De school als spiegel van de omgeving : een geografische kijk op onderwijs
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Summary

The school as a mirror of the environment. A geographical view upon education.

Introduction

This investigation deals with the question to what extent school careers are influenced by their spatial environment at a local and regional level. So far, most research about school careers and education has been directed towards the parents’ influence (Jungbluth, 1985; Tesser, 1986; Dronkers, 1992; Dronkers & De Graaf, 1995). Consequently, most of this research considers this relationship especially from a historical point of view. Local and regional characteristics and differences are not taken into account and so the Dutch context is seen as one and the same. Because of this lack of knowledge, a research project has been carried out to stress the spatial aspects of this relationship. So, school careers in different spatial settings will be compared with each other.

First the relationship between the parental background and individual school careers was explored. Then was examined the extent to which this relationship is strengthened or weakened by local and regional characteristics. By means of existing theories some hypotheses were set up. With regard to the neighbourhood first we can consider the unequal availability and accessibility of schools and the lack of some types of education (Wilson, 1987). In poor areas this could result in a lean supply. Secondly the neighbourhood can function as a source of contacts with other residents. On the one hand, one can receive help and support. On the other hand, however, people can be influenced negatively by their social networks. Some tiny links with other social groups can offer possibilities to escape from poverty: The strength of weak ties (Granovetter, 1973; Wilson, 1987). In the third place some expectations about the culture of the neighbourhood were formulated. In deteriorated areas this influence will be negative. The culture of poverty will prevent a positive attitude towards education and employment (Lewis, 1966; Wilson, 1987). Fourthly, the phenomenon of stigma has been described (Wacquant, 1993). Pupils from areas with a bad reputation will experience difficulties in getting a good education in schools outside their own neighbourhood. The reputation of the neighbourhood is projected upon individual persons. With respect to the region, both structural and cultural traits can be distinguished. The structural elements contain information about the modernity of the labour market and the possibilities for highly educated people. It may be expected that the structure of the labour market will influence the education possibilities. Some regions function as an “escalator region” (Fielding, 1992). Also, school careers will be influenced by cultural characteristics. Interest in and appreciation of education will vary among regions. It will depend on the degree of modernisation (Hofstee, 1962). One may expect that school careers in regions with a modern labour market and a modern culture will proceed at a higher level than in other, more traditional regions.
Methods of examination

To verify the suppositions stated a research project was carried out in the cities of Amsterdam and Enschede in the Netherlands. These two cities resemble ideal types: on the one hand a central and modern region, on the other hand a peripheral and traditional region. Amsterdam, centrally located, has a heterogeneous population with a polarised educational level (both very highly and very poorly educated people), and a lot of employment in the high qualitative service-industry sector. Enschede shows the opposite: a (former) industrial town with rather few possibilities for more highly educated people, a peripheral location near the German border and a relatively homogeneous population with many poorly to moderately educated people. Within the cities of Amsterdam and Enschede, a selection of neighbourhoods and respondents was made with respect to the criteria of the so-called “Onderwijsvoorrangsbeleid” (OVB), a policy that gives extra money to primary schools with a lot of foreign and native children with a weak socio-economic background. There are two main groups: foreign children with poorly educated parents (“1.9 pupils”) and Dutch children with poorly educated parents (“1.25 pupils”). All other children are labelled as “1.0 pupils” and receive no extra money. Because of the heterogeneity of this last group, a division was made between “1.0 upper class pupils” (at least one of the parents has an education at a high level) and “1.0 modal pupils” (the remaining group). These groups are distributed unequally through the cities of Amsterdam and Enschede. In Amsterdam, the Vogelbuurt and Stadionbuurt have been selected as “1.9 neighbourhoods”, Nieuwendam as “1.25 neighbourhood” and the Concertgebouwbuurt as “1.0 neighbourhood”. In Enschede, Deppenbroek resembles the “1.9 neighbourhood”, Ribbelt the “1.25 neighbourhood” and Stokhorst the “1.0 neighbourhood”. In every neighbourhood selected, a primary school was asked to participate in the research. A primary school was selected that reflects the neighbourhood and its inhabitants. Schools are not independent of their environment, but are influenced by their environment in both a structural and cultural way.

The data with respect to the pupils were collected in two different periods. Shortly after the beginning of the research project, pupils of the last class of the selected primary schools have been questioned about their choice of a secondary school. To get a complete overview, it was necessary to question older pupils as well. Some lists of former pupils of the selected primary schools were used for this purpose. These youngsters were interviewed about their school career. Altogether, 396 pupils were interrogated during the first round. Two years later, the whole procedure was repeated. So, the school career could be followed for a longer period. In the second round, 329 respondents could be traced again; 177 pupils were interviewed face-to-face, 212 pupils were questioned by telephone. Some twenty per cent of the respondents dropped out, mainly the result of having moved to other neighbourhoods or towns.
Parental influence

There are two different views concerning the relationship between parental background and school career. The first view is known as mobilisation (Davis & Moore, 1945; Parsons, 1951; Blau & Duncan, 1967; Van Heek, 1968). It is supposed that the parental influence upon school careers is declining. “Independent” aspects such as intelligence and motivation play a more important part than some decades ago. Education can create social mobility and change existing social structures. The second view is known as reproduction (Bourdieu, 1973; Collins, 1975; Jencks, 1972). The supporters of this view claim that education reproduces existing social structures, especially by a cultural policy that benefits children with a higher cultural background. So, the relationship between the parents’ education and the school career of the children remains stable.

This contrast between mobilisation and reproduction has inspired me to distinguish four types of school careers. The first type belongs to the mobilisation thesis and is labelled “the rising school career”. The pupil gets a higher degree than his or her poorly educated parents. The second type and the third type are based upon the reproduction thesis. Here, a division was made between reproduction at a high level and reproduction at a low level. In case the pupil follows a school career that is comparable with his or her poorly educated parents, the school career is labelled “stagnant”. When the school career is comparable with that of the highly educated parents, the school career is labelled “consolidated”, because at this stage a higher education is not possible. The last option is called “the descending school career”. Children get a lower degree than their parents. This school career belongs neither to the mobilisation nor to the reproduction theory.

The various school choice motives match quite well with this characterisation. For pupils with a rising school career, school is in the first place meant to get a diploma. With a certificate, one can get a (good) job and earn money. Their school choice motives are very functional. Especially the school advice of the primary school teacher is important. Pupils with a descending school career are also oriented towards work, but experience school mainly as a waste of time and an obligatory obstacle. For them, school is not a way to get a better job on the long term. The stagnants can be divided into two very different groups with also very different school choice motives. So it is recommended to separate the stagnants in a problematic – and a not problematic part. The first group can be labelled as the potential drop outs of the school system. Their school choice motives are similar to the descending group. Lack of interest and resignation are characteristic for this group. The other group of stagnants with moderately educated parents is, however, inclined to maintain the status quo. This group is looking for proper, well-organised, schools with a “decent population” (not too many foreigners). They do not belong to the upper class, but do not want to be looked upon as lower social groups. Therefore, this group pays more attention to social motives in selecting a school. This is all the more true for the last group, the consolidating group. They focus upon schools where they can find the same people. For them, the social context of the school is extremely important. School time is an important stage in life, where you have to be prepared for the future. Not only by factual knowledge, but also by social knowledge. As they are
higher on the social ladder, they can permit themselves to pay relatively less attention to cognitive aspects and more to other aspects of a school.

It may be concluded that at the individual level the rising school careers can be found among a part of the second generation of foreign-born people (the 1.9 pupils). Although they are overrepresented in lower forms of secondary education, one third has an education at the highest level (havo/vwo). Another part of minority children, however, are faced with a lot of difficulties in getting their education. Some of them can be labelled as problematic stagnants. The backward position of many minority children has a lot to do with the fact that they are often compared to Dutch children. They have to compete with Dutch pupils for a suitable place on the labour market. Then they have often fewer chances. On the other hand, a comparison with the often very poorly educated parents makes it clear that on an average, the second generation has in principle a better starting point. In comparison with the parents, their social mobility is rather considerable.

The 1.25 pupils show a less optimistic result. This group consists more and more of a persistently remaining group. Three quarters of them has an education at the lowest level. There are only few children of this group visiting a grammar school. So this group has overwhelmingly reproducing school careers. The school careers of the upper class children also have a very reproducing character, but at a much higher level. Because most parents have a high education, it is impossible for these children to get a higher degree at this stage of life. Almost all visit a grammar school themselves (75 per cent), so their school careers have a rather consolidating character. The remaining group (the 1.0 modal pupils) has a clear heterogeneous character and, therefore, their school careers develop in a different way. The mavo is the most popular school type, so the school careers of these children are comparable with those of their parents. Their school careers are mainly labelled as non-problematic stagnant. Their participation in havo/vwo (37 per cent) is comparable with the average of all pupils questioned (41 per cent).

**Spatial influence**

In this research the question was asked to what extent the types of school careers described are influenced by spatial characteristics. The results show in the first place an influence at a regional level. School careers in the region of Enschede are weakened by the relatively low school advice given by primary school teachers. In Amsterdam, teachers advise their pupils to attend a higher level of education than they do in Enschede, even when the pupils have the same socio-economic background. The first explanation concerns the structure of the regional labour market. In a central and modern region like Amsterdam, highly educated people are needed because of the labour market. The regional culture has adapted itself to this structure: there is more interest in and appreciation of higher education than in a relatively peripheral and traditional region like Enschede. Sometimes this attitude can be exaggerated by parents and teachers, so that a risk of too “high advice” and even drop out may occur. In spite of this risk, the pupils in Amsterdam
stay during their school time at a relatively high level of education in comparison with their peers in Enschede. Therefore, sometimes it is rewarding too give high advice for the secondary school.

The industrial tradition of the region of Enschede has another effect upon school careers. Vocational training is relatively attractive and has a relatively strong position, especially at a moderate and higher level. This type of education prepares the pupils in a better way for the labour market in their region than general secondary education. At the lowest level of vocational training (vbo) the share in Amsterdam and Enschede is the same. One may wonder, however, why pupils choose this type of education. In Amsterdam negative motives prevail, in Enschede positive. In Amsterdam a lot of teenagers start their school careers at the mavo level (moderate general education), but are forced to move to vocational training after some years. In Enschede many pupils start their vocational training immediately after their primary school, so it may be expected that their choice for this type of schooling is more positively oriented.

In addition to the regional influence, the differences within the regions at the neighbourhood level were investigated, too. It was expected that this influence would be very negative in deteriorated areas and that school careers in these parts of town would develop very reproducing. The research makes it clear, however, that this influence has a rather neutral character (not positive, but not very negative either). On the other hand, the influence of the neighbourhood upon school careers is positive in well-to-do areas. The 1.0 moderate pupils, for example, follow a higher kind of education than their peers in other neighbourhoods. The school career of youngsters in poor neighbourhoods is, on the other hand, not more problematic than with comparable teenagers in more mixed areas. Besides, not all deteriorated areas are the same. Most striking in this respect is the difference between the Stadionbuurt on the one hand and the Vogelbuurt and Nieuwendam on the other hand. Although in socio-economic and ethnic terms the respondents do not differ very much, the school careers in the Stadionbuurt pass at a higher and especially more general (less vocational) level. These differences are partly accounted for by differences in supply and the attainability, availability and accessibility of this supply. Pupils in the Stadionbuurt benefit from the situation of their neighbourhood in the wider district of Amsterdam-Zuid. This town district offers a lot of schools for general secondary education. Teachers in the Stadionbuurt stimulate their pupils to use this supply. It is clear that the Stadionbuurt belongs to the district of Amsterdam-Zuid, not only in a structural way, but also in a cultural way.

So, an important conclusion of this research is that school careers in poor areas do not pass at a lower level when parental features are kept constant. Still there is, however, a certain influence from the neighbourhood. But this influence is mainly active in the well-to-do neighbourhoods. Here we can encounter some examples of effects that are positive for the resident teenagers. The homogeneous character of these neighbourhoods provides a strong social control. Deviating school careers are very marked within the neighbourhood. Teenagers that cannot succeed in getting the highest degree are placed outside the group. A lot of them have about the same life, visit the same schools and clubs and have the same friends. In the other areas researched, the diversity of the population is much higher. Most residents are not particularly interested in the school careers of their neighbours. Respondents in these areas do not indicate any obstacles on the part of other residents in their neighbourhood. They lack, however, the extra
positive influence that is given in the well-to-do areas. The ultimate result is a modest
neighbourhood effect, but more explained by the situation in these well-to-do areas than by the
situation in the deteriorated areas selected.