

ELITE SCHOOLS AND THEIR SOCIAL PLACE: THE BULGARIAN CASE

VALENTINA MILENKOVA
MAXIM MOLHOV

The present article is focused on a research of school choice under Bulgarian conditions that becomes possible through:

- the degree of parents' participation in the decision making;*
- the students' and parents' expectations for a good start of children and the belief that the given school will secure prosperity;*
- the readiness of children to follow the choice where parents have a decisive word.*

All these determinants (of choice) are influenced by students' as well as by parents' opinions and statuses.

Bulgarian elite schools are analysed in the present article and a thesis is developed that economic and cultural priorities inherited by families are transformed into school priorities in the education process. Different facets of the elite schools in the years of transition are followed up, and the main accent is put on their students: as social background and environment, achievements, propensity to future education and values, cultural capital.

The analysis is based on several surveys carried out by the authors in the period 1996–2005 concerning the Bulgarian elite schools and their social actors. One major conclusion is that the elite school is a response to “social errand” for formation of an elite; these schools support continuity between parents and children, expressing themselves as an institutional mechanism of socialization which is nearest to family aspirations and habitus, representing an investment transmitted within generations.

***Keywords:** elite schools, cultural capital, social mobility, education.*

The choice of school is a rule that establishes the landmarks for future initiatives of the individuals. The option for a certain school takes place in a time period the parents' influence over their children is strong and it is connected with the family status and its political, moral and cultural characteristics. The school choice is actually ruled by specific determinants of parents' social and educational identity, but it is also dependent of economic and financial living conditions. The hierarchic nets of places, contacts and information guarantee possibilities for an access to schools, specialties and professions (Grusky, 2008), because whatever wider the social base of education becomes, whatever equality of opportunities is seemingly created, a hermetic structure of elite education and professions is

Adresa de contact a autorului: Valentina Milenkova, South-West University of Blagoevgrad, 66 Ivan Michailov st., 2700, Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria, e-mail: vmilenkova@gmail.com.

preserved – inaccessible to some and attainable to others. In that sense, even when there is no expressed partiality to selection of students, its social character is preserved due to social definiteness of educational attainments (DiMaggio, 1982). Through the internal mechanisms of selection, the educational system sanctions and deepens the preliminary transformation of family privileges into educational ones. That is why the seeming of academic criteria as impartial actually realizes defensive functions concerning the existing public order (DiMaggio, 1979). One of the concepts substantiating the role of school in the process of reproduction of social inequalities is cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). Cultural capital as a system of implicit and deeply internalized values and resources transferred to generations is influenced by social class, race (ethnos) and parents' education (Lareau and Weinger, 2003). Cultural capital examined as particular cultural practices, activities and resources concerns school results, educational attainments and future social individual choices (Ganzeboom et al., 1990; Kalmijn and Kraaykaamp, 1996; Dumais, 2002; DiMaggio and Usem, 1978).

The *Bulgarian educational system* does not make exception from the general case of reproduction in some of its actions, while directing children towards one school or another follows a conscientious parent estimation and availability of capital – cultural and economic. In this respect, school success attains a symbolic image. We have to mention here that the variability of choices is strongly influenced by the model of the already existing family statuses. For example, the most uncompromising in following their schedules, the straightest forward are the intellectuals.

It is well known that exactly that social group clearly and distinctly understands the sense and value of education, notwithstanding the endured truth that (under Bulgarian conditions) the high educational status not always presupposes a highly paid position and prosperity in society. Nevertheless, the inertia of habitudes is so strong that they could hardly imagine any alternative of their children education; the latter (at least in parents' idea of good education) has to be obligatorily obtained at a foreign language school, in elegant surroundings of pairs.

The preservation of those ideas is supported by the fact that intellectuals as a social group do not, in general, dispose of the resources of the economically prosperous and well-to-do strata, for which private schools are affordable, easy and secure option for their children education. What is the situation with low status categories of poor and uneducated or with educated though poor social groups? Lack of resources for private lessons and preparation isolates those persons and their children as not likely candidates for an elite education. Among them there are such individuals who are not concerned at what school, respectively in what environment their children would find themselves. There are some others, who are clearly aware of the importance and the necessity of favorable start coming with the good education. However, due to lack of resources to support a living standard and conditions that preceding the admission to a foreign language school, those families could not be real competitors.

In all cases, though, entrance exams for the elite schools after the 7th grade exactly present the first confrontation with the reality of stratification in a child's life, showing the high and unattainable level for some and its easy overcoming for others.

The selection after the 7th grade is the first real trial, not only formally for the child, it is also a symbol of the real social labyrinths of poverty and lack of good conditions for education and living, from the one side and wealth, guaranteeing its representatives a chance for an individual prosperity, from the other.

One could clearly witness how social differentiation is expressed even at the “entrance” of the school system (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 2007). Of course, that does not necessarily mean that the children follow the life course which their parents had planned out for them. It is a fact that overall child's performance at the primary school (with private language lessons as a rule) and later on at the grammar school is, actually, a preparation for the forthcoming exams. The choice of an educational institution after 7th grade reproduces some family characteristics and also surrounds children with predictable outcomes, in the sense of status parents' aspirations. Parents' ideas for the choice of a school are actually filtered through common group perspective and family experience. Parents do not make their choice under equal cultural and material resources (Grusky, 2008).

Here, of course, it may be argued that the individual's behavior is to a greater extent a fruit of his/her particular choice and it is exactly that choice that destroys the scheme of education determined by parents. That is because there are possible cases of ascending mobility (a movement from lower educational status to higher one) as well as opposite cases. However, it is a certain fact that high status families¹, even in the cases of not so acceptable choice of their children, apply long, continuous and stable efforts to turn back the children to favorable, promising and preferred by parents' institutional niches. On the contrary, families of a lower social status have difficulties to cope with a socially unacceptable choice made by their children. From one side, they lack cultural capital to avert the descending movements of the individual, and from the other side, they do not have an alternative to offer their children and which to withstand.

In an educational market, control is implicit and here, school has to offer training expected by parents, so that it would guarantee continuity of family bringing up and expectations (Brown and Scase, 1990). The nature of that guarantee is determined by school traditions' reputation and for parents that means that, in “buying” reputation, they diminish the risk for their child not to succeed in life. More important, the different groups enter the market with different limitations on material and cultural capital. Which groups will be acting successfully on the market depends not so much on the participation in itself, but more on the cultural capital, on the knowledge of the rules of the game by the “customers”.

Part of the school reputation is determined by career development of the trainees and graduates, who become accomplished in society, because, in fact, the guarantee school gives is that it recruits the appropriate statuses. The circumstances

¹ In the ideal case, one can define high status families as those combining both cultural and economic capital, but rather often at least one of the components may be absent. The important prerequisite is that they have the potential to react and prevent their children – either thanks to their high educational level (as the most significant element of their cultural capital) or thanks to their economic qualification.

connected with the “implicit agreement” combine the diminishing of risk both for the educational institution and for parents as well. Under those conditions, price would follow operationally competition market – legitimate or not, but always efficient and well organized. Thus “education market” (Ball et al., 1997) might be understood uniquely in social terms, i.e. it works perfectly due to the nature of the social structure it supports and not because it stands for the perfect competition. Educational values, embodied into mechanisms of educational system urge parents and students to compete for places at high quality schools – they choose to take part in that competition and so they become part of the reproduction of the dominant culture (Bowles and Gintis, 1976): when they value one type of education and not another; when they tolerate particular skills and qualification, which actually are artefacts. School choice is one of the significant biographical acts, and, as Giddens stated, the choice connects “power” and “stratification” (Giddens, 1995). It is important to put an accent on diverse institutional nets in which children involve as well as on to the parents' effort to guide their children's success in specific fields.

Through the following analysis, we are going to try and show how cultural capital, inherited through family and incorporated into children, is transferred to the educational institutions, which tolerate a particular type of social profile and socialization, which ultimately leads to the reproduction of the capital.

THE “ELITE SCHOOLS” MODEL

In general, characteristic features of elite schools are: high level of selection, high quality of training and homogeneous composition of pupils. It is an honour for many people to send their children to an elite school – a sign of prestige in society. That is why the term “elite school” represents also a social appraisal, because it produces definite type of “aristocracy” and privileges. The social function of those schools is to create and sustain an elite through the relations between training, selection, power and ways of supporting those preferences. At the elite schools, nets of contacts between schoolmates take a specific place, constituting the idea of selection as a part of the “brand”. Just because of that, elite schools arise social interest – by high competition at the “entrance”, by typical subcultures created as a result of selection, by social composition of the trained individuals. And because the idea of stratification of the system, of the place of the individual at the position, structure is perceived as a socialization principle, as an important training mechanism, a moment dominating education, as far as the creation of an elite reflects not only on students, “who feel promised a good future” (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1970), but also on the others, destined to occupy lower levels of social hierarchy.

Elite schools in Bulgaria

There were no elite secondary schools until 1944, under Bulgarian conditions. Having in mind the low level of education of the population, secondary schools classes in themselves represented a serious application for erudition and elitism, as

few could reach them. The population was mainly rural, with little traditions in the field of education; maintenance of schools turned to be an expensive undertaking. Statistical data indicated that, in 1922, out of the 5 009 school buildings available for primary schools, only 1 692 were suitable. The 3 313 rest were only half-fit or absolutely unsuitable (Vankov, 1921). The Law of People's Education from 1924 intensified the tendency towards classical and humanitarian training in high schools. In 1934, in many towns, secondary schools were closed and schools of two classes (4th and 5th grade) were created, while full secondary schools were left only in some bigger towns (Atanassov, 1977: 317). There were also private schools; besides, "big wigs" children – those of doctors, lawyers, and politicians – studied abroad.

Socialist state started the formation of its own elite after 1944. An important part of its training was teaching of a Western language. Thus, naturally, foreign language schools turn into institutions occupied with a secondary selection, where they train mainly children of Party staff and functionaries. That tendency was preserved in the following decades. In the years after 1990, foreign language schools appeared to become more open and more meritocratic, but they were in no lesser extent dependent of private lessons and financial privileges of parents.

Nowadays, the most important specific feature of elite schools in Bulgaria is that they train students admitted through the trial of numerous entry exams. In that sense, elite schools² are foreign language schools, mathematical high schools, art schools, some vocational schools, where high competition between candidates presupposes a high degree of selection. At the same time, another indicator for the definition of an elite school can be derived: the number of the candidates for those schools. In the last five years, 71% of the candidates in the City of Sofia after the 7th grade have indicated among their first five preferences several foreign language schools – the German Language High School, the First English Language High School, the Spanish Language High School, the Second English Language High School, the French Language High School. Subsequently, the entrance grades for those schools were the highest – in that order³. Thus, selective process becomes possible and standing for meritocracy becomes a reality, just because of the great number of candidates and one can select the best among them, in that case, the individuals with the highest grades.

The secondary education in foreign languages is substantially directed towards more detailed instruction and young people who are oriented towards it go there on their own will, with different motivation, but always with the conscience that the education they get is something necessary and important for their individual existence and for their value system.

² The notion of an "elite school", according to **teachers** from a field study of private schools in 2003, was determined by: "qualitative choice of students" at the first place, followed by "material basis" and the availability of "highly qualified teachers" (Boyadjieva, 2003).

According to parents, elite school is that with "a steady place". In the educational system, guarantees: "successful passing" to a higher level, has its "own image", "academic and well-meaning atmosphere" (Boyadjieva, 2003).

³ For that reason, for the following analysis under the notion of elite schools we shall be having in mind foreign language schools.

For all these reasons, it is interesting to study the process of choice at contemporary elite language schools, to observe the background and the environment where students study and teachers teach. Such a study would permit to follow the technological function of elite formation, respectively, the reproducing role of school. On the other hand, it is necessary to establish whether, and to what extent, the elite schools respond to the idea of “equality of educational opportunities”; do they give a signal that they create and maintain conditions for that?

Basic features of elite schools

The definition of elite schools is developed at two levels:

- Family section, connected with the origin of their disciples: educational, professional and economic profile of the social environment.
- Institutional section, connected with the selection, spirit of competition, professionalism of teachers; and what is consequently reflected in general–competitive skills of graduates.

Elite schools show the following important features, which distinguish them substantially from the other secondary educational institutes⁴:

1. High degree of selectivity in the admission of pupils;
2. Competitive environment and great competitive power of graduates of foreign language schools in continuing their education at higher schools;
3. A specific individual profile of teachers, combining high professionalism with higher expectations and demands from students.

We are going to explore them one by one.

Family section

As a result of a survey done in 2005 on 360 students chosen randomly from German, English, Spanish and French language high schools in Sofia (90 pupils from each school) it was established that for 61.1% pupils (N=220), their parents were also graduates of a foreign language school⁵. In addition to those data we shall show some results from the survey (realized following “experimental design” schedule) carried out in 1996 at three foreign language: English, French and German schools and at two comprehensive schools – No. 81 and No. 40 (comprising the control-group) in Sofia⁶. The subject of analysis was the milieu – family and school, as well as its

⁴ The idea belongs to Boyadjieva (2003)

⁵ The first author, using as a main research technique a standardised interview with students, carried out the survey; we shall focus on the education and profession of parents in more detail later on.

⁶ Control-group was important for comparing results. There were 100 students and 10 teachers from each school to be surveyed. The methodology included standardised interview with teachers, group interview with students, information of the state of the school given by schoolmasters, expert opinions from experts from Regional Inspectorate in Sofia on 10 school subjects. The survey “Socialisation at the elite foreign language schools was carried out by a team from the Institute of Sociology: V. Milenkova, R. Stoilova, M. Molhov; consultant – P. Boyadjieva. The National Scientific Research Fund at the Ministry of Education and Science funded research.

features: education and profession of parents, specific characteristics of educational process and environment, teachers and children's achievements.

Education of respondents' parents

– fathers: 91.8% from the English language school are with higher education, 96.6% from the German language school and 91.2% from the French language school, while 45.7% from School No. 81 and 43.9% from school No. 40 are with higher education;

– mothers: with higher education – 87.6% from the English language school, 90.9% from the German language school, 90.2% from the French language school as opposed to 46% from School No. 81 and 41.7% from School No. 40.

Profession

Respondents from foreign language schools parents were mainly intellectuals (over 85%) – doctors (25%), teachers (4%), engineers (7%), diplomats (3%), lawyers (21%), economists (9%), scientists (5%), journalists (11%), 12% ran their own business; compared to less than 30% of the representatives of the intellectuals from the control-group of schools No. 81 and 40 (Sofia).

It is clear from those data that individuals coming from the group of intellectuals were not only eventual candidates, but also the most frequent users of foreign language training. And that is so, because intellectuals in any case guarantee a greater proximity to those linguistic and social practices supporting them, while generation traditions and life styles affordable to those families gave significant advantage to their representatives.

The presence of high rank civil officials as well as of the representatives of middle and big business among students' from foreign language elite schools families is considerable. A number of the interviewed from the English language school refused to reveal their daily allowances, considering the question as too "intimate" or "not to be commented" (the quoted phrases were from the comments of respondents)⁷. Making reference to their fathers' profession, those particular respondents have noted "board of managers of a certain firm", "general manager", "Foreign Ministry", "Diplomatic Corps", "commercial representative" etc. In general, though, respondent stated that "money is enough".

Institutional section

Selection

This aspect of the analysis concerns the selection of students as one of the most important indicators of an elite school. Looking back to the admission of student candidates after 7th grade in the last years one could witness the tendency of foreign language schools to admit children with highest or near to the highest entry examination grades. Let us follow the picture of:

⁷ One has to bear in mind that it was in 1996 and financial differences were a sensible theme for the Bulgarian society.

Results from entry exams:

72.7% of the interviewed from the English language school, 57.8% from the German and 55.9% from the French language schools have had excellent marks, compared to 21.4% from School No. 81 and 29.6% from School No. 40.

Through selection for several years, individuals were put in an environment of strong competition, which has to be overcome daily as a consequence of the principle of “contest mobility” (Turner, 1960: 855–862). The latter is structure defining for contemporary schools, describing the model of permanent self-proof, made objective through numerous tests and examination until the highest grade of the educational institution. Thus, attitudes towards new, more serious battles have been “openly” and “covertly” constructed. The resilience to exams, tests and check-ups tempers students from the elite schools to a much greater extent than their mates from other schools. As a result, elite schools are an example of combining the “reproduction” and “meritocratic” model as far as tolerating “achievement” they organize the training in accordance with “competitive mobility”, although school successes are influenced by social origins as far as “contest” functions as reproductive mechanism, its ultimate effect means mobility.

Year marks

74% of the pupils from the English language school, 69% from the German language school and 71.8% of the pupils from the French language school got excellent marks for the preceding year, corresponding to 29% from School No. 81 and 35.8% from School No. 40. The obstacle “examination” can be overcome only in case of systematic and thorough preparation, of hard work, of serious attitude⁸. Here are some opinions, expressed by teachers at elite schools:

“The level is very high here. Our pupils do study, because, in principle, they are among the best children, and competition is quite hard. However, the level went down a little in the recent years. In my times, I have also graduated this school⁹, things were much harder and stricter” (teacher, foreign language school).

“I am satisfied with work at this school. Earlier, I taught at a local one, the difference is tremendous. We could not make them enter the class, at ordinary schools, not to speak of studying” (a teacher, foreign language school).

In this context, it is understandable that in estimating the statement “it is easy to get good marks at that school” most of the persons from foreign language school (52.5%) give the answer: “completely disagree” and “quite disagree” (28.2%) compared to greater accumulations at “neutral” and “agree” categories with persons from the control-group (general education schools) – “neither agree nor disagree” – 35% and “quite agree” – 41.5%. Thus, the attitude towards preparation for lessons and towards studies was an important element of the theoretical model of the survey.

In that direction, a special battery of questions was prepared: several statements were offered to respondents to be estimated through a five degrees scale:

⁸ It is a fact confirming hard preparation that 63% from foreign language schools take private lessons; for the control-group, this percentage is 20.

⁹ One could note as a sustainable tendency to admit graduates of the same schools as teachers.

- When I prepare for school, I study only the necessary;
- I use additional material for almost all subjects;
- I use my time for things more interesting than preparation for school;
- I never enter class unprepared;
- School is the most important thing in my life.

The analysis of variance with a factor – “school type” and dependent variables – the scales of estimated statements established that mean value for general education schools was 14.21, while for foreign language schools it was 17.31, which gave $F = 31.32$, $p < 0,0000$. That meant that there existed statistically significant relation between school type and declared opinions.

Socialization, taking place at elite schools, is connected with the construction of some general social schemes of thinking and attitude, appearing through prosperity models. During the survey (of 1996), we suggested the respondents several prerequisites for success, which they had to estimate using a five degree scale: “social (family) origins”, “steady work and diligence”, “high education”, “good relations and connections”, “good chance”, “professional qualities and initiative”. The suggested conditions, in fact, inspire two polar models of social development:

- “Traditional”, with a social code “family origins”;
- “Modern”, with a key word “individual ambitions”.

Under the “modern” model of development, education is the most significant factor for selection and mobility, for stimulation of personal ambitions, while under the other – social dynamics and individual prosperity are projections of origins. The belief that education moves forward into social hierarchy demands from the individual to rely mainly on his/her own abilities to cope with things. When relying on their own skills and habits, people succeed due to their constant efforts and not to their social origins. On the basis of preferences stated by respondents, concerning conditions for a career, one can suppose at what degree and who are intended to see the validity of one or another model of development. Definitely the highest accumulations are observed at the condition “professional qualities and initiative” as a prerequisite for ascension: 94% of elite schools students agree with that. Only 20.8% agree with the thesis that “social (family) origins” is a factor for success, at present”. Accumulations with all the other suggested conditions are about 75–85% degrees of agreement. Results show that, at present, there is at school both modern and traditional models of prosperity and mobility, in support of the availability of “reproduction” and “mobility” in elite schools.

Competition skills of graduates

In regard to selection and competitive spirit of elite schools, it is relevant that almost all of foreign language schools' graduates apply every year for a higher school; more than one third of the university students, in 1994, graduated foreign language school¹⁰. Schoolmasters informed that, in the last five years (1990–1995), about 90–95% of students from the French language school were admitted to

¹⁰ Data are from a sociological survey “Needs of University Education in a situation of social transformation”, carried out in 1994 by a team headed by G. Dimitrov.

Universities; the same number from the German language school; 96% from the English language school graduates; and from the control-group – 10–15% of graduates of School No. 40 and about 20% of graduates from School No. 81¹¹.

In the last two years, the admission to higher schools of foreign language schools graduates is almost 100%. Moreover, after the year 2000, the rate of those continuing their education at universities of Western Europe and the United States considerably increased and most of them were mainly from foreign language schools. Obviously, in comparison to other secondary schools, elite schools prepare their pupils better to cope with their university entrance exams. The reason for this might be that elite schools socialize a deeply impregnating meritocratic standard to their students, stimulating them to new achievements.

Professionalism of teachers

We are going to quote some opinions of experts in different subjects from Sofia School Inspectorate, obtained within the framework of the cited survey of 1996:

“The teachers of foreign language schools are better professionals, which is proved by the high interest in acquiring knowledge from the part of students” (expert in Chemistry).

“The teachers of foreign language schools are with a qualification class, good professionals and model teachers from Sofia University” (expert in Physics).

“One can mention good teachers' names both from language or general education schools. However, textbook and/or handbook authors, reviewers and creators of school aids and scholarships are mostly teachers from foreign language schools” (expert in Bulgarian language).

The fact that foreign school teachers are good professionals is proved, apart from the quotes above, also by the higher number of working hours (almost double in comparison to the number of working hours of teachers in general education schools). Teachers from language schools devote to extra-school work in comparison with teachers from general education schools. In the same time, they hold better qualifications (teachers with I and II qualification class and academic degree are almost double in number in comparison to their colleagues from general education schools). It can be added here that a majority of foreign language school teachers are ready to participate in writing or reviewing of a textbook – 60% for the English language school, 60% for the German language school, 70% for the French language school, while for the general education this rate is under 50% – 40% for School No. 81 and 30% for School No. 40.

Teachers from language schools were categorically more satisfied with their work, compared to other teachers¹². For that reason, respondents from elite schools

¹¹ Data are from the survey “Socialisation at Elite Foreign Language Schools”, carried out in 1996 by a team headed by V. Milenkova.

¹² Completely unsatisfied: non-language – 9.5%; language – 0%
quite unsatisfied: non-language – 38.1%; language – 19.2%
quite satisfied: non-language – 42.9; language – 61.5%
completely satisfied: non-language – 9.5%; language – 19.2%.

said that if they had an opportunity of choice, they would choose to become teachers again¹³; here we are quoting some opinions:

“I like my work. I think that children are good, ambitious. I taught at this school for years and in my opinion, it is reasonable to put it in the elite group.” (teacher, English language school).

“Although my teaching career has been quite long, I am here for a short time and I can make comparisons. The difference is formidable. Here, there are no absences, everybody is motivated, they study and they are ambitious. You cannot imagine what a local school looks like (even with admission); there they come to school with difficulty, not to speak of studies or ambitions. I think that a teacher can easily appreciate the results of his/her work when he/she is working with clever children” (teacher, German language school).

The high professionalism of teachers from elite schools is a consequence of the created framework of expectations in society, a sort of an “agreement” between them and the high status social groups. In that sense, high professionalism of teachers from elite schools is not accidental, it is “a social order” (expert in Bulgarian language and literature).

Therefore, we can say that:

– The foreign language secondary schools are identified to a greater extent than general education schools as places for confirming meritocratic standards, supported by teachers' demands as well. Of course one cannot idealize, but in general, on the background of the decreasing quality of education, (belief shared by all the Inspectorate experts, as well as by the interviewed teachers), foreign language schools were to a lesser extent influenced by devaluation of educational grades and marks.

– The label “Elite school” expresses itself in all the elements of school environment – teachers, education quality, and students' abilities. In the process of thoughts, we somehow get lost in what is prerequisite and what is a consequence, what is cause and what is the result, as able students demand and suppose highly qualified teachers, and the latter stimulate the intellectual development of their students, their aspirations and ambitions. But that is only at the first glance because within the framework of an elite school predominant place and sensible role is given to selection, starting at the “entrance”, passing through the training process and at the “exit”. It is organically connected with the notion of capital. Elite is defined as such compared to other social actors, thanks to that it exceeds them and the key to its excellence is capital – economic and cultural. Thus, elite–selection–capital produces a chain of connections, showing interdependence, determination and fusion.

– Culture capital of families in elite schools is specific, but it is also a preference, because it becomes a natural prerequisite for admission and educational achievements of children. Cultural capital ensures a step forward to its owners and their chances for prosperity. In another words, real differences, established by social

¹³ “I would become a teacher again”: non-language – 40%; language – 60.7%

“I would quit teaching”: non-language – 10%; language – 7.1%

“I would seek for another job”: non-language – 50%; language – 32.1%.

and cultural quality of families are transformed in the process of training into school differences conducting to achievements, realized and demonstrated in the classroom.

Cultural capital

We are going to describe the *cultural capital of the families*, in order to outline starting characteristic features of the children trained in elite schools. Data were obtained through a survey of 60 children from different classes and grades from the First English language school and the German language school (30 from each school). The survey was conducted in March 2006. Theoretical model in general was based on the operationalization of cultural capital (Sullivan, 2001).

Cultural capital goes along three distinct dimensions:

1. Individual educational experience and resources (educational capital), making easier the acquisition of definite cultural tastes;
2. Family environment, where cultural tastes are transferred from parents' educational experience;
3. Cultural tastes and activities.

Cultural tastes and activities (in accordance with already discussed in the first part theoretical ideas of Bourdieu) can be manifested in many forms: choice of clothes, cars, films (watched), books, food etc. We focus on several of them, trying to show the relation between cultural knowledge and practices, on the one hand and economic and educational capital, on the other hand. This is considered as fundamental structural principle of the social space.

In the present survey, cultural capital has the following dimensions (Sullivan, 2001):

- parents' education, profession (auxiliary indicator: means of life);
- material environment at home – furnishing, appliances, clothes, consumption;
- participation in cultural activities, cultural tastes and habits;
- health services.

Material surroundings and furnishing – includes: dwellings (country house), TV set (color), washing machine, heating, cooking stove, video (DVD), MP3 player, computer, car (number of).

Consumption includes: use of meat, fruit, vegetables, and pasta products.

Participation in cultural activities includes: books (available in family library – number) and book reading; most frequently watched TV programmes, channels, broadcasts; going to cinema (monthly); holidays (yearly – number); excursions (yearly – number); travels abroad (in general).

Health services – which is a very important indicator for parents' status.

Besides that, the number of family members was also taken into account.

The questionnaire was organized into three parts:

- the first part included information about families, material environment, housing, furnishing, clothes, books;
- the second part concerned parents: education, profession, cultural interests, tastes and activities;

– the third part was devoted to children: cultural interests, leisure, preferred entertainment places, cultural tastes.

The respondents

Students between 15 to 19 years old have been interviewed: 36 girls and 24 boys from the two language schools.

Families

The most widespread were three member families (46.6%) and four member ones (50%), 3.33% of the children live with a single parent.

Education (fathers)

93.3% of parents hold a higher education degree, 5% –semi-higher education degree (college).

Material environment – furnishing.

All interviewed persons declared that their families lived in their own house; half of them had a country house too.

All interviewed persons declared that their families owned:

TV set (more than one).

Washing machine.

Cooking stove, microwave stove.

Video (DVD), a car; 46.6% had two cars in the family.

All the interviewed had MP3 player, computer and Internet.

Consumption concerned use of meat, fruit, vegetables and pasta products: respondents stated that their families consumed all those kinds of food, but they could not point how much in a week.

Clothes – the greatest rate of persons – 53.3% – indicated that they sought to buy almost exclusively design clothes; 30% of the respondents argued that it was not so important where they were buying their clothes, provided they were following fashion.

Participation in cultural activities included: books (approximate number in family library), TV programmes, broadcasts, attendance of cinema, theatre, concerts, exhibitions, opera, holidays (number), excursions, travel abroad.

Books:

– 25% of the respondents had in their home libraries up to 100 books;

– 58.3% of the respondents had 100 to 150 books;

– 16.7% of the interviewed students had more than 150 books.

The respondents declared that they did not have much time for reading (excluding obligatory books from the school curricula). Reading was not very popular with young people. They preferred Internet as a source of information in all fields; Skip as a virtual communication means. Parents (according to students) read mainly newspapers.

TV programmes and broadcasts:

The most preferred were musical channel and broadcasts (83.3%), sports (48.3%), films (51.7%). In general respondents from the surveyed elite schools preferred to spend their leisure time in front of the computer, on the Internet or at parties with friends, or else in clubs (18–19 years of age). Parents (following the

students' information) have interest towards political and comment broadcasts, films and serials, some were interested in sports.

Cinema was preferred to theatre (38.3%), musical concerts were attended by 80% of the respondents, the least attended were opera performances (16.7%) and exhibitions (20%); school takes an active part in those activities, individual preferences were mainly oriented towards clubs. Parents go to cinema (55%), theatre (40%), concerts (35%); the most preferred time spending was with family friends (58.3%).

Holidays:

They preferred camps, organized by schools during winter and summer holidays (58.3%); 33.3% go to summer vacation with their parents.

Excursions and travel abroad:

All of them have travelled abroad – once (36.7%), twice (33.4%), more than twice (29.9%), with their families or through school.

Health services:

All of them had family doctor.

One can conclude from the data, that families of the students of elite schools (English and German language schools) enjoy a high standard of life, high over the average for the country.

Moreover, educational attainments (marks from the previous year) are connected with cultural practices and activities – the most preferred were cinema and computers as a source of information and formation of culture, contacts with literature were reduced to books, obligatory for school studies, substantially less were the cases of “voluntary” book-reading. Books bought personally by students were again connected with the training process and teachers' demands; paper editions bought on their own will were mainly youth magazines. That is in support of the fact that, as in general, concerts and exhibition attendance were among the less popular cultural activities of parents and children, as well. It seems that children accept parents' environment as a background to their development, which they try to perceive as independent of parents, respectively they presented it as such. Children strive towards an existence not dominated by parents' tastes, preferences and appraisals – with a greater remoteness and difference: that is the benefit of growing up.

On the other hand, better conditions (mainly material) were taken for granted – computers, Internet, travels abroad, clothing were not thought of as something exquisite, because they were common to the environment in which they live. We have to mention though, that the greater part of cultural practices and activities were realized again thanks to financial spending, standing at the fundament of taste distinctions. Thus, cultural capital of parents is transferred as status privilege and resources to generations, and so, conditions for the individual development are created. It is important to note that participation in cultural activities (of children) passes through communication within circles of friends. They preferred peers from school, mostly classmates: so the thesis of Bourdieu about controlled homogenizing of the environment and establishing contacts within its framework was confirmed. So, we can conclude that parents' status culture influence only indirectly, and only in some cases, directly. Parents' participation in the organization of children leisure time

is superseded by the net of mates, starting with schoolwork and transferred to free time and entertainment, too. Actually, homogeneity is one of the crucial characteristics of elitism.

Institutional life

A decisive role for the integration to school world and for the adoption of its model of organization play the different forms of collective life, leading to establishing of generally shared standards and socializing, to the formation of a feeling of belonging. As a result, a true general culture is created – an ensemble of legitimate knowledge and opinions, manners, typical school slang phrases, forms of jokes, ways of movement (Bourdieu, 1989). In practice, the formation of solidarity between schoolmates is a continuous process, taking several years. Institutional life is directed towards bringing views closer, towards adaptation of individuals to collective activities and tolerance. In building up the conscience of the entity, the individual seeks to take it into account and submit to it. Socialization is connected with a whole system of durable schemes of thinking, of perceiving, and of spirit of life, which motivate students in their acts. Ultimately, the deep and intimate sense of elite school is to carry on socialization without any outside influences, without perplexing random and purposely bad contacts. Selection aims at bringing together a homogeneous group and the main concern of parents is ensuring their children the necessary economic capital to guarantee conditions for its preservation and reproduction, to create those prerequisites for their heirs to meet their mates. School is aimed at producing of such social actors, recognizing and conforming to limits, putting them in or out of community. Selection aims at demonstrating the superiority of the chosen, at legitimizing their distinction. Thus, individuals are distributed in classes as homogeneously as possible. And notwithstanding competition, opposing students, a definite solidarity and bringing together “similar to similar” (Bourdieu, 1989) is developed.

Moreover, the aim is also to create a new community, members of which take part in the symbolic capital of the group. Entering an elite school presumes several years of training, the task of which is a definite type of socialization – creation of a routine, adoption of definite rules and traditions, valid for all pupils. Through preliminary preparation, emotional and cognitive attitudes are constructed, because the acts exerted upon the novice change the ideas the latter has of him and the others. According to Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1989) institutional symbols in contemporary societies fulfil a function very close to that of nomination habits and the very name of the school, a nomination act, which shows to those given a particular social destiny. The succession of acts of introduction is connected with imposing of mutually shared standards of recognizing of their own position and its difference or identity with that of the other individuals, because taming into traditions of community is a slow and continuous process, presupposing conformity with hierarchy, with authority, with strict rules and norms established decades and, sometimes, even centuries before.

The ultimate effect consists of integration in school, in adoption of principles of school life. Repeated many times through the years, weeks, days, they start living unconsciously within individuals. Strict observation of the order is a part of the tolerated everyday rhythm, observed by teachers, students, and administration. Without that, those schools would lose part of their specific subculture, refinement, feeling of self-respect and socialization and maybe the strength of the established connections would not be so great, and nostalgia, often connecting former classmates would not be so deep. The subculture of elite schools creates a feeling of access to knowledge, unfamiliar to uninitiated. At the same time, it is aimed to construction of a consensus, necessary for the self-consciousness, future identification and mutual support between disciples.

Consensus is a way of imposing the “closure” of social limits. And although non-formal training seems to look somewhat scattered (after Bourdieu, 1989), it turns to be extremely important, because it presents a formation aiming at producing an elite, initiated, recognized and conscious of its dignity to be such. Thus, selecting those defined as the most gifted, school increases their self-esteem. Training at elite schools is aimed at adoption of a symbolic construction of world. That process may be absolutely decentralized and may not include any specific teleology, although it is influenced by the specific cultural activity of the individuals. Ultimately, symbolic forms ensure the direct context of socialization, confirm personal identity and “create a feeling for things”.

That invisible act is realized through the effect of status definition, deriving from attachment to a place and position (Bourdieu, 1974). Creation of continuity of individual and communal time constructs correspondence between system of values and norms and the existing external order. This essential model is one of the possible means of recognition of mechanisms, allowing school to attract individuals, found themselves “in”, making them conforming to its demands for perpetuation of the available structures. That is why it may be said that socialization at elite schools succeeds thanks to the fact that individuals are, in a certain sense, shaped after the expectations of the institution itself. Every one of typical school acts – exams, praises, high marks, prizes, are at one and the same time results and causes for school achievements, which, in their turn, stimulates recognition of education values and, thus, impels a round process.

In that context, we have to underline the policies of the administrations of the respective foreign language secondary schools, where schoolmasters prefer to employ as teachers former graduates. When the first author had a talk with the schoolmistress of the First English language school she argued that it was very important for her that former pupils turned into educators can transfer that unchangeable experience. Besides, according to her, institutional spirit of the school was carried on exactly because of transfer of traditions, and teachers took an especially active part in the process. The wholesale training process in elite schools is aimed at constructing not just an engaged attitude towards real conditions, but at forming attitudes towards inclusion of actors in social processes and statuses, to which they feel attached. The set of principles, meanings, orientation, language

patterns of the participants in school interactions as a result of socialization behind school walls is reflected in particular act and behavioural attitudes. We have to bear in mind that school spirit is, by no means, arbitrary and independent. It is constructed and cultivated for years and, behind that reshaping of characters, of adapting individuals to communal life and specificity of collective activities and tolerance, stands the idea for the future and expectations about it. Elite schools deepen social differentiation as a product of two distinct forms of capital – economic and cultural. From the other side, they play a decisive role in structuring of economic and political elite and that is a means of understanding of the sources of power in society.

Earlier we suggested that elite schools respond to a “social task” for the formation and socialization of elite; that, in certain cases, they can support a definite element of continuity between fathers and children, in this country, as well. We especially emphasized the fact that 61% of students from the non-representative sample had parents who graduated from a foreign language school. That fact in itself is demonstrative of raising elite school in rank as a recognized institutional mechanism of socialization being nearest to family expectations and aspirations. In that aspect, we have followed up cultural capital including educational and professional profile of parents, cultural practices, activities and tastes, valid both for families and for children, as well. It turned out that disciples of elite schools have similar attitudes and they participate in similar cultural practices; it is not by chance that they gradually homogenize their environment in the years of training. This leads to the formation of a new community of socially related individuals which means that elite schools guarantee, along with acquiring knowledge, a construction of prerequisites for the formation of stable friend nets.

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Articolul de față este scris pe baza unei cercetări asupra modului de alegere a școlii, în Bulgaria, ce devine posibilă prin:
 – gradul de participare al părinților în cadrul deciziei;
 – așteptările elevilor și părinților privind un start bun al copiilor și credința că o anumită școală va asigura prosperitatea acestora;
 – gradul de pregătire al copiilor în a urma această alegere în care părinții au un cuvânt decisiv.

Toate aceste determinante sunt influențate atât de opiniile și pozițiile copiilor, cât și de ale părinților.

Școlile de elită din Bulgaria sunt analizate în acest articol și este dezvoltată teza că prioritățile economice și culturale moștenite de familii sunt transformate în priorități ale școlii, în procesul educațional. Sunt urmărite diferite aspecte ale școlii de elită în anii tranziției, accentul principal punându-se pe elevi: backgroundul social și de mediu, reușite, dispoziția spre educația viitoare și valori, capitalul cultural al acestora.

Analiza este axată pe cercetările mai multor autori desfășurate între 1996 și 2005 asupra școlilor de elită bulgare și pe actorii lor sociali. Una dintre concluziile principale este că școala de elită este un răspuns la „rătăcirile sociale” în scopul formării unei elite; aceste școli sprijină continuitatea dintre părinți și copii, exprimându-se ca mecanisme instituționale de socializare cele mai apropiate de aspirațiile și obiceiurile familiilor, reprezentând o investiție transmisă între și în cadrul generațiilor.

Cuvinte-cheie: școlile de elită, capital cultural, mobilitate socială, educație.

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