Whites” is associated by immigrant parents to a better quality of teaching and a more secure environment.

- contrast with White parents’ preoccupation who are anxious about the potential minority situation of their child

“Social mix, There is no social mix any more! When I registered him, they told me: you must advise your son, be careful, because he will suffer racism. Who told you that? The principal. It means that he is white, blond...he will be part of the minority. He is the one who is not Muslim, North African or Black. It will not work well. So, in fact, all normal parents, with some education, do not put their child in a middle school like that.”

(Miss Petit, 2 children, in charge of a Kinder garden, Asnières-sur-Seine, 92)
inequalities, injustice and discrimination (1)

- feeling of injustice and incomprehension in front of a negative answer, especially when parents link it with the good school performance of their child.
  
  => idea that doing well at school should be sufficient to validate a serious application. In that sense, they feel that the promise of meritocracy is betrayed.

- they switch to an interpretation in terms of discrimination when they think that application has been turned down because of their immigrant background

- socio-economic inequalities are mentioned only for the access to private schools
“a failure of equal opportunity” : meritocratic and republican beliefs are shattered

- parents with immigrant background think that people with a French background ("Whites") are treated differently, but also people living in a stigmatized neighborhood
- they also think that “French” families know better the right strategy (and the illegal ones) to make a successful application.

this feeling is amplified :

- when they know “French” parents who have obtained a positive answer, some of them through illegal means.
- when the application to a private school is denied.
- when they did not receive a clear and individual response. The standardized argument “no more positions” is very badly received and increases their perception of territorial inequalities.
in its extreme form, this feeling of discrimination is associated to the perception of an “institutional racism”

And when you received the letter, how did you react?
Ms. H: I thought, it’s rac...rac...like...
M. H: racist.
Ms. H: Exactly
Is it true?
M. H: Yes, of course. There is racism.
Ms. H: Because a white women, she applied with me, she was also in trouble with her family. She was accepted, not my daughter.

(H. family, father: part-time worker and welfare recipient, Algerian origin / mother : housewife born in Algeria, Nanterre 92)

the idea of a “class discrimination” (based on working class belonging) is rarely mentioned
bureaucracy, loyalty and fraud

- they stress their “republican loyalty” contrasting it with the opacity and non meritocratic process of evaluation of the application
- applying is also presented as a struggle against stigmatization: “we want to do our best for our children”
- after applying and receiving a negative answer, they refuse to assume the sole responsibility of their children’s school problems or failure.
- they transfer this responsibility to the educational system, in order to put the French society and its school in front of their own contradictions and judgments on Youth with immigrant background. On the one hand, the lack of integration is regretted; on the other hand, the access to good educational environment is denied.
- feeling of helplessness all the stronger since they are reluctant to appeal officially.
a classical evaluation of the reform would conclude that it has been inefficient, regarding both the benefit for disadvantaged pupils and the claimed increase of opportunities. But beyond that, the reform has a deeper impact:

- on the more intense hierarchization of schools and competition between them
- on the perception of discrimination which has grown even more because of frustrated expectations

the increase of resentment and feeling of discrimination is mainly produced by the opacity of the administrative process. Other researches show the same mechanism concerning affirmative action for access to higher education or the process of admission in selective high schools. The more opaque the measure, the higher the possibility of interpreting the result in terms of ethno-racial discrimination. The contrast with the US situation is very significant.

residential segregation in Paris is moderate, and the majority of neighborhoods are mixed to some extent. The destabilization of the school system induced by the reform, and the stimulation it introduces for parents to search for a better school, may become factors of increased segregation and less social mix in the future.