Inequalities in Access to Higher Education: Methodological and Theoretical Issues

Editors

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COGITATIO

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Editorial

Access to Higher Education: An Instrument for Fair Societies?

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Abstract
Access to higher education (HE) has a long history. To offer a view on the current debates and worldwide issues regarding access to HE, this editorial depicts how the control of educational access has historically been used as an instrument of governance at the interface of two processes: social stratification and the territorialisation of politics. Access to HE has remained embedded in these large structural processes even though HE has expanded from a highly elitist institution into mass education systems with equity of educational opportunities having become a desirable goal across societies. Analysing these processes helps understand the complex mechanisms producing inequalities in HE today, which are brought together by the ten articles composing this special issue. Tacking stock of how inequalities in access are produced in different continents, countries, HE Institutions, applying to different social groups though evolving mechanisms, these articles document the importance of contrasting methodological and theoretical approaches to produce comprehensive knowledge on this sensitive issue for democratic societies.

1. Introduction

Over the last century, inequality in access to higher education (HE) has become an important topic both for scholars and policymakers. However, the political interest for educational access goes further back. Whatever the period of time or a place considered, access to HE, understood in the broad sense, appears to have been the core issue when defining the role of universities in society. How access and admission to HE have been organised represents a most important instrument of governance because it is in the interface between the processes of social stratification and of the territorialisation of politics. This interface is today still framing the production of inequalities in access to HE, despite the spreading and commonly shared assumption that equity in access is a desirable goal. However, the definition of social justice varies between societies, as well as the national and institutional definitions related to its implementation and for which social groups it should be targeted.

What are the mechanisms behind inequalities in today's HE systems and how can they be measured and explained? The articles in this thematic issue propose answers nested in sociological, political science, historical comparative and ethnographic perspectives, covering a broad geographical scope with nine countries (Brazil, England, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Israel, South Africa and Switzerland) from four continents.

2. Looking Back, Looking Forward: Educational Access as an Instrument between Social Structures and Political Territories, Social Characteristics and Citizenship Categories

The organisation of access to HE has a long history. Since the creation of the very first universities, access and admission processes to universities, degrees, and the academic profession have been at the core of negotiations between universities' internal actors and external political powers at different levels of territories. The access issue included the geography of higher education institutions (HEIs) as well as the territorial and social perimeter of their recruitment, an issue deeply embedded with the definition of the privileges and duties of university students, graduates and teachers, already topical in the Middle Ages and continuously relevant today.

The question of who have access, or who are admitted, is thus a recurring issue, variably addressed depending on HEIs' contexts and periods of time but systematically traversed by a tension related to which groups of the social structure are accepted both by universities and by the rulers as well as their territory of action. Starting in the 12th century in Paris and Bologna, the creation of the first colleges alongside universities was aimed at providing accessibility for some less wealthy students, identified as potentially constituting the future administrative elite of the rulers of the territories they originated from.

Conversely, the exceptionality of access in some social groups a priori excluded from HE was made possible by their belonging to socio-economically advantaged groups. This was the case for women, for whom access was forbidden as stipulated in universities decrees, with exceptions being made over the centuries for some aristocrats mainly in Southern Europe (Goastellec, in press; Noble, 1992). The same was observed for a few "local" students in the context of the "colonies" where the university institution was exported. Belonging to local aristocracies enabled access to some forms of HE for the native population (Goastellec, 2010; Gonzalez & Hsu, 2014), while access to colleges and universities was used to select those who will compose the future local elites, destined to work hand in hand with the local administration of the empire. These students often already belonged to the ruling group before the colonisation and became actors in the processes of independence.

Thus, historically, access to HE appears to be an instrument where social structures meet the territorialisation of politics, sustaining various political and societal projects. The selection of students, traditionally based on their social characteristics and the needs of the rulers to administrate their territories, account for the role of HE in social organisation and related schemes and processes. The link between the students' social characteristics and access to education runs across times and places through various configurations articulating the geographical, socio-economic, ethnic origin and gender of the potential students.

The student's social characteristics impinging on access to HE is akin to citizenship, in line with Bickel's notion that (1) citizenship "can exist without democracy…and relates to the rights and obligations associated with the citizen status, which can be decided and allocated by the rulers" and (2) it is a concept which "concentrates a complex stratification of multiple significations from various eras" (Bickel, 2007, pp. 12–14). The way the categories of citizenship impinge on educational access relates to the social organisations' variety of citizenship categories and rights associated with it applying both to its allocation to individuals born within the territory and to individuals coming from other social organisations.

For example, in 17th and 18th century Mexico, university degrees obtained by some nobles from the indigenous elite:

> Indicated something more than mere education: they signalled honor, an invaluable (and inheritable) social quality.…This quality, which transcended ethnicity, partially exempted…native lords from colonial hierarchies that disadvantaged non-Spanish ancestries. (Villella, 2012, p. 12)

A university degree was a path to the imperial and ecclesiastical bureaucracy, to some professions with access usually restricted to those of Spanish descent. For some families, it sustained an entry into political positions of authority on both sides of society: local historical nobility and the Imperial state. In the same vein, in 19th- beginning of 20th-century Russia, citizenship and HE studies worked hand in hand. Here too, HE degrees paved the way to social positions backed by what could be called a better citizenship capital, entitling to some form of political participation. While in Russia this was one of the factors to prevent women from accessing the same HEIs and degrees as men, in other countries, such as England or Portugal, it worked the other way around: HE degrees became a tool for women to achieve political citizenship, university graduates becoming the first women to gain access to the census suffrage in 1918 and 1931, respectively.

The diffusion of more inclusive political citizenship within democratic societies have not erased the issue, as asylum-seekers and refugees' difficulties to access HE today illustrate (Détourbe & Goastellec, 2018). In all cases, historical and contemporary access policies, citizen rights and social identities are tied together.

3. Access as a Tool for Fair Society: A Spreading Norm Variably Defined and Instrumented

Yet, a paradigm shift occurred after the Second World War; it was characterised by the trend toward a broader access to education and by the spreading notion of promoting equal access for all social groups. Because HE studies and degrees come with many public and private benefits, it is widely admitted today that "[a]ny society

committed to promoting equity must ensure that their education system, including their tertiary education sector, is accessible to students from the broadest spectrum of underrepresented and traditionally excluded groups" (Salmi & Bassett, 2012, p. 3).

Since the Second World War, the question of social justice in access to HE has become a political and economic issue, with the aims of "mobilising the productive power of nations and realising a more acceptable social equity in the distribution of opportunity" (Halsey, 1993, p. 129). Accordingly, these two aims have been translated into the massification trend of HE. Access to HE was initially organised on the basis of academic merit—secondary degrees used as the main condition for admission—and later complemented by an increased diversity of admission processes considering a wider range of academic criteria as well as some social characteristics of the students.

HE systems have thus progressively, although at different rates and paths, shifted from being an exclusive good, reserved for a happy few (young men from the upper middle classes and bourgeoisie, capital cities and belonging to the ethnic majority), to being an inclusive good, accessible to women, lower middle and working classes, ethnic minorities and middle-size towns students (Goastellec, 2008). As a result, in 2014, the number of students enrolled in HE worldwide exceeded 200 million, having more than doubled since the beginning of the 21st century (UNESCO, 2016). However, important disparities exist between countries and continents with regard to the proportion of an age group accessing HE (the smallest access rates being observed in Africa) as well as regarding the characteristics of the student body. Differences continue to exist between men and women, but the sense of the variation differs between countries, with a few developing policies aimed at promoting men's access in contexts where they are now largely underrepresented, such as in Sweden or Norway (Santiago, Tremblay, Bari, & Arnal, 2008).

However, in most countries, the probability of HE enrolment depends strongly on the family's wealth, which together with gender is probably the most widely examined factor, measured through various indicators such as income, profession or parental level of education. In addition, differences in enrolment rates related to other social categories are also meaningful, as illustrated by the inequalities observed between ethnic groups in South Africa by Melanie Walker (2019) in this special issue. There the probability for Afrikaners and Coloured people to participate in HE is less than a third of that of Whites or Indians (CHE, 2013). In Israel, Arab students are less represented than Jews, as discussed by Eyal Bar-Haim and Carmel Blank (2019). Furthermore, in highly stratified systems such as the UK, differences do not reside in access per se, as shown in O'Sullivan, Byrne, Robson and Winters (2019) in this thematic issue, but in the small number of under-represented groups in the most prestigious HEIs in 2015. For instance, one third

of Oxford colleges did not admit any black British students. As suggested by the comprehensive overview offered by the ten articles of this special issue, each country appears to lean towards the use of a specific set of statistical categories framing their access policies; categories that are nested in a specific history and are in part path-dependent.

At the dawn of the 21st century, equity in access—leaning toward a student body representative of the population structure in society—is becoming the norm. International organisations, as well as macro-regional institutions provide discursive incentives towards the measurement of such distance (Goastellec, 2008, 2010), with various foci: for example, the United Nations, with the fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) and its target 4.3, states that "by 2030 countries should provide equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and HE, including university" (UNESCO, 2016, p. 1). Such goals can also be found in some national constitutions (such as in Brazil) or in individual HE access policies and admission processes.

The diffusion of a shared norm questions its operationalisation: the issue of equal educational opportunities is a political one concerning the measurement of inequalities as well as the social diversity which can legitimately be measured. This dimension translates into methodological debate with regard to the categories available and used by researchers in order to measure inequalities.

In their article, Siddiqui, Boliver and Gorard (2019) make the case for choosing the statistical categories by taking account how missing data blur the results obtained, thus addressing the limitation of self-reported characteristics of the family. As a result, admission policies targeting specific social groups depend upon the management of this issue. The organisation of educational access in each country results from "a "tacit" or "implicit" contract among the main stakeholders which emerged under particular, idiosyncratic historical and social conditions" (Meyer, St. John, Chankseliani, & Uribe, 2013, p. 2).

Who is expected in HE and who gets access to HE tell a lot about the place allocated to HEIs in the social organisation and, more broadly, about the social organisation in which HE is embedded, its referential and social project. Access to HE contributes both to the reproduction of social structures/organisations and their transformation. Access can be comprehended as an instrument of government and, more precisely when it comes to the last centuries, as an instrument of public action aimed at sustaining a societal project. As the articles of this thematic issue demonstrate, we observe major national variants, which illustrate the relation between fairness and sovereignty.

The assumption behind the massification of HE was that it reduces inequalities because more students have access to HE. And indeed, massification comes with increased inclusion: the more individuals enter HE, the more there will be degrees and members in the academic profession. When the HE sector trains elites and into elite, it

can provide a large added value to degree holders. However, when large numbers of people are holding HE degrees, lacking a degree may become a strong handicap in the labour market. In addition, massification also tends to be accompanied with persistent inequalities within HE sectors, protecting the historical advantages of a happy few.

Balbachevsky, Sampaio and de Andrade (2019) show that access has opened up so that in 2014 slightly more than 20% of the 18–24-year-olds entered HE. However, expanding access to HE is not enough to reduce social inequalities. It now takes place through the development of the private sector and leads to the preservation of old hierarchies and thus supports structures of inequalities through a diversion process. The same can be observed in High Participation Systems (HPS) of HE (Cantwell, Marginson, & Smolentseva, 2018) which are facing increasing institutional stratification with elite universities selecting students mainly from the highest social strata. In an HPS area, how are social inequalities in access to HE and its degrees measured, explained and theorised? Which are the various approaches dealing with this issue?

Researchers have focused on the structural dimension of education, discussing the degree of massification for previous levels of schooling such as the Maximally Maintained Inequalities (MMI) approach (Raftery & Hout, 1993) or the EMI, Equally Maintained Inequalities (Lucas, 2001), or on the structure of secondary education (Goastellec & Välimaa, 2017). Others have examined the choices made by students, analysing the educational paths followed and investigating the educational choices (Pilote, Picard, Goastellec, Turcotte, & Olympio, 2015). While other streams of research have questioned the effect of governing political parties (Jungblut, 2014), welfare states (e.g., Pechar & Andres, 2011; Peter, Edgerton, & Roberts, 2010) and the trade-off between educational policies and other social policies (Busemeyer & Nikolai, 2010), the hold of degrees on employment, or more broadly the effect of admission criteria (Childs, Ferguson, Herbert, Broad, & Zhang, 2016), institutional and national policies and educational markets.

Canisius Kamanzi (2019) illustrates this process by analysing the interaction between students' social origin and public policies according to the conception and organisation of school market, showing that this interaction is linked to society at large, especially the way public policies in education interact with social actors. Although most Western HE systems have been massified for a few decades already, inequalities seem to persist. They also transform, becoming more qualitative, through a diversion process and emerging issues in some countries, such as refugees' access to HE (see, e.g., Breanne, Nawyn, & Okwako, 2017; Dryden-Peterson, 2010; Jungblut & Pietliewicz, 2017), which is analysed through an ethnographic comparative research by Katrin Sontag (2019). Her study shows how the student biography and migration history interact with how the asylum system, the educational one as well as the funding possibilities articulate, variably in each country.

Access to HE is multifaceted because it includes the provision of study places (HEIs and their geography, the educational system HEIs are embedded in), student' influx patterns and students' characteristics. Admission refers to processes sustaining or restraining students' access on the basis of a variety of criteria (social, economic, academic) and procedures (former degrees, exams, tests, ability to testify one's social position and, more broadly, one's social characteristics). Admission processes thus play a crucial role in organising the access and defining who actually enter HE. The instrumental role of access is thus even more clearly illustrated by research focusing on admission processes, with regard to the respective strategies of HEIs and families. Indeed, the norm of inclusion is variously adapted depending on HEIs, as illustrated by Mergner, Leišytė and Bosse (2019). Using a translation perspective, they show how universities translate political demands to their local context, underlining the importance of the HEI's identity as well as the actors involved (administrations or professors) and the discipline concerned.

O'Sullivan et al. (2019) also show in their article that when specific admission processes are dedicated to widening the student body, they attract different student profiles depending on how they are organised and, to some extent, on who is in charge of admission within a specific institutional culture. Interestingly, England and Ireland do not only differ by the admission processes implemented but also by who is responsible for identifying the student potentially benefiting from widening admission processes: HEIs in Ireland, within a national frame, but students in England, where one must "opt in" to be considered, within an HEI's frame. Additionally, the diversion process observed at the HE systems level is also ongoing at the admission process: Bar-Haim and Blank (2019) again reveal that the population who benefits from second-chance admission processes is not the one targeted. Studying contemporary Israel in quantitative terms they show that the interest is usually directed to mainstream access, and students from the majority social group (Israeli) benefit more from second chance alternatives by comparison with Arab students, which leads to increased inequalities. At a policy level this also suggests the importance of temporally limited admission policies to limit family diversion strategies.

Conversely to these strategies of access developed by students from a non-targeted group, Walker (2019), in an insightful article studying the construction of access to HE through the choices of school paths and orientation, using the capability framework developed by Amartya Sen, shows that if the role of good schooling emerges as crucial, it is in the intersection with supportive family conditions that it works as a multiplier effect.

Inequalities do not disappear at later stages of university education or career: two articles discuss the long-lasting effect of social characteristics in HE by investigating the profile of professors in HPS with regard to social origin and gender by comparing the profile of stu-

dents and professors at different stages of educational and academic careers. Based on the Finnish case, Helin, Koerselman, Nokkala, Tohmo and Viinikainen (2019) offer a methodological contribution by documenting the importance of effective longitudinal studies to understand transitions in academic careers. By doing so, they also underline that different types of inequalities are structured through different processes, socio-economic inequalities taking the form of a leaky pipeline, while gender inequalities are doubled by a delay effect, women accessing the highest positions at an older age. Equally adopting a longitudinal approach with a social closure perspective, Blome, Möller and Böning (2019) defend the idea that inequalities related to social origin in access to academic careers are the product of intentional patterns of action aimed at securing the power of a specific group. Indeed, looking at the social origin of professors in Germany in comparison to that of students, they show the reverse trends of respective closing and opening.

4. Conclusion: Educational Access as an Instrument of Fair Societies (If They Wish)

The contrasted and complementary research presented in this thematic issue reminds that HE represents an important instrument to improve the fairness of societies. Not only for a fairer access to education but also for knowledge and jobs, increased social mobility, reduced social reproduction, etc. As these articles point out, the definitions of fairness vary between societies, and are differently translated depending on HE structures, HEI identities and the involved actors within this sector. Additionally, access as an instrument is both path-dependent and embedded in multiple structures and changing processes. Moreover, the actors, uses and users of access and admission processes change over time. This has consequences for both research and policies: because these processes are multidimensional, they can only be comprehended through bringing together multiple research approaches. In addition, because the processes producing inequalities evolve continuously, access issues should be studied and monitored on a regular basis in order to update the analysis and to understand the adaptation of educational access as a democracy instrument.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

Expanding Access to Higher Education and Its (Limited) Consequences for Social Inclusion: The Brazilian Experience

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Abstract

This article adopts an historical institutionalism perspective (Pierson, 2011; Pierson & Skocpol, 2002; Thelen, 2014). Its main goal is to understand the lasting dynamics and path dependency processes that constrain the impact of expanding access to higher education (HE) in changing the pattern of social inequalities in a given country. To do this, the article will explore two different aspects of the impact of education on social inclusion: the dynamics associated with production and distribution of portable skills and competences, and the dynamics associated with social stratification. The study follows the experience of Brazilian HE over the last 15 years. In this period, the country experienced a rapid expansion, coming from a total undergraduate enrolment of 2.7 million in 2000 up to nine million in 2016. Nevertheless, the design of this expansion assumed a very conservative pattern. Following a well-ingrained domestic pattern, most of this expansion was absorbed by the country's huge demand-driven private sector, and into less than half a dozen very traditional types of bachelor programs. Thus, the article argues that by failing to diversify, and by preserving old institutional hierarchies, expanding access to HE in Brazil has rendered less impact than one would expect on the country's social inequalities.

1. Introduction

Education, and more specifically higher education (HE), is seldom an area of interest to political scientists. While the theme has long raised interest among sociologists and economists, political science has been conspicuously absent in the debates of education in general and HE in particular. Most recent contributions to the area are focused on issues related to governance of the field and of institutions, and there are few analyses that approach the issue from the perspective of its consequences for the processes of social exclusion/inclusion. In fact, most of the literature tends to accept the notion that expanding access to HE should be taken as equivalent to social inclusion, without further problematization. This article raises some considerations on this equation when exploring the social consequences of the expanded access to HE experienced by Brazil in the last two decades.

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework employed in this analysis is historical institutionalism. We are mostly interested in the shadows cast by old social dynamics of exclusion on

new processes of expanded access to HE experienced by Brazil over the last two decades. Three concepts, central in this school of thought, are relevant for our analysis: first, its emphasis on path-dependency dynamics that narrow the number of policy alternatives open in any given conjuncture (Mahoney, 2000; Pierson, 2000, 2011). Second, the concept of institutional layering, i. e., the processes of producing, changing and adapting institutional rules as actors face new problems with an institutional framework developed under different past circumstances. This dynamic ends up producing different layers of institutional logic inside the same organization, which can be mobilized by different actors to face new challenges arising from novelties in the institutional environment or created by the internal struggles for power and dominance (Thelen & Mahoney, 2010). Third, there are the reinforcing dynamics produced by institutional complementarities coming from changes in different institutional settings (Crouch, 2010; Hall & Soskice, 2001).

3. Access to Education and Social Inclusion: Mapping National Regimes of Skill Formation and Social Stratification of HE

The main effects of education on social inclusion are related to two different, yet interrelated, social dynamics: first, education is intrinsically connected with the processes of creating and upgrading skills and competences that are valued in society as whole, and specifically in the labour-market (Busemeyer & Trampusch, 2012; Estevez-Abe, Iversen, & Soskice, 2001; Iversen & Soskice, 2001; Thelen, 2014). Second, education is linked to the processes of social stratification by regulating access to social and cultural forms of capital that are valued by society (Bourdieu 2011/1986). While the first dynamic is a by-product of all levels of education, the second is strongly linked with patterns of access to the higher levels of the educational pyramid, and, in particular, to university education. Analysing access to education through the first dynamic provides understanding of a country's national regime of skills development. Analysing patterns of access to HE from the perspective of the second dynamic direct the analyst's attention to the processes of differentiation and social stratification present in all systems of HE.

There are two relevant dimensions of the differences in the design of the national regimes of skills development to consider: first, the degree of inclusiveness present in the educational pipeline leading to HE. Here, countries can be differentiated considering the barriers their educational system pose on the route leading to university education specifically, and to HE in general. Another dimension relates to the number and quality of skills and competences that students leave the educational system with at all levels. In this last regard, countries are separated into those offering a unitary system of education, where access to relevant and portable skills are restricted to those reaching higher education,

and those where learning paths leading to relevant and portable skills are also available (and widespread in the system) at other levels of education (so-called vocational education). Considering the exhaustively documented correlation between educational success and social origins, it is clear that the presence of a robust vocational system catering to those leaving earlier the educational pipeline means that children from lower income families have access to alternatives for upgrading their skill profile before starting work, instead of entering the labour market with no more resources than a plain, cheap, and undifferentiated work capacity. However, the design of a robust vocational system is often combined with a more exclusive path leading to university education and may represent a relevant barrier for children from lower income families.

Combined, the two dimensions sketched above produce a typology that enable us to better explore how the educational system operates for reinforcing or for attenuating the reproduction of social inequalities. In fact, countries where access to HE is wide, and learning paths leading to relevant and portable skills are open at different levels of the education pipeline are those marked by strong social inclusion dynamics, and where the credential value of a HE diploma has lower impact on social stratification. An example of this profile are Scandinavian countries. Countries with a unitary educational system, but with a high degree of inclusiveness, meaning that a large proportion of the youth reaches (and finishes) HE, are the ones where the channels for social mobility are large, but where education reinforces social-stratification. An example of this is the United States. Countries where a highly exclusive educational path leading to university education works in parallel with a large and inclusive vocational system are those where social hierarchies are strong, but where a skilled working-class is able to command a high level of earnings. An historical example of this situation is Germany at the beginning of the 20th century. Finally, countries where education is exclusive, leading to a high dropout rate, and unitary, offering few alternatives for acquiring work-relevant skills and competences outside HE, are marked by strong social hierarchies and weak social inclusion dynamics, composing what the literature calls the low skills bad-job trap (Snower, 1994). This characterises the experience of many emerging countries, and most specifically the historical experience of Brazil.

From the perspective of the processes of differentiation and social stratification present in all systems of HE two other dimensions are also important: first, the intensity of stratification and the differential prestige associated with different institutions and kinds of degrees granted by tertiary education. Second, how exclusive each educational route inside HE is, i.e., how much the choice of one route creates costs for ulterior changes in the learning trajectory. In some countries, not only is access to HE widespread, but it is also done through a more or less homogeneous system, composed by universities

of similar prestige granting a similar array of certifications and degrees, which creates a relatively flat national HE landscape where expanding access to HE has strong effects on social inclusion. In other countries, access to HE expanded inside more or less homogeneous systems in terms of types of degrees institutions but marked by strong hierarchies of prestige associated with different institutions and sectors. Here, the effects of access to HE on social inclusion are mitigated by the differential access each institution opens to social and cultural forms of capital. In other countries, access to HE is also wide, but done through two (or more) differentiated institutional profiles of organisations, each providing different portfolios of degrees. Robust binary systems are a historical inheritance of the country's experience with strong vocational training systems. Traditionally, these countries depart from a highly hierarchical HE system, where a small number of highly selective institutions control access to social and cultural forms of capital, providing the basis for the reproduction of the country's elite (Ben-David, 1977). From this point of departure, the literature that explores the contemporary dynamics experienced by these countries (Maassen, Moen, & Stensaker, 2011; Pinheiro, 2013) points out two different trajectories: one marked by intense processes of academic drift, merging, and collaboration, where the institutional designs of contemporary universities of applied science and of traditional universities converge, which reinforces the channels of student circulation. The other development path tends to preserve differences, even when the country adopts policies targeting to equalize the social prestige attached to the different trajectories of learning.

4. The Brazilian Historical Experience: Enlarging Access and Preserving Hierarchies

Brazil is a newcomer to HE compared to other Latin American countries. The first institutions of higher learning were created at the beginning of the 19th century, alongside the country's process of independence. At that time, HE was an elite endeavour. Its main goal was to train high-level professionals deemed necessary for building the new nation-state. Therefore, the overwhelming influence of the model of Napoleon´s Imperial French HE is no surprise. The first HE institutional model adopted in the country drew inspiration from the *grandes ècoles*. They were independent schools organised for training and certifying professionals in a specific professional track. This model responded also to the aspirations of the local elites. A professional degree was the primary signal of prestige and differentiation in local societies. Holders of these degrees enjoyed esteem, had access to secure posts in the high bureaucracy and the clergy, and could aim towards the most senior positions in the country's political, economic and military life. The first universities in the country were only created in the 1930s. Even then, the newly created universities preserved the core traits of the so-called Napoleonic model, a loosely-coupled institution, composed of semi-autonomous professional schools, each of them dominated by the ethos of a particular profession, to which a new unifying component was added: a Faculty of Philosophy, Science and Humanities, which was expected to carry out some research and train specialized teachers for secondary education.

The first critical juncture that conditioned the contemporary development of HE in Brazil was established at the end of the 1960s. A structural dependence on the private sector for answering the demands of access was created. At that time, two different dynamics were responsible for this critical juncture. There was a first wave of demand for expanding access to HE caused by increasing access to secondary schools since the 1950s. By the mid-1960s, the number of youths holding secondary-level qualifications and passing the entrance examinations organized by each university but left without access to the HE because of the limited number of entry-positions opened by these universities started to increase. This situation gave rise to a social movement—the "movimento dos excedentes"—which were then mobilized by the oppositionist political agenda of resistance to the military government that replaced the democratic regime in 1964.

The increased demand for access was concurrent with another dynamic arising from a push for reform in public universities. In 1968, the military government adopted a comprehensive reform which tried to depoliticise the internal environment of public universities by responding to some demands posed by the sectors interested in improving the institutional framework supporting research. The reform of 1968 implanted full time contracts in public universities, replaced the old chair model with the departmental model, stimulated the dissolution of the old faculties of philosophy, science and humanities into a number of specialized institutes and faculties, and adopted a credit system (instead of the old sequential model) for bachelor programs (Klein, 1992). Even if the Reform faced resistance among the faculty of the most traditional professional schools and mistrust among other academics and students, it was successfully implemented in the entire public sector. However, the success of the reform also increased the costs of public universities. Estimates made by specialists show that, between 1972 and 1986, the budget of federal universities grew 5.4-fold, most of it consumed by opening full-time contracts to all academics in these universities, without a significant expansion of enrolment at undergraduate level (Schwartzman, 1993; Velloso, 1987). With the superimposition of these dynamics, expanding the private sector became the best policy alternative in the eyes of the government. It was a cheaper response to the "movimento dos excedentes", with the added gain of helping to weaken the student movement concentrated in large public universities, then one of the most prominent sources of opposition to the military government.

Private HE was legally permitted in the country since 1945. However, prior to the 1960s, the choice for private

learning was mostly dictated by the students' family religious or other values. Most of the private sector was made up of Catholic and other denominational universities, following the institutional design of public universities. The other common organisational format was the school of commerce, focusing on providing training paths for white-collar jobs (Sampaio, 2000). The second edition of the country's Education Law (the Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação, 5.540/1968), from 1968, revived the independent faculty or school as an alternative institutional design to the university model for teaching and granting degrees at the bachelor's level. While, ideally, this should be a provisional arrangement as the organisations were expected to grow and become full-fledged universities, the new institutional design became a permanent part of Brazilian HE. The private sector grew as a cheap route for expanding access to HE (Martins, 2009), and the system experienced a wave of organisational differentiation without diversification in degrees and career paths. The private sector grew as a parallel system, mostly organised in small units offering evening courses, catering to students who could not perform well in the entrance examinations to the public sector, which lost its qualifying nature to become simple classificatory exams, designed to select the best ranked students to fill the entering positions opened by the university for each bachelor's program (Balbachevsky, Kerbauy, & dos Santos, 2000).

Protected from the worst sequels of massification, Brazilian universities followed a different path to the one experienced by public universities in many Latin American countries, where it was the public universities that answered to the demands for access to HE in the 1970s. There, the public universities expanded to became what is known regionally as the mega-universities. The main traits of a mega-university are its very large body of undergraduate enrolments, with hundreds of thousands of students, taught by a large and highly segmented faculty body, which includes a high proportion of academics with per-hour paid contracts, and the presence of specialised bodies dedicated to research where full-time academics develop research and postgraduate education. In Brazil, however, from 1968 public universities evolved to adopt the organizational features of research universities, employing mostly academics in full-time contracts with low teaching loads. A post-graduate, academically oriented, training path was legally recognized and structured in 1964 and grew at a fast pace since. A federal agency—CAPES—strengthened its position inside the Ministry of Education and won a central role in the schemes for supporting graduate education through dedicated funds directed to graduate programs inside the universities and a large program of scholarships for graduate students. With this support, and counting on

good institutional conditions, Brazilian graduate education expanded to become one of the largest systems in the world. While external quality assurance mechanisms for undergraduate programs were only developed in the 1990s; in the case of postgraduate education, the scientific community allied itself with the high bureaucracy from CAPES to create a comprehensive mandatory evaluation based on peer-review, in place since 1976.

From the late 1960s onwards, access to basic education—including primary and low-secondary education—also experienced rapid expansion, adopting a more inclusive design for the first time. Primary and lower secondary education were conflated into a single mandatory level of education attending children from seven to 14 years old, and the traditional entrance examinations for the lower-secondary education were abolished. However, here the country experienced a similar dynamic as the one found in HE, with the growth of a large number of private institutions. Only, at this level, the differentiation took an inverse trajectory: while the public sector massified and quality declined, the private sector attracted children from the upper-middle classes. The selective exit of the students from families more likely to voice dissatisfaction with the deterioration of the quality of education worsened the situation of public basic education and left it without resources for fighting the trajectory of deterioration, following a general dynamic first described by Albert Hirschman (1970). This change has a reinforcing mechanism: as quality deteriorates in the public sector, it become more and more confined to the role of a second-class alternative of education, which is shunned by the children from middle classes, which, in turn, aggravates the processes of deterioration. From middle 1970s, public basic education had already been converted into an education for the poor, marked by strong class stigma.

Meanwhile, the limited demand for qualified workers coming from the most dynamic sectors of the economy was met by a very peculiar and successful institutional arrangement created in the 1940s, known as System S.[1] The entire arrangement is financed by a levy applied to the profits of all firms. It is sectorial, regionally organized and directedly managed by the corporate sector, which assures that the skills developed precisely meet the particular needs of firms (Assumpção-Rodrigues, 2013). Besides this successful but limited initiative, the Federal government and the states governments also organized networks of vocationally oriented secondary schools in the 1960s. Nevertheless, this sector was (and still is) small and selective, with access regulated through entrance examinations. The selectiveness of public vocational education prevented it from becoming a real alternative for access to relevant and portable skills for the children dropping out of school before reach-

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[1] System S refers to a set of non-state organizations established since the 1940s, dealing with vocational training. The most important are: National Industrial Apprenticeship Service (SENAI), created in 1942, Commerce Social Service (SESC), National Commercial Apprenticeship Service (SENAC), and Industry Social Service (SESI), created in 1946, Brazilian Small and Medium-Size Businesses Support Service (SEBRAE), created in 1972, and a number of other institutions.

ing HE. As general basic education in the public sector lost quality, by contrast the academically selective public vocational system converted itself into a successful route to access to the valued public university education for the more able children from lower-middle income families. Thus, vocational learning become a complement, added to a more generalist curriculum, which evolved by focusing on preparing the students to face the demanding examinations which controls access to HE.[2]

The dynamics described above trace the development of the main elements of the Brazilian regime of skills development at the end of 1990s. It was organized in the shape of a very long pipeline, with almost no de facto lateral exits, where the access to relevant and portable skills are mostly available at the HE level. Preparing students for the path leading to HE is the dominant objective of education at all lower levels, even inside the small public vocational sector. This general design means that by leaving the school before finishing a first level university training, youths face the labour market without any particular set of skills or competences. For the losers in this competitive game, the only learning option available is the narrow on-job training provided by firms.

5. Stratification and Access in Brazilian HE

The combination of all these dynamics produced a heavily stratified system of HE with a high degree of institutional heterogeneity. At the end of the Military Regime, in 1989, at the top of the system, there was (and still is) a number of comprehensive, tuition free, public universities. Among them, a smaller number of active research universities, with a relevant proportion of enrolments at postgraduate—master's and doctoral training programs[3]—command most of the academic prestige inside the country. Besides this select group of universities, there are some private denominational universities of great prestige. Below them, there was an incredible array of private institutions—some legally recognized as universities, some organized in federations of faculties, and most of them with the format of independent schools or faculties, all catering to students to children from low-income families in search of social mobility.

Despite this institutional diversity, the system was highly homogeneous in terms of the credentials it granted: except for some transient experiences in teacher education, for the entire last century all institutions in the Brazilian HE granted the same first degree, the professional bachelor's degree after a period of training varying from four to six years. While the comprehensive public universities showed a degree of heterogeneity considering the number of knowledge areas

these degrees covered, the system as a whole converged to granting degrees in a small number of areas: pedagogy (which is a degree giving access to teaching positions in basic education), law, business administration, and health sciences (some medicine, but mostly psychology, nursery and odontology). In 1998, 62% of all degrees granted in the country were concentrated in only ten areas. Among these areas, two career paths—Law and Business Administration—were responsible for 26% of all degrees granted in the country (INEP, 2000).

From the point of view of social stratification, it would not be a misrepresentation to consider this education system as a sound-box, reproducing and magnifying the patterns of social exclusion present in society. In 1994, less than 8% of all youths aged between 18 and 24 years old were enrolled in HE. Among them, slightly more than 2% had access to the prestigious tuition free public universities. Furthermore, by combining a low quality public primary education with an academic oriented secondary school, the school system actually functioned as a filtering devise, selecting the most appropriate candidates for university life, while neglecting all other profiles. Particularly, secondary education operated as a stringent bottleneck, filtering a relevant proportion of youths out of school. At the beginning of 1990s, over 43% of youths from 15 to 17 years did not attend school.

6. Changing Access to Education: The New Dynamics Opened by the Democratic Experience

Democracy returned to Brazil at the end of the 1980s. The new Constitution was promulgated in 1988, and in 1990 the first elected President took office. Between 1990 and 1994, the country faced a turbulent period with extremely high inflation rates and low rates of economic growth. In 1994 a successful economic stabilization plan brought Fernando Henrique Cardoso into office, sustained by a large alliance between the centre and centre-right, followed by the administration of Luis Ignácio Lula da Silva, a president elected from the leftist Workers' Party (known as PT) in a broad coalition which unified the left and right, bypassing the centre and the centre-right parties. Mr. Cardoso governed Brazil for eight years (from 1994 up to 2001), and Mr. da Silva for the following eight years, from 2003 to 2010, and selected his successor, President Dilma Rousseff, also from the Workers' Party.

The main achievements of Cardoso's administration were in primary education, mostly focused in expanding enrolment and lowering the level of dropout. Cardoso's administration introduced a major change in the financ-

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[2] Before the last reform of 2017 that radically reduced the number of mandatory disciplines, all Brazilian students—including those enrolled in the vocational sector—were supposed to learn mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, sociology, world history, Latin-American history, and Brazilian history, world geography, with special emphasis on the Latin America region and Brazilian geography, philosophy, Portuguese grammar and writing skills, Brazilian literature, English and Spanish languages. Not only were there a large number of disciplines, but the roll of subjects inside each discipline is extensive: in physics, for example, the student is supposed to learn mechanics, the laws of movement and of conservation of energy, elements of astronomy, physics of fluids, thermodynamics, waves, optics, electricity and electrical magnetism.

[3] For an analysis of the growth of research universities in Brazil see Balbachevsky (2013).

ing scheme for primary education, by diverting a relevant amount of federal resources toward the Fund for Support and Development of Primary Education and Valorisation of Teacher Profession (FUNDEF). These resources were made available to municipalities to support improvements in primary education, as well as in teachers' salaries, which until then had been the sole responsibility of municipalities. Access to the resources of FUNDEF was conditioned by the performance of the municipal authorities, taking into account the level of coverage of primary education and a number of other indicators. At the same time, the government prohibited the practice of holding back under-performing students in the first years of school. This was a relevant bottleneck preventing a large number of children, especially those coming from poor, less educated families, to complete primary education. The results of the two combined initiatives were impressive: in few years the country reached universal access to primary education, with the net enrolment at primary education rising from 87% in 1994 to 94% in 2000 (IBGE, n.d.-b). With a growing number of children finishing primary studies, the country also experienced an explosive growth in enrolment at the secondary level. During his government, the percentage of youth between 15 to 17 years old attending school rose from 57% to 75% (IBGE, n.d.-b).

It was also during Cardoso's first term that a new Education Act was approved by the Congress and enacted by the Presidency, in 1996. The law introduced a number of relevant changes in the normative environment of HE. First, the Law imposed new general parameters under which a HE institutions could be authorised (and, for the first time, re-authorised every five years) to hold the title of a university. At the same time, it differentiated and recognized other institutional profiles, including teaching-oriented institutions and private for-profit institutions. Another relevant innovation was the diversification of the portfolio of first level degrees any institution could grant: besides the traditional bachelor's and teaching license (the latter now established as a third level degree), it also introduced the technological degree, a vocational degree granted after three years of study, and opened the possibility of mid-term certification in a bachelor's program track, then called sequential programs—"cursos sequenciais". Under this model, the bachelor's program could be organized into two halves, opening the possibility of a certified lateral exit—which also allowed for a later return to studies—when the student finished the first half of the study program. Overall, innovations were mostly adopted in the private sector, where old programs experienced intensive redesign, new programs were launched, some with a modular approach, and technological programs were started. The public universities resisted change, proclaiming loudly that the old bachelor's program was the only degree acceptable for a university. In this sector, there were only few experiments with curriculum reform, and even at postgraduate level most public universities re-

frained from diversifying their portfolio by incorporating the alternative of professional master's degree now recognised by the government.

Finally, Cardoso's government was also marked by two other initiatives: a bold move toward controlling the quality of HE through a general evaluation applied to all graduating students coming from bachelor's programs, and the adoption of a number of evaluations for accessing the system performance at different levels: the "prova Brasil" which evaluated the performance of a sample of students in their 6th and 7th years of study, the ENEM ("exame nacional de ensino médio") designed to evaluate the performance of students leaving high-school, as well as volunteering the country to take part in the PISA exercises organized by OECD.

7. Access to HE and Social Inclusion: The Legacy of the Left

Mr. da Silva's election, in 2002, relied on the backing of a large majority of the country's lower middle-class and the organized sectors of society represented in unions and social movements. Regarding HE, the first moves of the new government in HE policy answered to two different constituencies, both critical for the new government. In one part, the policy answered to the more ideologically committed sectors by changing the normative environment and imposing stronger controls over the private sector, tightening the rules of evaluation and accreditation, and imposing a ban on opening new bachelor programs with the design of the sequential programs, considered a neoliberal aberration by these sectors. On the other hand, responding to the Party's large constituency of lower-middle income families, the government adopted an aggressive policy toward enlarging access to HE. As had happened in the past, the first moves targeted the private sector. In 2004 the government launched a program called "University for All", which exchanged fiscal benefits for tuition exemption to lower income students in the private sector.

In 2007 the government also started a major program supporting the expansion and reform of the federal universities, the REUNI program (Programa de Reestruturação e Expansão das Universidades Federais). The program set incentives in the form of price signals, conditioning the university's access to new funds for improvements in some critical indicators: the expansion of the number of undergraduate enrolments, targeting particularly enrolments in evening programs; the increase of the ratio of undergraduate students per academic, and the expansion of the proportion of students coming from public schools (taken as an indicator of low-income social background) and minorities. Mr. da Silva also encouraged the adoption of quotas and other affirmative action initiatives, targeting children from minorities and from low-income families. In 2012 these initiatives were consolidated in a new law, reserving half of the entrance positions in the federal universities for candidates coming

from the public basic education and minorities. Finally, in the area of vocational education, in 2008 the government upgraded and enlarged the federal network of federal colleges for technological education to HE, allowing them to offer programs leading to technical degrees. This shift diversified the federal system that was previously composed primarily by comprehensive universities.

All these initiatives expanded access to HE, and between 2010 and 2012 enrolments in the public sector grew faster than enrolments in the private sector. Even so, this growth was not enough to produce a massive increase in access to HE. the country's gross enrolment ratio in tertiary education remained low. This index reached just 34% in 2009, which was lower than the ratio of many other Latin American countries (UNESCO, n.d.). Thus, in 2010, in order to quickly expand the enrolments in HE, the Federal Government opted to reform and expand a subsidised loan program (FIES) to support students enrolled in the private sector. FIES helped to solve a central bottleneck for the growth and diversification of the private sector which was the high level of insolvency in tuition fees, creating the conditions for significant growth of the private sector between 2010 and 2016.

8. The Conservative Response to Expanding Access to HE

The first 25 years of democracy in Brazil significantly changed the educational landscape. As seen in Figure 1, among young people from 18 to 24 years old, between 1995 to 2014, the percentage of those who do not finish primary education—which in Brazil constitutes the first nine years of study—dropped from 58% to 16%. The percentage of those finishing upper-secondary education rose from 12% to 33%, and enrolments in HE rose from 1.7 million to almost nine million in the same period (IBGE, n.d.-a).

Access to HE also became more inclusive, though still highly unequal: the percentage of youths from the

two lower-income quintiles reaching HE came from 2% in 1995 to 12% in 2014. Among the youths from the upper-quintile, the percentage enrolled in HE rose from 21% to 61% (IBGE, n.d.-a). Here, the most important move against the hierarchical nature of HE in Brazilian society comes from the introduction of an aggressive affirmative action program in Federal universities. As early as 2007 the REUNI program supported the adoption of quota programs in federal universities. In 2012 Brazilian Congress approved a law imposing a reserve of 50% of all entrance positions in Federal Universities for students coming from public primary and secondary schools, and, among these, reserving some positions for children from black and indigenous families. This move was followed by the state-run universities. These initiatives produced a relevant change in the profile of the students served by prestigious public universities, as it has the potential to change the pattern of access to the social prestige linked to holding a degree from these universities, which is one of the most promising moves in the recent past.

However, the measures guaranteeing access to entry positions public HE for the children from lower-income families and minorities were not followed by a massive program supporting the progression through the institution of this new profile of students. There are some initiatives at institutional level, and a number of small-scale federal programs trying to tackle this problem, but still a lack of a more comprehensive initiative. It is to be noted that, from 2006 to 2016, the ratio between the number of degrees granted and that of the number of admitted students four years earlier dropped from 58% to 43% inside federal universities (data from Censo do Ensino Superior, n.d.; tabulation done by the authors). While this decline in the efficiency of federal universities cannot entirely be attributed to challenges faced by the new profile of students when undertaking the most demanding programs, it is clear that, to some degree, the new challenge faced by the federal universities is to provide enough remedial academic support to the new pro-
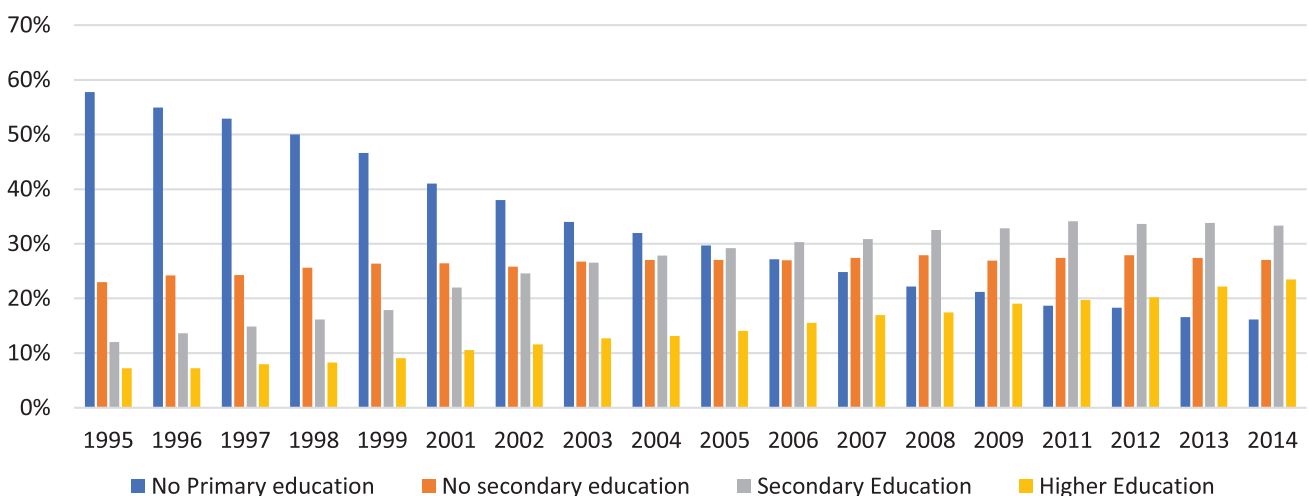

Figure 1. Brazil: Evolution of access to education from 1995 up to 2014, population with 18 up to 24 years old. Source: IBGE, n.d.-a). Tabulation done by the authors.

file of students, especially to those enrolled in the more demanding programs.

On the other hand, in spite of all changes, Brazilian HE has remained highly traditional in its design. In 2014, over 61% of all undergraduate enrolments were still concentrated in only four areas: Business, Social Sciences, Law and Education. Together, these few areas plus engineering and health sciences accounted for 82% of all enrolments in 2015, leaving just 18% of the students for all other areas. A very small number of programs inside each of these areas concentrate a great majority of the enrolments. Thus, Law and Business Administration answer for more than 20% of all enrolments in the country, and civil engineering makes up for 70% of all enrolments inside engineering (Censo do Ensino Superior, n.d.).

Brazilian HE is not only conservative in the profile of competencies and skills it develops. It also resists diversification. In 2014, only 20.1% of all first-level degrees granted in the country came from programs exploring new alternatives to learning outside the traditional four-years bachelor programs. In that year, just 20% of enrolments at the master's level were in professional master's programs. Despite the diversification experienced by the federal system in 2008, it is the private sector that is still responsible for more than 91% of all technological degrees awarded in the country (Censo do Ensino Superior, n.d.).

In fact, in 1996, when the normative environment changed with the new Education Law, the internal stakeholders in public universities banded together against changing their portfolio of programs and training paths. For some of them, the main issue was the fear of losing social prestige, and a clear discomfort with the idea of equalizing the traditional learning path leading to a bachelor's degree with the more mundane training path of technical learning. For others, the conservative response came from an ideological misunderstanding that equates vocational education with class subjugation (Barbosa, 2009). Thus, the alternative design of programs was mostly explored by the private sector, which innovated by introducing programs focusing on new niches created in the labour market, such as fashion design, game design, gastronomy, among others. Another major innovation introduced in Brazilian HE in the last decade is the use of online distance education. Again, distance education is in practice a private endeavour: over 90% of the 1.4 million enrolments in distance education are in the private sector. The absence of the prestigious public universities in these initiatives helps to limit their impact on social mobility. These innovative paths remain marked as second-class alternatives, and for that reason, their impact on access to learning have had limited consequences for opening access to social and cultural capital. In fact, another relevant change in the Brazilian HE landscape is the presence of strong processes of differentiation and stratification in the private sector, with the growth of a segment of prestigious elite institutions catering to children from affluent families, interested in the selective social environment offered by such institutions.

9. Conclusion: Expanding Access without Changing the Dynamics of Exclusion

The changes experienced by Brazil in recent decades has had a relevant impact on the pattern of access to education in general, and on HE in particular. Thanks to the policies adopted in the last three decades, access to HE has expanded. Because of this expansion, and also because of the bold affirmative action programs adopted at the beginning of the new century, the profile of students attending post-secondary education is also much more diverse today than it was at the beginning of the century; there are more children from poor families, and more female, black and indigenous students. However, most of this inclusion has happened in programs of lower social prestige, if not of lower quality, which lessens its impact in terms of social inclusion (Costa-Ribeiro & Schlegel, 2015).

Considering the main design of the country's skills development regime, one could say that opening access to HE did expand the outcomes of the country's regime of skills and competences, but its basic shape remained untouched. It is still organized in the shape of a very long pipeline, with almost no de facto lateral exits. Access to relevant and portable skills are mostly available at the HE level, and the main goal of all the first levels of education -mostly of secondary education—is still to prepare the student for the exams that regulate access to HE. The meaningless encyclopaedic mode of learning promoted by this narrow goal accounts for the large volume of dropouts at the secondary education. Thus, the general design of the country's regime of skills development still creates the conditions for a low-skill, bad-job trap for a large number of Brazilian youths.

Inside HE, the design is still highly hierarchical, with a small number of students reaching the prestigious tuition-free public sector—24.7% of all enrolments, according to the last census of Brazilian HE in 2016. The vast majority attend programs in the demand-driven private sector on programs of lower quality, leading to less valued academic degrees and de facto limiting their academic options after graduation.[4] The path dependence dynamics established in the 1960s still constrain the policy options open to governments. Expanding access and attending to the demands of education coming from the new generations and from the older cohorts that did not have access to education is done mostly through large for-profit educational conglomerates. The presence of this large for-profit subsector in Brazilian HE reinforces

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[4] There are no figures available on the previous academic track of the candidates accepted to the postgraduate level. Nevertheless, the data gathered at by the last survey of the academic profession in Brazil, and anecdotical information concur to indicate that attending a bachelor's program in the demand-driven private sector diminishes the probability of access to master's and doctorate programs (Balbachevsky, 2016).

the move towards a strong State presence, imposing regulation and strict supervision over the entire system. In order to control the quality of education, the Ministry of Education developed a huge and detailed system of evaluation following uniform parameters applied to all institutions. In spite of the good intentions, the large apparatus for overseeing the programs had an adverse impact over the private sector, supporting the dynamics of its consolidation into huge for-profit institutions. As argued by de Castro (2015, p. 282): "Instead of controlling market behaviour and making it work better, the quality assurance policies provoked the capture of private HE by investment funds and global groups", which has deepened the hierarchies that organize the country's HE landscapes.

On the other hand, the public sector also faces challenges when it comes to innovation and social inclusion. Despite efforts and policy initiatives, public universities have a governance model designed to prioritize the demands and views sustained by the internal stakeholders, which are responsible for electing the rectors and the central actors in the university's senate. Most Brazilian universities do not have a board of trustees in their institutional design. When facing demands coming from the government and price signals posed by programs and new policies, most public universities answer strategically, limiting the impact of the changes over their internal environment and protecting the status quo. Most of the push for innovation remain isolated in small internal environments, limiting impact over the university as a whole. This situation makes public universities costly and poorly adapted to responding to the demands for broad social inclusion. The highly prestigious public universities were successful in avoiding adopting a more flexible portfolio of learning alternatives and a new governance framework. This move, while it did preserve the public sector from some side-effects of massification, ended up reinforcing the traditional hierarchy of prestige and social esteem attached to different kinds of degrees. This dynamic also helped to consecrate the conservative approach that holds the bachelor's degree as the holy grail to which the entire system is geared, while undermining the social value of other learning paths.

The deeply-ingrained institutional model of the university—as a research institution with most academics on full-time contracts with low teaching loads—prevalent in the public sector, contaminated the design and development of the new institutional additions of technical colleges, making them too expensive to function as an alternative for answering the demands for access to HE. Finally, the selectiveness of the vocational programs offered in the public sector in secondary education preserve them as an alternative path for access to a public university (Bandera, 2014), and limits their impact over the shape of the country's regime of skills development.

All these traits put education and HE at the service of dynamics preserving dualization in the labour market, which helps to reproduce the inequalities in Brazilian society. Therefore, focusing the entire policy debate on the issue of expanding enrolment in HE effectively occludes the real focus of social inclusion, which is to achieve a new design in the regime of skills formation marked by different and flexible learning paths. This change would not only help to prepare new generations to face deep changes in the labour market created by the accelerated pace of the technological change, but also improve the opportunities open to the children from poor families. In fact, today, as in the past, the conservative design of the country's regime of skills development denies access to relevant skills to these children, which would allow them to fight against the heritage of poverty and social exclusion. At the other end, the highly hierarchical design of Brazilian HE still prevents, even among those reaching HE, full access to the social and cultural capital that would allow a deep change in the profile of the country's social stratification.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

School Market in Quebec and the Reproduction of Social Inequalities in Higher Education

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to show that the stratification of the Quebec secondary school market contributes to the reproduction of social inequalities in higher education. The results obtained from a sample (N = 2,677) of a cohort of students born in 1984 and observed up to the age of 22 show that the influence of social origin operates in large part via mediation of the type of institution attended. Students enrolled in private or public institutions offering enriched programs (in mathematics, science or languages) are significantly more likely to access college and university education than their peers who attended a public institution offering only regular programs. Additional analyses reveal that the probability of attending a private or public institution offering enriched programs is strongly correlated with the social origin of the student. The influence of the education market itself operates through differences in performance and educational aspirations that characterize students in the three types of establishments.

1. Introduction

In Quebec, as in other developed societies, mass higher education has intensified since the 1980s. According to Savard and Bouthaïm (2006) and the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Science (Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur, de la Recherche et de la Science, 2015), the rate of access to General and Vocational College (CEGEP), the first level of higher education and known in French as *Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel* (the equivalent of tertiary-type B education in OECD nomenclature), increased from 39.3% in 1975–1976 to 53.3% in 1985–1986, and to 60.8% in 1990–1991, before stabilizing around 60% thereafter. The situation is more or less similar in university, where the rate of enrollment in a bachelor's degree program increased from 29% in 1984 to 36.7% in 2011 (Ministère de l'Éducation, 1999; Ministère de l'Éducation,

du Loisir et du Sport, 2014). In other words, nearly two out of three students pursue higher education and one goes on to university. Despite this popularization, studies have shown that social inequalities in terms of access to this level of education persist (Chenard & Doray, 2013; Dandurand, 1986, 1991; Sylvain, Laforce, & Trottier, 1985). These inequalities have been attributed to differences in educational aspirations, which are themselves associated with the social and ethnic origin of students. According to Dandurand (1991), it is a "partial democratization", because gaps remain persistent between the French-speaking majority and the English-speaking or other-mother-tongue minorities, between men and women, as well as between young people of working-class origin and their peers from wealthy families. Recently, Chenard and Doray (2013) have pointed out that even though the popularization of higher education in Quebec is steadily increasing, it remains an area of social

reproduction, especially in university, where the effects of culture and family income are combined with the effects of academic pathways and experience.

In general, Quebec studies on inequalities in higher education have shown that these are the result of differences in academic pathways in high school taken by different social groups, which are attributable to power relations between social classes, genders and ethnicity (Dandurand, 1986, 1991). The resulting explanations are thus in line with the theory of social reproduction established by Bourdieu and Passeron (1970).

Although the explanatory scope of this theory is undeniable, we consider that it is limited. It would be as if the school system and the public policies that structure it were socially neutral. However, as Whelan, Nolan, Esping-Andersen, Maitre and Sander (2012) point out, the persistence of the reproduction of inequalities observed across several societies is strongly anchored in the evolution of public policies and the functioning of social institutions, educational systems in particular. As a result, the production of social inequalities stems from both the responsibilities assumed by the state and by families (Motel-Klingebiel, Tesch-Roemer, & Von Kondratowitz, 2005).

The purpose of this article is to show that the persistence of unequal access to higher education in Quebec is dependent on public education policies via the structure of the education market. Paradoxically, the choice to introduce market practices in education was made in the name of fairness and educational democratization. Before illustrating this point with data, it would be useful to clarify the concept of education market and to give a brief overview of the writings on its links with academic (in)equality.

2. Education Markets and the Democratization of Education: Convergence or Divergence?

The recent evolution of education systems in several developed countries has been characterized by increased competition between schools, stimulated by the expansion of parents' freedom to choose schools for their children, as well as the possibility for schools to select or classify students. This dynamic of choice and competition has given rise to what has been termed an "education market" (Felouzis & Perroton, 2007; Felouzis, Maroy, & van Zanten, 2013; Teelken, 1999; van Zanten, 2006, 2009). Whether between parents or between schools, competition is based on the search for better quality of student training (Falabella, 2014). Parents find a good school for their children, while schools look for good students. However, several authors emphasize that the use of the market concept in the field of education must be more nuanced because of its rather "hybrid" character (Felouzis et al., 2013; Felouzis & Perroton, 2007). Unlike other types of goods or service markets, the law of supply and demand is not defined by the partners but by government, which also regulates the quality of the goods and

services traded (Ball, 1993). That is why several authors propose the term quasi-market (Bradley & Taylor, 2002; Felouzis & Perroton, 2007; Whitty, 1997).

The intensification of the education market through public policies in education has been the subject of conflicting debates between university researchers. Advocates, particularly in the United States, argue that freedom of choice and competition among schools improve efficiency while reducing inequities in access to quality education (Chubb & Moe, 1988). Several studies come to this conclusion, as indicated in a meta-analysis performed by Belfield and Levin (2002) from 41 studies. On one hand, in most of the studies identified, there is a significant link between competition and student performance, graduation rate or dropout rate. On the other hand, there are many who, on the contrary, maintain that the education market is at the origin of some forms of social segregation. Belfield and Levin (2002) have submitted the hypothesis that the impact of competition in student performance is instead attributable to other factors created by competition, notably the quality and quantity of resources allocated to learning. As Felouzis et al. (2013) observe, it is difficult to measure the actual effect of competition between institutions, because the education market is moderated by contextual elements such as the characteristics of the local population (social and ethnic composition, quality and frequency of urban transit, type of urbanization, etc.). The work of Lubienski, Gulosino and Weitzel (2009) is consistent in this respect. These authors show that the efficiency of private schools is less related to market practices (competition) than to the socioeconomic characteristics of the students who attend them, especially since private schools are often located in neighbourhoods with a larger proportion of wealthy families.

Several studies carried out in other developed countries, notably in Great Britain (Bradley & Taylor, 2002) and in Australia (Bradley, Draca, & Green, 2004) concur. According to Bradley and Taylor (2002), the institutionalization of competition in 1992 between British high schools resulted in a general increase in student performance, regardless of the initial level of the institution. However, in terms of equity, the results veer in the opposite direction, revealing disparities between institutions. These disparities result from the polarization of students according to their social origin. Felouzis and Perroton (2007, 2009) note the consequences of ethnic and social segregation phenomena on the academic acquisition and orientation of students in French schools. According to these authors, competition results in the concentration of the weakest and most disadvantaged students in a small number of schools. Their marginalization leads to a drop in the quality of training by lowering expectations and requirements for success by the management of the institutions and by their teachers.

In short, the education market is a powerful instrument of social and academic segregation by which middle and upper-class families succeed in implementing strategies to avoid social and ethnic diversity (Bernal,

2005; Felouzis & Perroton, 2009). In the name of meritocracy, it allows these social classes to control access routes to university education, notably to prestigious institutions and sectors (Draelants, 2013).

However, the extent of the education market effect on segregation varies between societal contexts in accordance with the public policies and the social and cultural traditions that underpin these policies (van Zanten, 2006). Segregation would thus be less attributable to competition practices, per se, than to the polarization of students according to social origin that results from the practices of selection and the traditional organization of the school system, as evidenced by comparative studies in Europe by Dronkers and Avram (2009). Moreover, the importance of the education market and the extent of its effects on the production of inequalities vary over time within the same context. This is the case in Quebec. While the goal of equity and academic justice has been at the heart of education reforms since the 1960s, the Quebec school system has been progressively characterized by an inter- and intra-establishment hierarchization and stratification (Dandurand, 1991) that the sociologists (Lessard & Levasseur, 2007; Marcotte-Fournier, Bourdon, Lessard, & Dionne, 2016) attribute to the institutionalization of education market practices. This study thus argues that the intensification of the education market in recent decades contributes to maintaining or even increasing inequalities in higher education. Before illustrating this with empirical data, we briefly describe the characteristics of the Quebec education market in the following section.

3. The Structure of the Quebec Education Market

The Quebec school system is divided into four levels: preschool and elementary education, secondary education, CEGEP and university education. The compulsory education age is set at 16 years and the duration of secondary education is five years. The Quebec school system is made up of two types of institutions in both primary and secondary: private and public. Whether private or public, all schools in Quebec are under the control of the state in the sense that they must all respect and implement the same curriculum. According to the 2015 report of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, there were 802 secondary schools of which 181 had a private status (almost a quarter). According to a recent report of the federation of private schools (Paradis, 2015), there were 87,500 students enrolled in private secondary schools, representing over 20% of secondary school students across the province. The same report indicates that more than one-third of Montreal's educational institutions (35%) are part of the private network, compared to 12% in other urban regions with more than 500,000 inhabitants and 6% elsewhere in Quebec. Private secondary schools are distinguished from public institutions by two major characteristics. First, they have the right to select their students on the basis of academic performance criteria and to expel those who subsequently fail to meet the standards of the school. Second, they have the right to charge parents tuition, a fee level that depends on whether or not they are subsidized (in part) by the government. As for public schools, they are under the obligation to unconditionally educate all students residing in their territory.

In addition to the division between private and public networks, the Quebec school market is characterized by the vertical differentiation of subjects, in both private and public institutions. Since the 1980s, the Public Education Act has allowed public secondary schools to develop special programs for so-called talented or gifted students. Gradually, several public institutions have adopted this strategy, especially in urban areas, in order to retain the "good" students who are migrating in increasing numbers to private institutions. Such a provision allows them to counter, or at the very least to confront, competition from the private sector, which continues to heighten. The expansion of special projects has given rise to curriculum differentiation which, in fact, now makes it possible to offer unequal training depending on the grade level of students (Marcotte-Fournier, 2015). There is a broad variety of enriched programs, but in general they focus on a small core of areas: mathematics, science, languages, arts and technology. In response to this differentiation, private institutions have adopted the same strategy to maintain competition with the public sector. In both cases, private and public, these enriched programs must be approved by the Ministry of Education. It is up to each school to decide on the number of places offered and admission criteria used to select or reject students.

The rapprochement of public and private institutions was further advanced by relaxing district school maps. While public schools are still obliged to provide schooling for all students residing within their territory, they are now allowed, though not compelled, to admit students residing outside their recruitment zones when parents request it. In other words, the law extends the freedom of parents to choose the school for their children outside their zone of residence, although this freedom remains subordinate to the right of the school to decide whether to admit this category of students and to set admission criteria.

In short, Québec's education system is characterized by a market model that was intensified in the 1980s. Combined within this market are the parents' freedom to choose a school for their children, competition between public or private institutions, and state control. While reforms since the 1960s have always placed school justice at the heart of the agenda, it is important to examine the extent to which the market model and the practices in place (curriculum differentiation, choice of school by parents, competition between schools) help to preserve school justice or, on the contrary, to challenge it. This study posits that the school market contributes to the reconstitution of inequalities in higher education. The following section describes the data and the strategies used for this purpose.

4. Data and Methodology

4.1. Data Source

The analysis will be based on data from the Youth in Transition Survey (YITS) derived from a 10-year follow-up of a cohort of students from the age of 16 to 26. Conducted jointly by Statistics Canada and Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC), this survey is an extension of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) conducted in 2000 by the OECD with 15-year-old students in 1999. In Canada, the PISA sample consisted of 29,687 students enrolled in 2000, of whom 4,450 were in the province of Quebec. Following this survey, Statistics Canada and HRSDC re-interviewed the subjects every two years over a 10-year period, from 2000 to 2010. The questionnaires used at Cycle 1 were used to gather information about the program year 2000. Subsequently, surveys were repeated every two years. For example, the Cycle 2 questionnaire collected information on the educational and professional backgrounds of respondents over the period 2001–2002, Cycle 3 covered the period 2003–2004, and so on to Cycle 6, which collected information on the respondents' situation for the years 2009 and 2010.

In addition, the database used contains information on sociodemographic characteristics of various aspects of the life events (social or educational) collected by either PISA or YITS. However, we decided to use only the data collected up to Cycle 4 (2005–2006), when the respondents were 22 years old, for two reasons. Firstly, it represents the age when the majority of students have already started studying at one of the two levels of higher education: college or university. Secondly, it allows to consider students who exclusively undertook a "regular" schooling pathway and to avoid possible skewing from adults returning to studies, for which we do not have information that could control their effect (for example, the recognition of life experience in admission considerations).

4.2. The Measure of Variables Studied

The dependent variable in this article is access to higher education. It is measured by the highest level of schooling attended during the observation period (2000–2006), i.e., between 16 and 22 years of age. Three categories were considered: (1) high school education, which, for us, corresponds to a failure to pursue higher education, (2) college studies and (3) university studies. It is therefore an ordinal variable because, in Quebec, college and university constitute two successive and non-parallel levels, as it is the case in many educational systems, particularly in the United States and the rest of Canada. In other words, access to university is conditional upon graduation from college and the transition to college requires a high school diploma.

Two *independent variables* are at the heart of this study: the social origin of the student and the stratification of the education market. Social origin has been measured by two dimensions, respectively, of academic capital and family economics: (1) the education level of the most educated parent and (2) the annual income of both parents. The stratification of the education market was measured by the type of secondary school attended or the curriculum followed by the secondary school student. Respondents were grouped into three categories: (1) those who attended a private school, (2) those who attended a public school, but took enriched courses in language, science or mathematics, and (3) those who attended a public school but attended only the regular public school track. Table 1 summarizes the overall portrait of the sample according to the three variables.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents by social origin and type of secondary school attended.

Education level of parents	N	%
High school or less	937	35
College	1,070	40
University	669	25
Annual income of both parents		
1st quartile	669	25
2nd quartile	615	23
3rd quartile	589	22
4th quartile	803	30
Type of school or class attended		
Regular public	1,365	51
Enriched public	883	33
Private	428	16
All	2,677	100

Regarding *control variables*, the analysis takes into account three groups of variables recognized for their influence on access to higher education that are both related to socioeconomic background and the education market: (1) academic performance, (2) educational aspirations and (3) sociodemographic characteristics. The student's academic performance was measured by PISA reading scores. As for educational aspirations, they were measured by the highest level of study foreseen by students at the age of 15 years. Finally, the analysis also takes into account the student's gender and place of residence (urban/rural) of their parents.

4.3. Statistical Analysis Model

Since the dependent variable studied is ordinal, ordinal logistic regression analysis with the logit function (Allison, 2003) was applied. Specifically, the cumulative logit model was used. This consists of comparing the upper cumulative categories of the studied variable with the lower cumulative categories. Since the dependent variable studied in this case has three categories, the model estimates the cumulative probability of a respon-

dent belonging to either category 2 (college) versus 1 (high school), or category 3 (university) versus 1 and 2.

5. Results

After graduation from high school, the majority of young Quebecers pursue higher education in college. The results in Table 2 show that by the age of 22, 70% of respondents had attended college at some point. Half of them (35%) had accessed university. However, the rate of access to one or the other level varies significantly according to the social origin of the student (parental education level and income), but also according to the type of institution attended in high school. Thus, the college transition rate is 54% among those whose parents hold at most a high school diploma, while it is 89% when at least one parent has a university degree. These inequalities are maintained or even increase at the university level. While the probability of going to university is 20% when neither parent has gone beyond high school, it increases to 32% when at least one parent has a college diploma and 60% if a parent has a university degree, triple the rate for the first category. These disparities are more or less similar for parental income levels, albeit less significant.

Access to higher education is also associated with the type of institution attended in high school. Students enrolled only in regular programs in public schools access college at a rate of 49%, versus almost all students in private schools (94%) or public institutions with enriched programs in mathematics, science and languages (91%). The gaps widen even more at university, where the transition rates are, respectively, 15%, 51% and 60%. The education market therefore has an effect on the production of significant inequalities in access to higher education, particularly to university. Significant differences exist not only between students in the private versus public sector, but also and especially among those who have enrolled in regular programs versus enriched programs in the public sector.

The following ordinal logistic analyses (see Table 3) seek to estimate the relative influence of each of these two variables. As a first step, bivariate analyses were performed to determine the gross effect of each of the different variables (*independent* and *control*) that will be included in the model. The results show that this effect is significant for all variables. In a second step, multiple regression analyses were carried out. Model 1 includes both the social origin and the type of institution attended. The results reveal that, when taking into account the school attended, the influence of the student's social origin remains significant, but decreases considerably. This supports the hypothesis that the effect of social origin is mediated by the type of school attended. In other words, social background influences the choice of type of high school attended, which, in turn, influences the chances of accessing higher education. Conversely, when the social background is taken into account, the influence of the school attended decreases considerably: when the socioeconomic status of the parents is comparable, the inequalities between students attending the private and the enriched public schools disappear but remain significantly high compared to their peers in the regular stream. This supports the hypothesis of an interaction between the two variables. In other words, the influence of social origin (parental socioeconomic status) varies according to the type of institution attended and vice versa. The fact that private school students globally access higher education (both college and university, $\beta = .347$, p < .001) in a relatively higher proportion than their peers in the enriched public stream (see Bivariate analysis) is thus partly due to differences in social origin. The first group comes, more often, from wealthy families. For example, a further analysis shows that 50% of those who attended a private high school have at least one parent with a university degree while it is 29% and 14% for those who respectively attended enriched and regular curriculum in public school.

Table 2. Access to higher education according to the social origin of the student and the type of high school attended (%).

	No access to CEGEP	High school $\Rightarrow$ CEGEP	CEGEP $\Rightarrow$ University
Education level of parents			
High school	46	54	20
College	37	63	32
University	11	89	60
Annual income of both parents			
1st quartile	41	59	23
2nd quartile	35	65	27
3rd quartile	24	76	37
4th quartile	22	78	46
Type of school or class attended			
Regular public	51	49	15
Enriched public	9	91	51
Private	6	94	60
All	30	70	34

Table 3. Ordinal logistic regression coefficients.

	Bivariate	Model 1	Model 2
	β	β	β
Independent variables			
Education level of parents			
High school	−.792**	−.526***	−.265**
College	Reference	Reference	Reference
University	1.100***	.692***	.491***
Annual income			
1st quartile	−.252***	−.135 (NS)	−.118 (NS)
2nd quartile	Reference	Reference	Reference
3rd quartile	.476***	.251*	.120 (NS)
4th quartile	.727***	.497**	.293*
Type of school or class attended			
Regular public	−2.027***	−1.817***	−1.019**
Enriched public	Reference	Reference	Reference
Private	.347***	.214 (NS)	.466**
Control variables			
PISA reading scores	1.667***	—	.711***
Educational aspiration level			
High school	Reference	—	Reference
College	1.933***	—	1.452***
University	3.436***	—	2.380***
Didn't know	1.499***	—	1.488***
Gender (female)	.635***	.930***	.611***
Residential location (urban)	.604***	.262*	.058 (NS)
Pseudo R^2		.1864	.2886
Wald χ^2		726.00	895.16
Degree of freedom		9	13
N		2,677	2,677

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$; NS: not significant at 0.05.

Model 2 verifies the hypothesis that the effect of the type of secondary school attended on access to higher education is exerted through differences in academic performance (measured here by PISA scores in reading) and students' educational aspirations. While Model 1 does not show a significant difference between private and enriched schools, the difference reappears when performance and academic aspirations are included in the analysis. In other words, with similar aspirations and academic performance, private school students are more likely to access higher education than their peers in the enriched programs in public schools. This suggests the hypothesis that the high rate of access to higher education among students from enriched in public institutions is attributable to their high level of educational aspirations, but especially to their academic performance.

In sum, the influence of social origin on access to college or university is partly mediated by the type of high school or program followed (enriched or regular). On the other hand, the influence of the type of institution is in turn mediated by the differences in performance and educational aspirations that characterize the students in private, enriched public and regular public programs.

6. Discussion

The results of this study confirm our hypothesis that the structure of the Quebec secondary school market, through its inter- and intra-institutional stratification character, exerts an important influence on the social reproduction of inequalities in higher education. Existing literature (Felouzis, 2009; Jenkins, Micklewright, & Schnepf, 2008) posits three possible interpretations, although their relative weight depends greatly on the societal context. The first refers to differences in the quality of education based on the different types of school or course of study to which students have access within these institutions. As a review of the writings of Rompré (2015) and the analysis of Quebec's Conseil Superieur de l'Éducation (2016) show, the segregations that characterize this differentiation have the effect of offering unequal education, both on a cognitive and non-cognitive level.

At the same time, teachers and principals tend to raise the level of expectations and demands on students because they are confident that they will be able to respond to them.

The stratification of the education market would also have the effect of creating an uneven distribution of financial and educational resources between schools and classes. In the case of selective training and schools, administrators tend to mobilize more pedagogical resources (technologies, libraries, etc.) for organizing school and extracurricular activities (competitions for prizes, trips, etc.) to further raise the level of students who are already strong in terms of knowledge and culture. Although poorly documented and not officially recognized, such inequalities between institutions certainly exist in Quebec (Karsenti & Collin, 2013).

Differences in access to higher education can also be attributed to differences in the institutional environment. The higher the expectations of students, the more strategies are mobilized to make the school environment conducive to learning and effective organization (Bryk & Lee, 1992; Dronkers & Robert, 2008). In Quebec, private schools have always been deemed to have a better quality of supervision that promotes student success (Brassard, 2006).

The second track relates to differences in scholastic experience. The stratification of schools and classes is not without effect on students' school experiences (Felouzis, 2009). If students who attend selective institutions and classes—private schools and enriched programs in the public sector in Quebec—demonstrate high academic performance and aspirations, it should be because they have developed a sense of confidence in themselves (Sheldrake, 2016). Thus, being enrolled in a private institution or an enriched class would be interpreted as a form of merit, recognition of the skills to succeed and perform that would, in turn, generate a sense of confidence and commitment to education. As Teese (1998) pointed out, the selection of students and the stratification of classes or institutions create and maintain a culture of elitism and social hierarchy among students themselves.

The third track deals with the social and academic composition of the group of students attending a school (Dronkers & Robert, 2008). The stratification of institutions and classes tends to favour the polarization of classes based on the level of school performance and social origin. From this point of view, this polarization tends to homogenize students' school experiences through the mutual influence of their peers in terms of their educational aspirations, their commitment to studies and the valuation of success. It could be argued that students in the private and the enriched public sectors maintain a high level of academic performance and aspirations due to peer interactions, a culture of competition and collaboration within the institution. In sum, additionally to the favourable effects of schooling and social origin, the students' aspirations to pursue higher education are contin-

ually modeled by the "school effect" (Draelants, 2013), through the quality of cognitive and non-cognitive training, the resources allocated, peer influence, and the quality of the institutional environment.

7. Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to examine the extent to which the stratification of the Quebec secondary school market contributes to the reproduction of inequalities in access to higher education. The results of our analyses reveal three main findings. First, although higher education is accessible to the majority of young people, there are still significant disparities based on social origin. The analysis reveals, however, that the influence of the latter operates largely through the mediation of the type of school attended and the courses or pathways offered within them. Students who attended a private or public institution with enriched programs (in mathematics, science or languages) are significantly more likely to have access to college and university education than their peers who followed the regular stream in a public institution. However, additional analyses reveal that the probability of attending a private or public institution with enriched programs is strongly correlated with the social origin of the student. Secondly, the influence of inter- and intra-institutional stratification is itself mediated by the performance inequalities of students. In this study, we examined the effect of school performance as measured by PISA scores and by student achievement at the end of high school.

In the end, the results of this study confirm the hypothesis that unequal access to higher education in Quebec is reflected in the stratification of the education market. In a context of equal opportunities, supported by the free and compulsory nature of primary and secondary education, the education market serves as an instrument of segregation that allows middle and upper-class families to preserve their privileges. In the name of social justice and systemic efficiency, the right to choose one's school favours and perpetuates the homogenization of students according to their social origin and academic performance. Since this homogenization is accompanied by an unequal supply of education and by school segregation, students are subject to an uneven educational and professional future, as the results of this study testify. However, this study has examined only two factors related to the education market, which is complex and contains other aspects that need to be examined. To bridge this gap, further studies may focus on academic performance in subjects other than reading. On the non-cognitive level, it would be interesting to study the effect of interactions among students, between students and school staff (e.g., teachers or guidance counsellors), differences in various resources and the internal climate. In addition, our study was limited to examining inequalities of access. Future research could expand to other areas, such as field of study, academic perseverance and grad-

uation. From a methodological point of view, it would have been useful to use the model of structural equations, allowing direct and indirect effects to be distinguished, but the distribution of certain variables did not allow us to carry out such an analysis, which forced us to limit ourselves to logistic analyses.

Despite these limitations, this study has produced interesting results both theoretical and political. On the theoretical side, its main contribution is to illustrate that the question of reproducing social inequalities has become more complex since the governments of many countries instituted and strengthened their policies of equal opportunity. Several previous studies associate these inequalities with sociodemographic characteristics, in particular socioeconomic origin and the way education systems are structured (Dubet, Duru-Bellat, & Vérétout, 2010; Pechar & Andres, 2011). Most of these studies focus on either of these two factors. The distinguishing characteristic of this article is to have attempted, from the data available, to take both into account.

International comparison studies distinguish two types of education systems: differentiated and comprehensive (Dubet et al., 2010; Dupriez & Dumay, 2006; Felouzis, 2009; Marks, 2005). The former are characterized by early student separation and orientation into hierarchical streams that usually operate on the basis of academic performance. Conversely, comprehensive systems are distinguished by a long-term common training structure. Selection and orientation in hierarchical streams occur much later, if at all, and the number of selective courses is limited. The ultimate goal of this long-term joint training is to provide all students with an equivalent educational background so as to minimize the effects of family resources on student performance, as well as access to higher education and vocational guidance. The educational and vocational guidance that follows this common core therefore relies more on student choice and accumulated skills than on the cultural and economic capital of the parents.

As noted in the studies cited above, Canadian provinces, including Quebec, are part of comprehensive school systems. In Quebec, orientation into general or professional education streams starting from the third year of secondary school is based on student choice and not on any sort of selection. In addition, the system allows students to change their orientation. In this respect, the structure of the education system is egalitarian. On the one hand, the egalitarian vision officially promoted in public policies has been compromised by social segregation spurred by the expansion of the school market in recent decades (Lessard & Levasseur, 2007). As discussed earlier, this segregation takes place through competition between the network of private and public institutions, which has led to intra-institutional competition, differentiated education and horizontal stratification in secondary education (Kamanzi & Maroy, 2017; Maroy & Kamanzi, 2017). The practices at the heart of this segregation are neither generalized nor obligatory. It is be-

cause of the intervention of social actors (in particular, parents' associations) that the segregation has been established. On the other hand, these practices have been accepted and even supported by the state, notably via the financing of private schools and enriched programs in public schools. Finally, this article shows, using the example of Quebec, that the production of inequalities in higher education is modulated by the interaction between public policies and the social background of students. In other words, the influence of social origin varies as a function of public policies and vice versa. While recognizing that the relative weight of each varies according to societal context and the socioeconomic climate, it can be argued that such a conclusion applies to all school systems (Dubet et al., 2010; Draelants, 2013).

On the political level, this study justifies the relevance of a reflection on educational policies in Quebec. While the institutionalization of curriculum differentiation is justified by the need to take into account the aptitudes and the individual needs of students, it should still be necessary to preserve the principles of justice and social equity. Although this differentiation is inevitable in the current context, a reflection on educational policies is required to increase the social and academic diversity of students and to avoid or, at the very least, to curb the hierarchy of classes and institutions based on social origin, which the various school reforms since the 1960s have always sought to end (Conseil Superieur de l'Éducation, 2016).

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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Article

Second-Chance Alternatives and Maintained Inequality in Access to Higher Education in Israel

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Abstract
Students are expected to obtain a matriculation diploma during their high school years. Throughout the world, it is considered as a precondition to gaining access to higher education. However, those who failed to meet this criterion can employ, in some cases, "second-chance" alternatives—either to obtain a diploma at an older age, or to enter specific academic programs that do not require one. The literature on second-chance alternatives tends to concentrate on these programs' evaluation. It rarely addresses the overall effect of these programs on inequality of educational opportunities (IEO). The current study focuses on Israelis who failed to gain a matriculation diploma at their high school graduation and contemplate on the effects that ethnic differences between them play on their chances to enter higher education. Based on a new Panel survey (2012–2016), we found that Israelis from affluent ethnic backgrounds were able to increase their chances to access higher education using "second-chance alternatives". Those from minority groups, most notably Arabs, were less likely to benefit from these alternatives. While originally aimed at improving higher education enrolment for people from disadvantaged backgrounds, these "second-chance alternatives" resulted in an increase of ethnic-based IEO. Considering the lower rates of Israelis who utilise them, we deduct that these programs "failed" to accomplish their original purpose. However, we argue that they merit further research since their understanding can benefit researchers and policy makers.

1. Introduction: Second-Chance Alternatives as a Form of Educational Expansion

Higher education is considered a scarce commodity. Apart from the very basic educational levels, which are accessible to almost everyone, climbing up the educational ladder is a competition with winners and potential losers. Usually, competition for a seat at the higher levels of the educational system requires a universal test or other method of screening. Those who are found as qualified can proceed to the next level, while others leave the system completely or settle for a less prestigious path. However, since the ability of students to pass the selection process is largely dependent on their social background (Au, 2014; Feniger, 2018; Triventi, Panichella, Ballarino, Barone, & Bernardi, 2016) and it only loosely predicts their actual success in the next educational level (Beller, 2001), the fairness of these procedures is under scrutiny (Arbel, Bar-El, & Tobol, 2017).

Therefore, "second-chance alternatives" which allow students who failed the screening process to enter the next level of education are important. When these pro-

grams are truly accessible to everyone (Inbar & Sever, 1989; Savelsberg, Pignata, & Weckert, 2017), they are assumed to reduce the level of inequality in opportunities, since people from lower backgrounds can use them to enter the educational level they were previously denied. Moreover, they undermine the importance of universal tests or other selection methods, and present a convincing argument for their elimination: if a student who is not qualified by the official assessment is able to succeed, what is the purpose of the screening process?

This study presents a different approach. We see the existence of second-chance paths as a form of educational expansion. The possibility to continue to the next educational level without passing the screenings enables more students to expand their educational opportunities (Buchholz & Schier, 2015; Schudde & Goldrick-Rab, 2015). This is especially true when the second-chance opportunity is universal. If the second-chance option is accessible to anyone failing the traditional education system, it is the equivalent of reducing the relative cost of education for individuals, similar to the effective cost reduction provided by educational expansion (Raftery & Hout, 1993). In these circumstances, students view the opportunity to acquire education as less costly, since they do not need to spend time repeating the previous level of education (Raftery & Hout, 1993).

We would expect that second-chance programs would increase inequality of educational opportunities, in line with Raftery and Hout's (1993) Maximally Maintained Inequality (MMI) hypothesis. According to this hypothesis, students from affluent background are more able to exploit new educational opportunities—like educational expansion or second-chance programs—and therefore are more likely to take advantage of these opportunities (Raffe, 1979). Hence, the proportion of students from advantaged background will increase at a higher rate than that of students from lower background and the inequality of educational opportunity (IEO) would rise. Studies of both educational expansion (Bar-Haim & Shavit, 2013) and second-chance programs (Ayalon, 1990) empirically support this hypothesis.

When the second-chance program is targeted toward a specific group, however, the situation is quite different. In that case, students outside the targeted group cannot exploit the opportunity and therefore, the program is expected to reduce at least nominal IEO. At the same time, there is a risk that the new program will mark its members as a distinguished group in a way that would affect their future educational attainment (Blank, 2008). We parallel this mark-up to the Effectively Maintained Inequality (EMI) hypothesis (Ayalon & Shavit, 2004; Lucas, 2001, 2009; Marks, 2013). This hypothesis emphasizes the qualitative differences between old and new educational opportunities and claims that while the nominal IEO would decrease due to the expansion, the IEO in entering the next level would increase or at least remain stable through differences in the quality of educational institutions, fields of study etc. While there is much less empirical evidence on the effect of such targeted programs to support this claim (Gale & McNnamee, 1995), some results (Shavit, Ayalon, & Kurlaender, 2002) demonstrate that when a second-chance program was able to reduce inequality in the specific level, the beneficiaries of it suffered from a disadvantage in the next educational level, thus the IEO increased in the following levels.

Based on these insights, we examine second-chance paths for accessing academic education in Israel and its effect on ethnicity-based IEO. We do so by testing who are the beneficiaries from these opportunities using the Israeli household panel survey (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017a, 2017b). The next section presents the ethnic inequality in Israeli society in general and in the education system in particular. This is followed by a description of the second-chance alternatives in Israel, which are aimed mainly at disadvantaged groups, but may nevertheless benefit the stronger.

2. The Israeli Context: Ethnically Stratified and Educationally Unequal

2.1. The Israeli Education System

As in most developed countries, the Israeli education system consists of four stages: elementary, middle, secondary and higher. Students in secondary school are assigned to academic tracks, which prepare them for higher studies, and to vocational tracks, which combines academic and vocational training. Vocational tracks are usually attended by scholastically weaker students who have not done well in middle school (Blank, Shavit, & Yaish, 2016), but students on all tracks can sit for the matriculation exams.

From elementary to high school, Israel's education system is divided into several sectors, reflecting the ethnic and social diversity in Israel. Arabs and Jews are highly segregated in the school system (Shavit, 1990), as most Arab students attend Arabic-speaking schools and virtually all Jews attend Hebrew-speaking schools. The Hebrew-speaking school system consists of three main sectors: non-religious state schools, attended by about 55% of all Jewish students; religious state schools, serving about 20% of Jewish students and ultra-orthodox schools, catering to approximately 25% of Jewish students (Blank & Shavit, 2016; Blass & Shavit, 2017; Chachashvili-Bolotin & Lissitsa, 2016). Most Arabs attend Arab state schools (there are no state religious Arab schools), but a sizable minority of Arab students, Christian and Muslim, attend private parochial Christian schools founded by various Christian denominations. These are generally regarded as being of better quality than the state schools (Al-Haj, 2012; Okun & Friedlander, 2005).

While the transition from elementary to middle school is mandatory, much like that from middle to high school, admission to most higher education institutions—state universities, colleges or private colleges—requires sufficient score in a psychometric test

(Helms, 2015) and matriculation diploma (*Bagrut*). The diploma is granted to those passing the final exams in several mandatory subjects and additional elective subjects at advanced level. The grades further affect the odds of being admitted to selective university departments. In recent years, over 70% of birth cohorts sat at least one matriculation exam (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2017b). However, only about 48% passed all necessary exams and were eligible for the matriculation diploma.

Since absence of matriculation diploma can deny access to higher education, there ley the need for second-chance opportunities.

2.2. Inequality of Educational Opportunities and Ethnic Stratification in Israel

Inequality of educational opportunities in Israel has been politically perceived in the broader context of ethnic and class stratification. Three major distinct ethnic groups account for most of the population: Jews of European and American origin (Ashkenazy Jews); Jews of African and Asian origin (Mizrahi Jews); and Arabs. This diversity greatly affects stratification in Israel. Israeli Arabs are characterized as being of lower socio-economic status than Jews in every aspect of stratification, including educational and economic outcomes (Cohen, Haberfeld, & Kristal, 2007; Lewin-Epstein & Semyonov, 1993; Shavit, 1984). Among Jews, those of European and American origin are usually ranked higher on the stratification ladder, although their advantage has been decreasing over generations (Bar-Haim & Semyonov, 2015). Studies of ethnicity and educational achievements consistently found that Ashkenazy Jews are more likely to obtain higher educational certifications than Mizrahi Jews and Arabs (Bar-Haim & Semyonov, 2015; Bar-Haim, Yaish, & Shavit, 2008; Friedlander, Okun, & Goldscheider, 2016).

2.3. Second-Chance Paths in Israel and IEO

Shavit et al. (2002) name two second-chance paths that were available during the 1990s in Israel. The first is university preparatory programs (*Mechinot*). These are one-year studying programs, offered at universities, without the need for matriculation diploma. Students who succeed in these programs are eligible to enter academic institutions in the field of study relevant to the courses they learned at the program. A Reform held in 2011 (The State Comptroller, 2016), determined that credentials given by preparatory programs can replace the matriculation diploma in admission to any academic institution. However, the reform was never fully implemented and in 2013, only 35% of the students in preparatory programs were given such a credential. Among the rest, 55% were tested again in the national exams required for state issued matriculation diploma and 10% studied for credentials acknowledged only by specific institutes. In addition, since 2011 the preparatory programs have been targeted mainly toward people from lower back-

ground, with differential admission cost and unique separate programs for ultra-orthodox Jews, Arabs and new immigrants. Thus, such programs can be expected to benefit primarily disadvantaged students. However, as Shafir and Peled (1998) describe, the mandatory military service in Israel serves as justification for discrimination of Arab citizens who are exempt from it. This is true also for some preparatory schools where students who served in the army are eligible for scholarships and reduced fees. While Mizrahi Jews can benefit from this assistance, it can hinder the Jewish-Arabic equality potential of such programs.

Another route described by Shavit et al. (2002) is the so-called "external" examination, as students sit for matriculation exams after the completion of high school. This is the preferred path for students who took the matriculation exams during high school but failed to make the necessary requirements to be eligible for diploma (either by failing the tests or taking only part of the required exams). This option is universal and not targeted toward a specific group, with only minimal fee. However, there are private and public preparatory schools for tutoring students before the exams, with considerable admission fees (Addi-Raccah & Dana, 2015; Zilkha, 2017) that can enhance the success of more affluent students. During the previous decade, a third second-chance path emerged in the form of acceptance to higher education institutions based solely on the psychometric tests. This option is available in several colleges and specific, less prestigious fields of study in universities. It does not target specific group, but due to the limited available fields of study and the demand for relatively high psychometric score, this path is relevant only for a small fraction of students, mainly from advantaged groups who can take preparatory courses before the psychometric test (Davidovitch & Soen, 2015). In addition, students from lower background are rarely aware of their options to enter academics institutions without the need of a matriculation diploma (Ayalon, 1990), since these options are usually suggested—by each academic institution—only to those already applied and are not widely publicized. In that sense, only people with suitable social and cultural capital are aware of these options.

Overall, the above-mentioned mechanisms do not suggest a clear beneficiary for second-chance programs in Israel. While targeted programs might be beneficial for the weakest groups, the accessibility of the opportunities might provide an advantage for stronger groups. Hence, two contradicting hypotheses can be inferred:

H1: The second-chance paths make academic education more accessible for scholastically-weak students from stronger background (Ashkenazi Jews) thus increasing IEO in academic education.

H2: The second-chance paths targeted toward the weaker ethnic groups made academic education more accessible for students coming from a weaker back-

ground (Arabs and Mizrahi Jews). Therefore, they decrease IEO in academic education.

3. Analytical Strategy: Using New Israeli Panel Data to Estimate the Chance of Entering an Academic Institution via Second-Chance Program

3.1. Data: Israel Longitudinal Survey

In this study, we employ a relatively new data set provided by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics. The data set, known as Israel Longitudinal Survey is based on annual panel consisting of four waves (2012–2016) of more than 4,000 Israeli households in a representative sample of the entire population of long-term residents of Israel. The number of individuals for whom there is at least one observation is about 20,000. However, only 70% of the respondents were interviewed more than once and information for all four waves was only available for 4,182 respondents.

We further limited the sample to respondents aged 19 to 35 for Arabs and 21 to 37 for Jews to account only for respondents who completed (or dropped out of) secondary education and to avoid the problem of selection through military service.[1]

The panel lacks any information on parental background and has no identifier for specific ethnicity of first-generation immigrants (former FSU and immigrants from Ethiopia). Therefore, we restricted the sample to include only Israeli born individuals. The number of respondents in the final restricted sample is 2,960.

3.2. Research Variables: Monitoring Educational and Ethnic Characteristics

The dependent variable used in the study relates to the studying status, i.e., whether the respondent study during the panel or previously studied in an academic institution. We consider only respondents who studied at an Israeli institution (for which matriculation diploma is usually required).

The first independent variable—Matriculation—indicates whether the respondent obtained a matriculation diploma after the expected end of high school (age 18) at the start of the panel period (in 2012).

The classification of respondents' ethnicity is based on parental country of birth and self-identification ethnicity (in the case of Arabs). We differentiate between four of the most common ethnic categories in Israel, using dummy variables: Ashkenazi (for respondents who came, or their father came, from Europe and America), third generation Jews (respondents that their parents are Israeli born), Mizrahi Jews (Asia and Africa) and

Arabs. For mixed ethnicity (12% of the overall sample, 11% in the restricted sample), we used a dominance approach, i.e., we gave the respondent the highest prestige ethnicity of the parents. Ashkenazi Jews are the reference category.[2]

We control for ultra-orthodox ("Haredi") Jews, based on respondents' own declarations. This group usually attends separated schools, without taking any matriculation exams. As a result, almost no members of the group have a matriculation diploma. However, some ultra-orthodox Jews in Israel enter higher education, exploiting targeted programs. Ultra-orthodox Jews are mainly Ashkenazi and third generation Israeli born (42.4% and 47.2% respectively) and therefore it is important to control this attribute.

In addition, controls are placed for gender (men = 0) and age (based in year of birth).

3.3. Statistical Methods

Logistic regression is used to estimate the effect of ethnicity on the chances of entering an academic institution through a second-chance program. The predictor is studying now or in the past at an academic institution. The independent variables are having matriculation diploma at the start of the panel, ethnicity, ultra-orthodox, gender and age. We also estimate the interaction effect between ethnicity and matriculation diploma. Equation 1 demonstrates the model.

Equation 1:

$$\text{Log}\left(\frac{p_y}{1-p_y}\right) = a + b_1\text{Matriculation} + b_2\text{Ethnicity} \\ + b_3\text{Matriculation} \times \text{Ethnicity} \\ + b_4\text{UltraOrthodox} + b_5\text{Female} \\ + b_6\text{Age} + e$$

4. Results: Do Strong Ethnic Groups Have an Advantage in Exploiting Second-Chance Programs in Israel's Higher Education System?

The analysis is divided into two sections. The first is descriptive and depicts rates of students enrolled in academic institutions by 2016, who did and did not have matriculation diploma at the end of high school. The second comprise a logistic model employed to estimate inequality in the chances of accessing higher education, controlling for the status of matriculation diploma at the end of high school.

As seen in Table 1, less than 3% failed to gain a matriculation diploma at their high school graduation in 2012, yet still enrolled into higher education through second-

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[1] As Arabs are exempt from mandatory military service, they enroll in higher education shortly after their high school graduation whereas Jews serve 2–3 years in the army and only then can turn to higher education. In an unreported analysis, we include the same age range for both Arabs and Jews. The results of the logistic regression were similar, but the percentage of third generation Israeli Jews who enroll to academic institution was considerably smaller, due to their later entry.

[2] In an unreported analysis, we employ the model with a separate category for mixed ethnicity. The results were very similar to the analysis presented here, with the mixed category preforming very similar to the third generation Israeli born Jews.

Table 1. Distribution (%) of the studying status by 2016 of respondents who did and did not had Matriculation diploma at 2012.

	Had Matriculation diploma in 2012	
Study in academic institution by 2016	**No**	**Yes**
No	97.68%	57.09%
Yes	2.32%	42.91%
Total	100%	100%

Notes: N = 2,960; weighted = 507,606.

chance alternatives. Thus, their ability to affect IEO in Israel is rather low, and this will be discussed at the final section of this article. This is in line with previous findings, for example, from the Israeli Social Survey (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2017b) where among a similar age group, 2.7% of the respondents without a matriculation, enrolled in higher education.

Figure 1 presents the overall access to higher education, compared to access to higher education without a matriculation diploma at high school's graduation within each of the ethnic groups. In line with previous findings (Bar-Haim & Semyonov, 2015; Cohen et al., 2007), ethnic differences in academic attainment exist regardless of any second-chance possibility, and they are also present when considering these second-chance alternatives. However, the latter differences are much more prominent. For example, while holding matriculation diploma at high-school graduation, the chances of Ashkenazi Jews to attend academic institution are almost three times higher than those of Arab, and 20% higher than those of Mizrahi Jews. Among second-chance users, it is closer to four times and two times, respectively.

The results from our logistic model are presented in Table 2. We utilise this model to estimate inequality in the chances to enrol in higher education, given the absence of a matriculation diploma at high school's graduation. In line with previous studies and like other countries (Bar-Haim, Chauvel, Gornick, & Hartung, 2018; Stier &

Herzberg-Druker, 2017; Van Hek, Kraaykamp, & Wolbers, 2016), women are more likely to attain academic education than men. In addition, the absence of a matriculation diploma markedly restricts access to higher education (−2.631).

Among those who graduated from secondary education holding a matriculation diploma, there are, as expected, striking differences between Jews and Arab; the chances of Arabs to enter academic education are significantly lower than those of Ashkenazi Jews (−1.341). The chances of Mizrahi Jews and third generation Israeli Jews are also significantly lower compared to those of Ashkenazi Jews, though much higher than the Arabs' chances. These findings are in line with previous studies of academic attainment in Israel; It was illustrated that while Arabs still suffer from disadvantages in educational attainment, Mizrahi Jews have narrowed the educational gap during the last decade (Feniger, Mcdossi, & Ayalon, 2014). Unsurprisingly, ultra-orthodox Jews are less likely to enter academic education due to their preference to study in religious post-secondary educational systems (Yeshiv'a).

Without a matriculation diploma, the chances of Mizrahi Jews, third generation Israeli Jews and Arabs to enrol in higher education decrease significantly, as seen in the interactions' coefficients, the chances of all three groups to enjoy an alternate path to academic education are lower than the chances of Ashkenazi Jews who gradu-
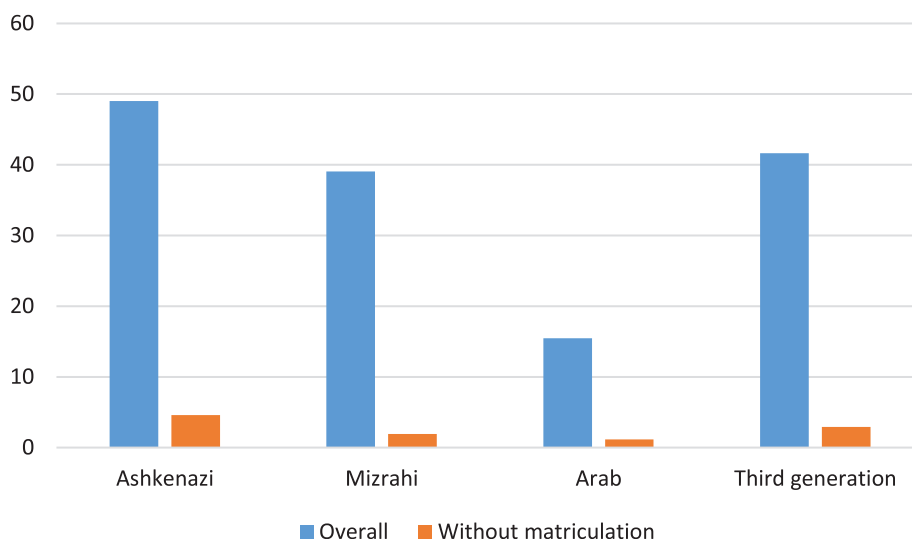

Figure 1. Academic enrolment by ethnic group, overall and without a matriculation diploma at high school's graduation.

Table 2. Fixed-effects logistic regression for attainment of academic education.

Variable	Coefficients	Marginal effects
Absence of matriculation	−2.631**	0.040
	(0.012)	(0.001)
Ethnicity		
Ashkenazi	—	0.585
		(0.001)
3rd generation Israeli Jew	−.107**	0.560
	(0.005)	(0.001)
Mizrahi	−.246**	0.527
	(0.008)	(0.001)
Arab	−1.341**	0.284
	(0.007)	(0.001)
Ultra-orthodox	−1.341**	—
	(0.013)	
Female	0.297**	—
	(0.003)	
Age	−.080**	—
	(0.004)	
Interaction with absence of matriculation		
Ashkenazi		
	—	0.052
		(0.001)
3rd generation Israeli Jew	−.261**	0.017
	(0.022)	(0.001)
Mizrahi	−.885**	0.010
	(0.042)	(0.001)
Arab	−.302**	0.036
	(0.029)	(0.001)
Intercept	−2.491**	—
	(0.012)	
Pseudo R^2	0.263	
N (unweighted)	2,408	

Note: ** − $p < 0.01$.

ated high school without matriculation diploma. Mizrahi Jews are particularly disadvantaged as their chances to enrol in academic education are smaller than that of Arabs.

5. "Failed" Expansion and Increased Ethnic IEO

The study of second-chance alternatives in education predates the literature on educational expansion and inequality of educational opportunities but shares a great deal in common with it. Both fields suggest that policies for reducing inequalities end up maintaining it and often even increase it. This article articulates the resemblance between the two fields and suggests a new way to interpret the implications of second-chance policies considering educational expansion hypothesis, mainly the MMI and EMI theories.

Our analysis estimated the chances of students to access higher education with and without a matriculation diploma at high school's graduation (i.e., the mainstream path to be eligible for attending academic institutions

in Israel). Hence, respondents without the diploma who enter academic education are the ones who exploited second-chance alternative.

We found considerable ethnic differences: without a matriculation diploma at high school's graduation, Mizrahi Jews, third generation Israeli Jews and Arabs were less likely than Ashkenazi Jews to access academic education. While not the most disadvantaged group, Mizrahi Jews suffered the most from not having a matriculation diploma. This suggests that especially for Mizrahi Jews, the second-chance alternatives are a source for increasing IEO. In that sense, the fact that less than 3% of the students exploit the second-chance alternatives may be part of the explanation for lack of IEO effect on Mizrahi Jews, found in Feniger et al. (2014).

Some of the second-chance alternatives were adjusted to better fit disadvantaged populations; several preparatory programs were given in Arabic and others targeted Jewish students from lower socioeconomic status background, as a combination of means-tested benefit programs combined with military service requirement.

However, on average, second-chance alternatives were mainly exploited by Ashkenazi Jews. Thus, the programs increased the level of IEO, at least from an ethnic point of view. While there is a strong correlation in Israel between ethnicity and class and Ashkenazi Jews are at the top of economic distributions (Bar-Haim & Semyonov, 2015), it is still possible that due to variation in economic background of the respondents the results would have differed with regards to parental background based IEO. If we consider second-chance alternatives as a form of educational expansion, or as a means to reducing costs in academic education, then the MMI hypothesis apply to this context. Students from stronger backgrounds were better equipped to exploit the second-chance opportunities than students from weaker backgrounds. Hence, programs that were aimed at reducing inequality were in fact maintaining it, helping weaker students (in our case, academically weak) from stronger backgrounds instead of the other way around. In that sense our findings stand in line with previous studies of second-chance alternatives that found similar results (Ayalon, 1990; Gale & McNnamee, 1995) and provide a wider theoretical framework that helps us understand these findings.

As mentioned before, less than 3% of the sample used those opportunities. Since only around a half of the birth cohort obtained a matriculation diploma at high school's graduation (Friedlander et al., 2016), this is not a result of a lack of candidates for second-chance alternatives in Israel. Understanding the reasons to the poor use of these alternatives is beyond the scope of this article. While it means that their overall effect on IEO in Israel is rather low, it also demonstrates that equalizing policies do not fulfil their goal, gaining further support to researches who had similar conclusions.

The relatively small percentage of people who actually utilise second-chance alternatives might serve as a good cause to dismiss the entire notion of alternative paths to access academic education as a way of educational expansion. However, we argue that these programs merit further research since their understanding can benefit researchers and policy makers.

First, the availability of second-chance alternatives for students without a matriculation diploma makes it a unique opportunity to explore expansion in a situation in which the majority of the potential students did not exploit it. Most studies of educational expansion based their measurement of expansion on the increase in participation in higher education (Bar-Haim & Shavit, 2013; Lucas, 2009; Marks, 2013). Therefore, the measured expansion did not consider the potential students, who were eligible to exploit alternatives to gain a matriculation diploma but did not do so. The current case is a form of such "failed" expansion since we believe that programs in which so many resources have been invested were designed to increase higher education participation of a lot more individuals without a matriculation diploma (The State Comptroller, 2016). The fact that only a small fraction of them actually exploit it does not mean that

we cannot study its potential and actual effect on IEO as the programs remain active today and would probably expanded in the future.

As Ayalon, Shapira and Shavit (1992) claim, the availability of second-chance alternatives poses a challenge for mainstream paths. If a second-chance alternative can compensate for twelve years of disadvantage in the mainstream school system and prepare failed students for academic education in a relatively short time, it undermines the entire role of the mainstream system. The fact that a few individuals use it might be, therefore, the result of the strong tendency toward this mainstream system, in which people believe they cannot succeed in higher education without a matriculation diploma. In that sense, second-chance alternatives assist mainly people from higher backgrounds, who are in better position to undermine the mainstream system to begin with. Therefore, the small amount of people from disadvantaged ethnic backgrounds who exploit it might due to strong ethnic discrimination tendency in the education system in Israel. Students from disadvantaged ethnic backgrounds, who failed at high school in much higher rates than students from advantaged groups, also do not believe they are eligible for academic education and would not even try second-chance alternative. As such, it is important even if it affects only a small fraction of the targeted population.

The few individuals who exploit the second-chance alternatives might also be the reason for its increased IEO. The vast majority of people without a matriculation diploma are Arabs or Mizrahi Jews. These groups are less likely to exploit second-chance alternatives. Increasing the accessibility of the programs to these specific groups, can increase their overall effect and may reverse their contribution to IEO.

In terms of social policy, this study raises a question regarding the importance of second-chance alternatives to IEO, in a situation in which they are available, though scarcely used. In these circumstances, the second-chance alternatives, and especially the targeted programs, should be considered a failure. However, more targeted programs and a reaching out policy toward disadvantaged ethnic groups might change the situation and decrease IEO. Our findings can also encourage a re-thinking by policy makers who highly regard these programs as a tool for reducing inequality (The State Comptroller, 2016).

Further investigation of second-chance alternatives should include more details regarding social background. The current available data is not suitable for such a study, maybe because this is the first longitudinal study in Israel and the questionnaire is very concise. With better data, it would be possible to consider not only ethnic background but also parental education and class, which stand at the core of much of the studies presented here. A richer database would also enable a more thorough analysis of the different patterns in which each group exploit second-chance alternatives. Details on the spe-

cific program used by individuals will allow us to test, for example, whether Arabs do use their targeted programs or if the Arab-Jewish differences in participation are higher in institutions that have military-service based financial aid. In this sense, the current article presents a new angle on an old issue, some "food for thought" for future studies.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

Who Goes to College via Access Routes? A Comparative Study of Widening Participation Admission in Selective Universities in Ireland and England

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Abstract
This article explores changing national widening participation (WP) policy and responses from Higher Education institutions (HEIs) from a cross-national perspective. Specifically, the use of contextualised admissions and the provision of foundation year programmes in selective universities in Ireland and England are the key foci of interest. Using data gathered from WP students in two selective universities in Ireland and England, we explore how student characteristics differ according to the WP route undertaken. In an attempt to generate more knowledge of how HEIs enact WP policy, we draw on interviews conducted with staff involved in admission decision-making to explore how those with responsibility for admission within each institutional context perceive the WP pathways and their aims. The findings highlight how important it is for selective universities to adopt multiple WP pathways given that the use of contextualised admission and the provision of foundation years attract quite diverse student intakes. In both contexts, those entering through foundation years have experienced greater levels of disadvantage in terms of family history of education and family occupation compared to their contextualised admission counterparts. The qualitative findings reveal that those with responsibility for admission perceive the WP admission routes in different ways, highlighting a clash between institutional culture and the goals of WP.

1. Introduction

National policy responses to Widening Participation (WP) have varied over time and place, and as a result, changes have occurred to WP admission routes within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Yet, despite the voluminous literature pertaining to WP initiatives, there is a dearth of cross-national empirical research that seeks to capture commonalities and differences in the interpretation of WP policy responses (Clancy & Goastellec, 2007). This article addresses this gap and examines current na-

tional (country level) and institutional (within HEIs) WP policy from a comparative perspective, placing emphasis on how WP policy has shaped admission routes to two selective universities in the Republic of Ireland and England. Specifically, the use of contextualised admissions and the provision of foundation year programmes in two selective universities are the key foci of interest. By 'selective university' we mean a university in which the number of applicants far exceeds the number of available positions, thus allowing the university to exercise some discretion in the admission process (Ehrenberg & Sherman, 1984).

Using data gathered from WP students in two selective universities in Ireland and England, we explore how student intakes differ according to the WP admission route undertaken. We then use data gathered from university staff members with responsibility for admissions to illustrate commonalities and differences in how WP policy is enacted in each setting. The key research questions addressed are: (1) Do the characteristics of students entering selective universities differ depending on the WP admission route taken? That is, do the characteristics of WP students entering through a foundation year differ from those entering directly through contextualised admissions? (2) How are the WP admission routes and their aims interpreted by those with responsibility for admissions? How are the rules interpreted?

In the next section, we provide a rationale for a cross-national study, and draw on the existing empirical and theoretical literature that highlights the socially stratified nature of HE admission systems. Section 3 provides an overview of WP policy developments pertaining to Ireland and England. The methodological approach to the interviews which sought to explore decision-makers experiences' and reflections on the admission process is set out in Section 4; and Section 5 offers a cross-national comparative analysis of the characteristics of students who have gained admission to HE through foundation year programmes and contextualised admission routes. The qualitative findings report on three themes that emerged during the analyses: (1) how those with responsibility for admissions understand the dynamics of processes of inequality in educational attainment; (2) how those with responsibility for admissions make distinctions between each of the WP routes; and (3) how WP initiatives are located within the context of the selective universities. The article concludes with a summary and discussion of how WP initiatives are positioned in the broader admissions processes in selective universities.

2. Rationale and Review of Literature on Higher Education Admission Systems

In recent years, the proportion of 17–20 year olds progressing to HE has increased in England from just 19% in 1990 to approximately 49% in 2015–2016 (BIS, 2017) while the proportion of 18–20 year olds in Ireland has increased from 20% in 1980 to 52% in 2015 (Clancy & Wall, 2000; HEA, 2015). Over this time a range of WP initiatives have been implemented in both national contexts. Yet, despite their prevalence, comparative research on WP policy and the specific measures adopted by HEIs to recruit WP students both within and across country contexts remains under explored (for exceptions see Donnelly & Evans, 2018). As a result, research studies that examine the characteristics of students entering higher education from similar cross-national WP programmes are limited, as are research studies that exam-

ine the characteristics of students entering higher education from different WP programmes within selective universities. Thus, a comparative study of WP policy and initiatives at both the institutional level (within HEIs) and at the national level (country level) between Ireland and England is timely for a number of reasons. Firstly, both HE systems have experienced high rates of expansion coupled with a highly educated population in European terms. That is, in both contexts there is now more than a 20% difference in the number of students attending Higher Education since 2000, and in both contexts over 45% of the 25–34 age group have acquired a higher education qualification. Secondly, trends in WP policy have become increasingly convergent in Ireland and England in terms of national target setting and accountability, making an interesting case study. In Ireland, the Higher Education Authority (HEA) continues the practice of setting national targets but has recently made HEIs more accountable for WP offerings by demanding that each HEI states their institutional WP targets in a 'performance compact'[1] since 2014. This shift has been accompanied by a number of competitive funding streams provided by the Department for Education and Skills (DES) for HEIs to implement evidence-based WP initiatives. In England, national target setting around WP is more recent (since 2015) and so, historically, HEIs have had more discretion in setting their own parameters for WP. Access agreements have been in place for some time in England, since 2006 when income contingent loans were introduced. Since that time, the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) has had the remit to ensure that higher fees do not inhibit equity of access. Thus, HEIs must agree an Access Agreement with OFFA in order to be able to charge higher fees, while retaining considerable agency in shaping institutional WP activities. Since April 2018, the Office for Students (OfS) has become the regulatory body for the English higher education sector. From the academic year 2019–2020, Access and Participation Plans and will have to be approved by the OfS, replacing Access Agreements.

The issue of institutional prestige adds a further layer of complexity when considering the implementation of WP policy. Young people from low socioeconomic groups are under-represented in the most selective universities in a number of country contexts (Jerrim, Chmielewski, & Parker, 2015) including Ireland and England. In England, these students are particularly poorly represented in 'Old' (pre-1992) universities, as opposed to 'New' (post-1992) universities and especially so in Russell Group universities (Boliver, 2013, 2015; O'Sullivan, Robson, & Winters, 2018; Robertson & Hillman, 1997). In the Irish context, students from less advantaged backgrounds are more likely to be attending Institutes of Technology versus universities (Byrne & McCoy, 2017; McCoy & Smyth, 2011), while a significant majority of first year entrants in the most academically selective universities are drawn from private

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[1] In 2014, each HEI entered into a 'performance compact' with the HEA undertaking how it would contribute to national objectives. The compacts provide for a roadmap for how performance is to be measured and a proportion of funding is contingent on performance.

or fee-paying schools (Share & Carroll, 2013). Despite the existence of a culture of selective admissions in the HE entry systems in both Ireland and England, it is important to keep in mind that progressive shifts have co-existed within selective universities, including the WP movement. That is, the last ten years have seen alternative entry routes to HE becoming more noticeable in national policy, with the use of contextualised admissions and the provision of foundation years becoming more common in both Ireland and England. However, where these routes fit within the stratified university system is under-explored, and the extent to which the characteristics of students who utilise these routes differ is relatively unknown. In addition, cross-national comparative studies have neglected how WP initiatives are perceived in the broader admissions processes in selective universities.

Access to selective universities is an important WP policy consideration given that graduate outcomes tend to be more favourable as the most sought employers favour and reward such graduates. For example, in England and the UK, graduates of more prestigious HEIs are more likely to secure professional and managerial jobs and earn higher salaries than students attending HEIs that are deemed to be less prestigious (Hussain, McNally, & Telhaj, 2009). In the Irish context, research has identified that there is a wage premium to university attendance as opposed to attendance at an Institute of Technology, all else being equal (Kelly, O'Connell, & Smyth, 2010). Furthermore, the competitive context of HE in each country means that the most selective universities have more resources, are commonly perceived to deliver the best education, and are positioned in top international rankings. Each of these aspects confer certain educational and career benefits that are not available in other institutions.

For quite some time, the admission system has been a concern in international studies on social stratification in higher education, given that the system and its rules represent the key mechanism through which access to HE is determined (Alon, 2011, in Israel; Boliver, 2013, in the UK; Byrne, Doris, Sweetman, Casey, & Raffe, 2013, in Ireland; Karabel, 2005, in the US; Thomsen, 2018, in Denmark; Zimdars, Sullivan, & Heath, 2009, in England). Both social closure theory (Weber, 1978) and social reproduction theory (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) posit that selective universities adopt admission policies that match the cultural capital of their desired intakes, thus reproducing and maintaining advantage in securing admission for the privileged professional classes. What is of particular interest to us is the interpretation of the aims of WP initiatives and admission 'rules' by those who have responsibility for admission. Research studies involving those who are responsible for admission decision-making are still in their infancy in the social stratification literature (for exceptions see Bowman & Bastedo, 2018; Stevens, 2007; Zimdars, 2010). As a result, relatively few research studies have explored the

processes that HEIs use to develop selection criteria and review applicant materials, the procedures for assessing applications, and the practices of those with responsibility for admissions. To this end, much less is known about the processes involved in admitting WP students, or how WP policy (or rule) enactment occurs within specific institutions. Admission policies for selective universities may be 'written' by Government or indeed by those within a university with responsibility for the strategic direction (such as a Governing Authority, which may or may not include those with responsibility for admissions). Thus, we also need to pay greater attention to the 'negotiation, contestation or struggle between different groups who may lie outside of the formal machinery of official policy-making' (Ozga, 2000, p. 13). As a result, our attention to those who are responsible for admission decisions is heightened, given that existing research has found that there is a certain amount of lee-way involved—that in the selective university context 'admission decisions are not formulaic' (Zimdars, 2010, p. 319). Therefore, interviews conducted with those involved in WP admissions form an important part of understanding the patterns of who is admitted to a selective university as a WP student, and the type of admission route taken, from a cross-national perspective.

3. WP Policy Developments in Ireland and England

Since the late 1990s, there have been several changes to WP policy in both Ireland and England to try to improve access to HE for under-represented socio-economic groups. As a result, HEIs are beginning to move away from simplistic explanations of inequality to greater consideration of the complex nature of its causes, recognising that WP activities need to bridge gaps in human, social and cultural capital if students are to succeed in higher education. In this section, we focus on two key policy developments—namely, the use of contextualised admission and the provision of foundation years. While contextualised admissions and the provision of foundation years are distinct WP initiatives, they share some common characteristics. That is, both consider the context of the applicant and their circumstances along a range of dimensions; and both can potentially allow for reduced academic entry requirement, taking into consideration the long-term impact that socio-economic disadvantage can have on the educational attainment of young people.

3.1. Contextualised Admissions

Universities in Ireland and England are using a contextualised admission system as a means of increasing participation rates of disadvantaged students. In England, the idea of contextualising academic attainment on entry to HE can be traced back to at least the 1960s and 1970s and became more formalised as a process following the Schwartz Report (2014) which recommended that contextual admissions become part of fair admissions

(Mountford-Zimdars, Moore, & Graham, 2016; Schwartz, 2004). In the English context, students apply through a centralised admission system and can opt in by declaring contextual information as part of their undergraduate admissions application.[2] Universities and colleges use contextualised admission differently, but typically those with responsibility for admissions in individual universities/colleges apply the contextualised indicators to assist with making conditional offers or offers to interview.[3] A second method uses applicant data to calculate individualised offers resulting in a reduced grade offer (a reduced academic requirement). Adopting a contextualised admission system means including a number of 'flags' on each application by those with responsibility for admissions during the admissions process, where each 'flag' represents a different indicator of disadvantage. In the English context, four types of flags or indicators are generally used: (1) individual-level; (2) area-level; (3) school-level; and (4) participation in WP programmes or outreach activities. A survey of 68 universities in the UK in 2015 revealed that 84% were using some form of contextualised admissions, up from 37% in 2012 (Sundorph, Vasilev, & Coiffait, 2017).

In Ireland the Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) is a national, centralised contextualised admissions system. All universities and some Institutes of Technology use HEAR. As in the English context, applicants must 'opt in' to this admission system. That is, applicants must specifically apply to become 'HEAR Eligible', a process that has recently become part of the centralised HE application process undertaken by the Central Applications Office (CAO). Previously, at the time of data collection for this article, students had to submit applications to a specialised body tasked with contextualised admission, a function that was undertaken by those working in WP 'access' offices. In 2017, 7.5% of all higher education applicants applied to become 'HEAR eligible', down from 10.6% in recessionary Ireland in 2012 (Byrne et al., 2013; Nic Fhlannchadha, 2017). The Irish system also adopts four different types of pre-defined indicators of disadvantage which include a household income indicator—which applicants must meet to become HEAR eligible—as well as a combination of two other indicators at the (1) individual level, (2) school level or (3) area level (see Table 1). During the application process, candidates are either deemed 'HEAR eligible' if they meet three or more indicators, meaning that they can avail of a reduced grade offer for their course of preference if required. Given that higher education entry in Ireland is determined by performance in the Leaving Certificate (terminal examination at upper secondary), a quota system of reserved places for each course in each participating HEI then allows HEAR eligible students to compete against each other for places. As soon as the number of reserved places is filled, remaining HEAR students join the competition for places with all other applicants. Research has found that those who are deemed to be 'HEAR eligible' are more likely to receive an offer of a place at higher education than all other higher education applicants (Byrne et al., 2013).

The use of the reduced grade mechanism is a key aspect of the contextualised admission process in both contexts. As indicated above, in some universities in England the contextual applicants may be either prioritised for a reduced grade offer at one or more grades below the standard offer, or alternatively guaranteed an interview. Research in the English context has consistently found that contextual information is used by institutions in a broad sense—where those in admissions take the information into consideration when making offers—rather than for reduced grade entry (Boliver, Crawford, Powell, & Craige, 2017; Sundorph et al., 2017). Research in Ireland also reports considerable variation across universities/colleges and over time in the use of the reduced grade mechanism. Byrne et al. (2013) found that among the HEAR eligible applicants entering higher education between 2010 and 2012, the share who had received a reduced grade offer was in decline—down from 44% in 2010 to 33% in 2012. Yet, HEAR eligible students fare as well as direct entry students in terms of progression beyond first year at HE, irrespective of a reduction in academic requirements (Byrne et al., 2013). Likewise, in the English context, there is no evidence to suggest that entry through reduced academic requirements results in higher drop-out rates, lower completion rates or lower overall attainment at HE (Boliver et al., 2017).

There are some key differences between how Ireland and England use contextualised data. In the Irish context, the use of indicators is standardised across universities/colleges. That is, each of the institutions that use the contextualised admission approach apply the same indicators, and these indicators are now applied centrally rather than by individual institutions. In England onus is placed on individual institutions to decide their own contextualised admission system and they may choose among indicators, as there is no centralised, pre-defined category that universities are required to use. Recent research suggests that previous participation in widening access programmes is the most common contextual indicator used, with two-thirds of universities in England reporting that they take this into account than other indicators (Boliver et al., 2017). In the Irish context, Byrne et al. (2013) found that the majority of those who reached the status 'HEAR eligible' did so on the combination of income and medical indicators, coupled with either socioeconomic status, school or area indicators.

Whether contextualised admission entry is overseen at a national level as in the case of Ireland, or operated by individual institutions as in the case of England, it does not come without problems. That is, a lack of

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[2] The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) has this function in the English context.

[3] As indicated above, in some universities/colleges in England the contextual applicants may be prioritised for a reduced grade offer at one or more grades below the standard offer—for example, AAB or ABB at A-level rather than AAA.

transparency is an issue for both systems. In Ireland there is a lack of transparency around precisely how much of a grade reduction is given to HEAR applicant students across universities (Byrne et al., 2013), while in the English context Boliver et al. (2017) have also found that there is a lack of transparency in the use of contextualised admissions across HEIs.

3.2. Foundation Years

Universities in Ireland and England have also developed foundation year programmes[4] as a way of supporting students to transition into university and to supplement the 'attainment gap'. Across both contexts, these programmes are broadly intended for those who do not meet the formal entry qualifications for their chosen degree and are designed to prepare students for degree level study (O'Sullivan et al., 2018).[5] That is, in both countries, students would typically not be permitted entry to the first year of their preferred undergraduate programme without the foundation year programme.

There is now greater momentum around university provision of foundation year programmes in the UK more broadly, and currently there are over 700 programmes available through University Central Admission System (UCAS, 2017), with considerable variation in terms of what they offer, and their target student. In the English context, these programmes have taken three directions; provision for international students, provision for the general student population, and provision to widen the participation rates of under-represented groups in university, to include mature students or students from low socio-economic backgrounds. Foundation years have evolved from pre-university entry courses provided in the further education (FE) sector or provided as collaborative FE/HE projects (Sanders & Daly, 2013).

In Ireland, foundation years have traditionally been delivered in the university context and have targeted under-represented student groups. Recent WP policy has advocated the continued delivery of foundation years largely orientated towards young adults and mature students but with a remit to promote links between HE and FE providers (HEA, 2015). Unlike in England, application to foundation year programmes are made directly to the university/HEI. Currently in Ireland, each of the seven universities run foundation year programmes for under-represented groups.

Foundation year programmes within and across country contexts also vary in the type of supports they offer students. However, for those from under-represented socio-economic groups and mature students, the supports specifically seek to facilitate the development of social and cultural capital alongside generic academic skills and/or subject specific content. In doing so, the programmes recognise that the challenges facing underrepresented groups in HE are complex. Thus, they seek to support the development of peer relationships, support academic ability and growth in students' confidence; prevent students feeling under-qualified compared to their peers, and aim to provide access to forms of bridging capital that support retention and progression (Heil, Reisel, & Attewell, 2014; O'Sullivan et al., 2018). A review of foundation years in Ireland demonstrated the effectiveness of the model in supporting under-represented students to access higher education (Murphy, 2009), and evidence from one selective Irish university found that retention and graduation rates were in line with those of direct entry students (Share & Carroll, 2013). In England, evidence is rather sparse although some research shows that foundation year students fare as well as direct entry students in the first year of study (Sanders & Daly, 2013). O'Sullivan et al. (2018) also report how a foundation year programme delivered in a selective university is supporting students to integrate into the prestigious environment. Boliver et al. (2017) also recommend that foundation year provision should be increased in England, with greater targeting of those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

There are commonalities and differences between foundation year programmes in the two selective universities under investigation in this article (see Table 1). In terms of commonalities, applications are made directly to the University[6], and students are assessed on application, interview and writing competency. However, differences also exist. Firstly, in the English selective university, the indicators that are used to determine entry to the foundation year were adapted from the existing contextualised admission indicators for entry to the university. In the Irish context, it is the other way around—as the national contextualised admission indicators were adapted from pre-existing foundation year provision. Secondly, while each selective university employs indicators of disadvantage for admission, some differences exist in the classification of socio-economic disadvantage. As shown in Table 1, in Ireland income level is a key indicator for socio-economic disadvantage, alongside parental socio-economic background, school type, residential postcode, eligibility for a medical card and welfare status. In the UK, the extension of indicators allowed for a more nuanced approach to WP than currently was used in the institution. The approach taken required that applicants meet the indicators of income and/or low parental socio-economic group at the individual level, alongside area level indicators capturing the proportion of young people participating in HE (POLAR[7]), the socio-economic profile of the area (ACORN[8]), and school characteristics (school

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[4] In Ireland, these are known as access courses or foundation courses. For the purposes of consistency this article will use the term 'foundation year' that incorporates those offered in both the UK and Ireland.

[5] For further information on the development of foundation year programmes in the UK see Sanders, Daly and Fitzgerald (2016).

[6] In this respect, the English foundation year under investigation deviates from the typical national application procedure.

[7] POLAR: Participation of Local Areas classification.

[8] ACORN: A tool used to characterise a postcode according to socio-economic status.

Table 1. Key characteristics contextualised admission in Ireland and foundation years in two selective universities in Ireland and England.

	Foundation Year, Selective University in England	Foundation Year, Selective University in Ireland	Ireland Contextualised Admissions
Application *Method and Material Required*	Direct Application to the University Application + Written Work + Interview(s)	Direct Application to the University Application + Written Work + Interview(s)	Application via Central Applications Office (CAO)
Eligibility & Indicators/Flags	Applicants must have studied at a state school for entire school career, AND/OR have been in the care of a local authority AND/OR meet the Individual and socio-economic indicators	Applicants must have attended a school linked to the access service in the HEI, as well as meet the household income threshold, and meet two other indicators of disadvantage.	Applicants must meet the household income threshold, and meet two other indicators of disadvantage
Household Income	Household income below £42,875 (€48,905)	Household income below €45,790	
SES	All parents present must belong to an under-represented socio-economic group in HE		
Medical Card		In receipt of a medical card for at least 12 months	
Social Welfare Recipient		In receipt of a means-tested social assistance payment	
School	The school that you attended for your GCSEs[9] scored below the national average for GCSE Results OR the school that you are attending for your A Levels[10] scored below the national average for the 'Average Point Per Academic Entry'	Applicants must have attended a school linked to the access service in the HEI, have completed 5 years in a DEIS[11] school—a school with a concentration of disadvantaged students	Have completed 5 years in a DEIS school—a school with a concentration of disadvantaged students
Area	POLAR: live in an area with a smaller proportion of young people participating in higher education. ACORN code: live in an area of socio-economic disadvantage	Live in an area that is disadvantaged, very disadvantaged or extremely disadvantaged	
Academic Entry Requirements	Yes, one grade typically below the traditional offer from the university of AAA. Applicants must have A Levels, Scottish Highers or International Baccalaureate. BTEC National may be eligible	Yes—5 × O6/1 × H5. Applicants must have passed English and Math Distinction in the LCA, or QQI-FET Level 5	Reduced LC points basis. Sliding points scale in play typically 10% reduction of points—deductions greater for higher point courses
Residency	Applicants must be eligible for 'home fee' status	Applicants must be eligible for the Government Free Fees Scheme or EU Fees	
Age	Applicants must be aged 19 or under	Applicants must be 21 years of age or under	
Duration	1 year, full-time	1 year, full-time	3-4 year depending on the Degree
Level of study	Level 3, same as A levels	Level 6 Special Purpose	Levels 6–8

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[9] GCSEs: Examinations undertaken by 14–16 years old in England.
[10] A-Levels: Upper secondary qualification in England.
[11] DEIS—Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools—is an initiative of the Department of Education and Skills in Ireland which seeks to improve the opportunities for those attending schools with high concentrations of children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Table 1. (Cont.) Key characteristics contextualised admission in Ireland and foundation years in two selective universities in Ireland and England.

	Foundation Year, Selective University in England	Foundation Year, Selective University in Ireland	Ireland Contextualised Admissions
Institutional Responsibility for Foundation Year Students	College responsibility for Foundation Year students (not Departments)	Responsibility of the University	
Direct entry to Degree course	Progression not guaranteed. Application made through UCAS in November	Progression is guaranteed. Application made through CAO February	Students already in degree.
Tuition and Accommodation	Free Tuition + Stipend	Free Tuition + Bursary	Some HEIs offer a stipend; students may be eligible for a grant.

type, school pre and post 16 ranking). Finally, in terms of inter-institutional linkages, the foundation year in the Irish context is 'tightly coupled' as it requires that applicants attend schools linked to the selective university. This is a national characteristic, shaped by Irish WP policy approach whereby universities are allocated schools that have low progression rates to higher education, to facilitate the targeting of WP activities. In contrast, the foundation year under investigation in the English context is 'loosely coupled'.

4. Methodology

The empirical data used in this article derives from a number of research projects conducted at a selective university in England and at a selective university in Ireland. The first was a cross-national study of WP students in Ireland and England[12]. The second was a national evaluation of the HEAR scheme in Ireland (Byrne et al., 2013). The quantitative data presented in Table 2 is drawn from baseline data from the O'Sullivan et al. (2018) study, and three groups are represented: (1) foundation year students attending a selective university in England; (2) foundation year students attending a selective university in Ireland; and (3) those who gained entry through the contextualised admission route in Ireland (i.e., those who were deemed to be HEAR eligible) in 2016 and 2017. The qualitative data consisted of 8 semi-structured interviews conducted with academic staff with responsibility for admission to the selective university in England, a focus group of admission officers, as well as 2 interviews with WP access staff working at the selective university in Ireland. In England, the fieldwork consisted of interviews with academic staff with responsibility for admission across a range of colleges. In Ireland, interviews were conducted with WP staff, co-ordinators of the national contextualised admission programme and admission staff. For the pur-

poses of anonymity, all respondent quotes are referred to in the article as 'England' or 'Ireland'. The time period of the fieldwork was between September and May of 2016–2017 for the former and February to May 2013 for the latter. The study used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)—a qualitative approach that explores in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). In this context, rather than attempting to produce an objective statement of the admissions process and an account of the actual work conducted by those involved in admissions, IPA techniques were adopted to explore the participants' individual experiences and personal reflections on the admissions process and rules. To this end, the personal experiences and perceptions of the how the foundation year and the contextualised admissions process fit within the selective university WP agenda was also of concern in the methodological approach. The key aim of the analysis was to make meaning of the beliefs and constructs that emerged from the interviews. Close reading of the interview transcripts was followed by documentation of emerging themes and their connections.

5. Findings

This section presents the results of a descriptive analysis of the characteristics of participants who have gained admission through the foundation year route in each selective university in Ireland and England, and those who have gained admission through the contextualised admission process in the selective university in Ireland.[13] While limited in its analytic capability and cross-sectional nature, the data presented provides a descriptive snapshot of the characteristics of students who have secured admission through different WP admission routes. In particular, it allows to explore: (1) a comparison of how the student intake into foundation year programmes differ across two selective universities in Ireland and in

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[12] Irish Research Council Grant awarded to Katriona O'Sullivan.

[13] Similar data for those entering through contextualised admission in the selective university in England was not available to the research team.

England; and (2) how the student intake to a selective university in Ireland differs according to the foundation year and contextualised admission routes. Key characteristics captured by the data include gender, family structure, race/ethnicity, parental education, parental occupation and previous educational attainment (equivalised).

5.1. How Foundation Year Students Differ in Two Selective Universities in Ireland and England

As indicated above, the data allow a cross-national comparison of how the student intake into foundation year programmes differs across two selective universities in Ireland and in England. The findings are presented in Table 2. Clearly, the size of the cohort is greater in the foundation year offered in the selective university in Ireland than its counterpart in England. However, there are also some striking similarities—each capture a higher share of females relative to males. While females are more likely to attend HE in the Irish context than males, this finding is particularly interesting in the English context given that Zimdars (2010) found that females were less likely to receive an offer for the selective university in England through the contextualised admission process, all else being equal. Lone parenthood is relatively high in both intakes in Ireland and England. In the UK, the percentage of dependent children living in lone parent families is 21% (Office of National Statistics, 2017) and in Ireland 18% of all family units are one parent families (CSO, 2016). In terms of family structure, each of the foundation years attract a high share of students from lone parent families, and those living with grandparents or other family members (51% of the Irish and 61% of the English intake). Ethnic minority groups have greater participation in the foundation year in England compared to Ireland (61% relative to 25% respectively). While there is more ethnic diversity in the English population than the Irish population, there is also considerable less attention paid to issues of ethnicity and race in WP and HE policy more generally, in Ireland than in England.[14]

The equivalised previous academic attainment of the foundation year students in the selective university in England was substantially greater than that in the selective university in Ireland. This observation displays the nuances that exist between selective universities in Ireland and England in selecting WP students. Such disparity may reflect the strong drive to maintain high academic standards of the English selective university—a theme that emerged in our analysis of the qualitative data (see in the section below). A practice of maintaining high entry requirements for WP students can be conceptualised as a form of 'cream skimming', where WP initiatives take the 'most intelligent' students from the low SES community, and place them in the 'top' universities, ignoring the societal and structural barriers which limit education progression, placing the responsibility for change on the low SES student in a manner that is similar to 'victim blaming' (Jones & Thomas, 2005, p. 617). With regard to parental education levels, both foundation year programmes attract students from the full range of academic backgrounds. However, clearly the foundation year programme in Ireland is capturing a greater proportion of students whose parents have very low levels of education (42% compared to 34% of students), while the opposite is also true—22% of foundation year students in the English selective university had parents with a HE qualification compared to just 9% in Ireland. In terms of parental employment, both foundation year programmes capture a similar share of young people from unemployed households, and those whose parents work in less secure employment (hourly paid jobs).

5.2. How Foundation Year and Contextualised Admissions Students Differ in a Selective University Ireland

The data also allow an examination of how different WP routes (foundation year versus contextualised admission) differ in terms of the student intakes that they admit at the selective university in Ireland. As shown in Table 2, the number of students accessing the university through each of the WP entry routes varies quite considerably, with the contextualised admission route capturing a larger number of entrants relative to the foundation year route. This is interesting given that our descriptive analysis shows that the characteristics of students who are admitted through each of the routes differ substantially. That is, students who experience greater levels of disadvantage in terms of family structure, parental education and household employment have greater levels of participation in the foundation year than those who were admitted through contextualised admission. For example, 51% of students admitted through the foundation year are from single parent households compared to 42% admitted through contextualised admission. With regard to parental education levels, both WP initiatives attract students from the full range of parental education levels. However, clearly the foundation year is a capturing a greater proportion of students whose parents have very low levels of education (24% of foundation year students relative to 16% of contextualised admission). Furthermore, in terms of parental employment, the foundation year captures a greater share of students coming from unemployed households (12% compared to 3%). Finally, student average grades are significantly lower for the foundation year intake than the contextualised admission intake (by 114 points), meaning that foundation year students would not gain entry to the selective institution based on the grade average, even when the selective university is using contextualised admission.

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[14] 18% of the population in Ireland declared an ethnicity other than 'White Irish' in the 2016 Census of Population. In the English context, statistics based on the Census of Population 2011 indicate that 40% of residents in England and Wales identified with either an Asian, Black, Mixed or Other ethnic group.

Table 2. Characteristics of Students Entering the WP Admission Routes in two selective universities in Ireland and the UK.

%	Foundation Year		Contextualised Admissions
	Selective University England	Selective University Ireland	Selective University Ireland
Number	18	54	187
Gender			
Female	72.2	66.7	64.6
Male	27.8	33.3	31.8
Family Structure			
Single Parent Family	50.0	41.5	42.0
Two Parent Family	38.9	49.1	58.0
Living with Grand Parent/Relative/			
Foster Care	11.1	9.4	0.0
Race/Ethnicity			
White	38.9	75.0	77.4
Minority Ethnic/Racial Groups	61.1	25.0	22.6
Previous Attainment			
Average Attainment	436	344	458
Parental Education			
Primary Level Only	16.7	24.5	8.6
Junior Cert/GCSE	16.7	0.0	7.5
Leaving Cert/A Levels	5.6	18.9	25.1
Some college/FE	11.1	17.0	21.9
Degree/Higher Degree	22.2	5.7	13.9
Masters or Phd	0.0	3.8	5.8
Don't Know	11.1	11.3	8.6
Parental Employment			
Unemployed	15.4	11.8	2.8
Employed	84.6	88.2	97.2
% Employed on an Hourly Pay Basis	30.8	35.3	49.5

5.3. How Those Involved in Selective University Admission Perceive the WP Admission Routes

In an attempt to better understand how HEIs enact WP policy, the qualitative findings sought to unpack how those with responsibility for admissions in each context perceived the different WP admission routes. In the following section, three themes which emerged from the analysis of the qualitative data are discussed: (1) how those with responsibility for admissions understand the dynamics of processes of inequality in educational attainment; (2) how those with responsibility for admissions make distinctions between each of the WP admission routes; and (3) how discussions about the WP initiatives are located within the broader context of the selective institution.

5.3.1. Understandings of Processes of Inequality in Educational Attainment

For the most part, those involved in admission decision-making in the English selective university demonstrated

an understanding of the role played by long-term experiences of socio-economic disadvantage in the home on producing differences in educational achievement. Typical comments included:

They're [foundation year] students coming from really, really poor backgrounds…very disadvantaged households with very low incomes…the reasoning is that if they didn't get the predicted grades, it's just because of circumstances, and actually you can't fix it in the A level stage, it is an ongoing process and it needs a longer time to, you know, get these students up, up to a standard that they're capable of. (England)

Now…a student at that school [in a disadvantaged area], having gone through education in that area cannot achieve an Oxford or Cambridge offer. There might be one person in a decade in the school that has achieved A*, A, A, if the person who got an A* also happened to get As in the other two subjects. That's very different from a school which occasion-

ally produces A*s, occasionally produces Oxford and Cambridge people, have obviously the teaching infrastructure to do it. (England)

However, while schools were often central to this discussion, their reference appeared to be vague, with little specific elaboration as to *how* schools structure disadvantage. That is, research has shown that schools structure disadvantage through inequalities in access to informed career guidance, the persistence of tracking and ability grouping for key subjects, and inequalities in access to resources to supplement learning and assessment at school. Yet, the interviews did not yield such in-depth understanding of how schools structure processes of inequality in educational attainment. Rather, there was a strong discourse around the failures of the school system in preparing young people for entry to selective universities. In such instances in the English selective university, the rationale provided for the need for a foundation year programme was 'to make up for things that were missed in their schooling' or for universities more generally to 'take on…the failing of the school system'. This was in contrast to the Irish context, where those involved in admission decision-making and verifying indicators of disadvantage are WP access staff, there was less failure attributed to schools, and a stronger recognition of the supportive role that schools can play:

> When you are working with schools for outreach purposes, [school] staff have a huge understanding and knowledge of the students and their backgrounds and understanding where they come from. (Ireland)

Those involved in admissions in both contexts also acknowledged the role of local area disadvantage on individual attainment. While awareness was evident of the under-representation of young people from the most deprived areas in England, it was often articulated that the POLAR and ACORN indicators produced 'a mixed response'. At times, those involved in admissions found the area indicators to be less relevant to the individual applicant than school flags due to potential measurement error. In contrast, a more reflective understanding of the impact of multiple disadvantage over life course was evident in the Irish context, with staff responsible for admissions recognising the need for multiple indicators to tackle processes of inequality. Issues around the ability to verify some of the indicators in the Irish context also arose, but largely with regard to socio-economic position as opposed to the area-based measures:

> We wanted to move away from just looking at income, to looking at where people grew up. The kinds of schools they had gone to, their socioeconomic backgrounds, in order to capture the kind of cultural educational disadvantaged instead of just looking at a cut off, income cut off point. You know, we felt that we wouldn't get, we wouldn't capture the kinds of stu-

dents we wanted to have if we just focused solely on income. (Ireland)

Yet, in discussions pertaining to (dis)advantage, key distinctions were continuously made between school types, with emphasis placed on the concentration of advantage/disadvantage in schools. That is, distinctions were made between those attending 'state' schools versus those attending private/independent schools in England, or the DEIS/non-DEIS distinction in Ireland—in other words, schools with/without high concentrations of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. In this process, schools were clearly positioned by HE staff, but so too were students, contributing to a deficit discourse. For example, candidates were often referred to as 'the best candidates' or 'the weakest/strong candidates'. The use of binaries in this regard tended to be less prevalent among the contextualised admission route administrators in the Irish context, who had more direct interactions with WP students seeking to access the selective university than all others interviewed.

5.3.2. Distinctions Made between the WP Routes

The strengths of using contextualised admissions in the selective university in Ireland were offered by staff, and in particular the advantage of nationalising/centralising the route.

> The universities had gotten to a point where...the number of students being admitted to the scheme [HEAR] had plateaued. But a lot of institutions were not fitting their quotas so it needed you know, we wanted more applicants, we wanted more students but the way the scheme was set up it couldn't deliver. (Ireland)

In these discussions in the Irish context, the national contextualised admission approach was viewed to be important in 'embedding what had been local (institutional) schemes and embedding them into a national system', but also the commitment of an independent body—the Central Applications Office—to ensure that each HEI 'was approaching application and assessment so we were being completely fair and consistent across the board to every student that applied to the it'. However, in the interviews and focus groups, there was also considerable concern among those involved in HEAR admission decision-making as to whether it was attracting the types of students that it sought to attract. That is, concerns were raised regarding the limitations to the contextualised admission approach in attracting the most disadvantaged students. To this end, it was recognised that multiple entry paths were required to tackle underrepresentation of the most disadvantaged groups:

> Students would have different requirements...so if you tick all six indicators versus you tick three,

chances are the person who ticked six indicators for here [a selective HEI] needs greater support than the person who's ticked three. So I'm personally not in favour of a one size fits all for every single student because depending on the HEI that they go to and their own individual circumstances they require different kinds of supports. (Ireland)

Reflecting the infancy of the foundation year at the selective university in England, there was less consensus regarding it. While many viewed that the foundation year represented a safety-net to support young people growing up in deprived areas in accessing selective universities, the concept of a reduced grade entry was at times viewed as too radical. At times, staff suggested building stronger institutional linkages with schools, adopting local area interventions, and employing more outreach activities as opposed to specifically providing a foundation year:

But I think there's actually quite a lot going on in the university to encourage students from different backgrounds to do that…so…we really target students in those areas to apply and then, if they apply, there's a separate route for [foundation year] students sort of rescuing them. (England)

I think, routine you know, work with year tens, work with students repeatedly…go into your areas and bring them up for a week, teach them all of these skills that you're teaching this very small number…try to get the tutors involved. You know, the tutors are involved now but they weren't involved before. (England)

5.3.3. Balancing Institutional Standards and Fairness

The complexity of selection was a frequent theme and 'fairness' was constructed in different ways throughout the interviews in both contexts. In the selective institution in England, the use of opening offers, whereby WP students received a conditional offer dependent on meeting the academic standard, was viewed to be the fairest process, despite recognition that the institution was not doing enough to widen the participation rates of low SES students:

We would rather make more offers than accept people who haven't made their conditions….If they've not made the grades that we predicted and not made what they need for entry…typically we wouldn't take them and that's why we have a big open pool, because these people do make their conditions and we think that's the fairest way. (England)

Fairness was typically described in two ways: personal and institutional, and respondents appeared conflicted when asked to consider the reduced grade entry mecha-

nism that is central to foundation year entry. Typical comments included:

I mean, you want to be fair as well, right, so you want to make sure that everybody puts the same standard and although we clearly know it's not the case, it's much easier to get you're A*s if you come from a tutoring background and come from a really nice private school you know. (England)

A harmony between institutional standards and personal understandings of educational disadvantage and fairness was evident in the interviews in both contexts. While stories of individual staff members who they had 'went that extra mile' to support the entry of students were common, running alongside these stories were concerns about maintaining institutional 'academic standards'. Even the most liberal of those with responsibility for admissions were focused on the limits of potential academic growth of individuals, and how the presence of a foundation year could influence how the institution is perceived. In such instances, the provision of a foundation year represented a greater institutional 'risk' to maintaining the wider institutional goals of the selective university, than the use of contextualised admission:

[There are] academic implications because we are admitting students who didn't make their grades. I think that they have got a reputation to keep high in that they're not dropping their standards and I think that's how they want to be perceived and how actually we all want to be perceived as…a high achieving place. (England)

For some, a discourse around meritocracy was evident, and this was about displacing others who had earned a place:

Every HEAR place is displacing somebody that may have more points but isn't HEAR eligible, so there is a kind of a conundrum there. (Ireland)

I think it's this kind of idea of fairness, right? Like, if someone's achieved higher metrics it would seem unfair to not give them a place and give a place to someone else. Although, mitigating circumstances and contextualising scores will be taken into account and people will get bumped by these kinds of thing. (England)

If you sort of went through and picked up all the access candidates who were right at the top of scores, who didn't get taken, then you would have a group of people who wouldn't need a foundation year. (England)

In Ireland, those with responsibility for admissions were largely access personnel, who also worked directly with students. In the interviews, this group typically demonstrated a broader understanding of educational disad-

vantage, and advocated the need for alternative routes into HE. This group could more clearly understand the distinction between academic potential and academic achievement, understanding the role that cumulative disadvantage plays, arguing for the use of alternative admission routes beyond the use of contextualised admission in selective universities, seeing such admission routes as essential for students who do not meet the HEAR academic standard.

6. Conclusion

This article sought to establish the characteristics of students entering selective universities in Ireland and England through different WP admission routes, while exploring how those with responsibility for admissions in both contexts perceive WP initiatives. The results indicate that students entering the selective institutions through these routes are more likely to come from lone-parent families, and those entering through foundation years have greater levels of disadvantage in terms of family history of education and family occupation, compared to their counterparts who gain entry through contextualised admission. These results highlight the value of considering heterogeneity within diverse groups, and how the use of a range of WP entry routes to selective institutions work to meet the needs of all students, rather than the high performing disadvantaged student group (Thomas, 2011). In showing how the student groups entering selective HEIs through these routes differ, the research highlights lone parenthood as something that may also be considered in future as an indicator of educational disadvantage.

Analyses of qualitative interviews highlight the complexities faced by staff with responsibility for admissions in selective universities, but also how broad national WP goals can clash with institutional culture. That is, broad national WP goals which seek to promote the act of relaxing academic entry requirements in order to reduce the impact that long-term disadvantage can have on educational attainment can clash with an institutional drive towards excellence and academic standards. The ethos of the HEI has a strong influence on the admissions environment in selective universities, and makes institutional/cultural rules regarding admission appear normative, universal and taken-for-granted (McDonough, 1997, p. 12). For example, in the selective university in England, those with responsibility for admission demonstrated caution when considering foundation years as a viable WP initiative. The findings illustrate the difficulties faced by institutions when considering the WP agenda; it shows how putting WP policy into practice is a process which is complex and can involve different interpretations of policy ideas, and considerations of how well the policy fits with the overall ethos of the university.

The evidence from the foundation year in the selective English university shows that relaxing the academic standard further (as well as contextualising student ap-

plication data) results in a more diverse student intake. However, it is also the case that this proposed practice clashes with the dominant ethos of the institution, which emphasises academics over all else. This is in contrast to the foundation year in the selective university in Ireland in some respects—while those with responsibility for admissions demonstrate concerns about meritocracy, and a model whereby affluent and able students are potentially being displaced, there is a general acceptance that student capability is impeded in situations of educational disadvantage. Admissions staff who were working more closely with WP students were most liberal in their views, and more likely to advocate for several routes into the selective university. As indicated in the methodology section above, those with responsibility for admissions may fall inside or outside of the formal machinery of policy making within the HEI. That is, they participate in the building up of WP policies, but also have agency to enact or resist WP policy.

Finally, the differences observed in academic attainment on entry between foundation year students in the selective universities in Ireland and England reflect a stronger drive towards academic standards, as seen more broadly in the UK admissions rhetoric. This is of interest when considering the contrasting macro WP policy landscape in both countries. In England, individual HEIs have the task of developing WP initiatives that suit their own institutional (local) context. Thus, WP is a process, the terms of which are agreed by those with power over the strategic direction of the HEI (such as a Governing authority), and institutional WP policy is then is enacted/interpreted by key actors working within the selective university. Given that it was academics that often occupied such positions in the English context, factors such as whether the policy was mandatory or recommended, or how well the policy was perceived to fit with the ethos of the institution shaped decision making around admission. In the Irish context, the HEA sets national WP targets, accompanied with some institutional accountability. While there is still room for WP policy to be enacted/interpreted locally in this model, the number of contextualised admission places allocated for each HEI is somewhat independently managed by a centralised body; ensuring that all HEIs are contextualising admissions for at least 10% of the student body. However, in both country contexts, the enactment of WP policy highlights the persistence of mechanisms of social reproduction and social closure at play in selective universities.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

The Achievement of University Access: Conversion Factors, Capabilities and Choices

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Abstract

In the light both of persistent inequality of education opportunities for low income families and a wide equality gap in South Africa, this article explores students' university access by applying Amartya Sen's capability approach to a South African case study. The article demonstrates empirically that access is more than an individual project, shaped both by objective conditions and subjective biographies, that is by general conversion factors and a person's social and personal options. Key conversion factors are material (income) and social (family, community, school, information), which produce an interlocking system of opportunity. Access thus requires more than formal opportunity to enable social mobility for all. The case study comprises qualitative interviews with diverse students in their first year at one university; illustrative narratives are selected to show different pathways, conversion factors and choices. Agency and self-efficacy emerge as especially important for making choices but also for constructing a higher education pathway where none exists for that person and her family. The article suggests that higher education has the potential to advance social mobility provided that it moves in the direction of expanding the capabilities of all students to have the choice of higher education.

1. Introduction

In South Africa it is matter of deep concern that almost 25 years after the first democratic elections, race, education, and labour market income are still key contributors to high levels of inequality. Poverty is high for a middle income country and mobility is low, while black South Africans consistently exhibit the highest poverty rates. The recent World Bank report (Sulla & Zikhali, 2018) shows that with a Gini coefficient of 0.63, South Africa is the most unequal country in the world for which reliable data is available, while the country is also tremendously unequal based on wealth distribution. A significant determinant of this inequality is inequality of opportunity, including to higher education, where despite high private returns, access remains limited especially from rural provinces which tend to be poorer overall. In the light of stubborn inequalities, fairness in access to university is of some concern: who goes to university, who benefits and whose social mobility is advanced are important questions in a country which is so economically polarized. Without access, social mobility cannot follow, nor can the wider public good of higher education be well served if only better-off students get into university.

Thus, we need to understand the conditions under which differently positioned students construct mobility pathways by first gaining access to university. Surprisingly, access is still under-researched in South Africa (see Walker, 2018), with most research focused on student experiences at university. This article therefore draws on a qualitative interview project to discuss access choices, where access is understood as having been achieved at

the point when a student is able to register for her programme and pay the initial fee. The assumption is that access is more than an individual project, but rather intersectionally shaped both by objective conditions (such as economic conditions, government policy, structures of gender and race) and subjective biographies (such as hard work at school, or encouragement to succeed from a family member). The underlying concern is with equality of access conditions and choices for students from different backgrounds. In short, is access fair?

Internationally, Spiegler (2018) has usefully summed up key findings on inequality in education—these hold also for access. According to Spiegler, there are two well-established findings: 1) access to and achievements in education are shaped, but not over-determined, by social background; and 2) there are always examples of individuals who make it despite coming from lower social strata. This holds for South Africa where some students from low income backgrounds do make it into higher education and of course others do not, but this should be understood as an issue both of social conditions rather than only individual efforts and talents. The issue would be to change the former and encourage the latter. The article thus takes up the challenge of social background and individual effort, first sketching the South African context, then outlining key features of the capability approach as a framework for examining student well-being. These ideas are then applied to three illustrative narratives from a qualitative interview project on access, looking at students from different social class and schooling quality backgrounds to understand their individual pathways into higher education.

2. A Context of High Poverty and Low Mobility

As already noted, social mobility is low and poverty is high; but poverty also declines with rising levels of education and hence social mobility (Sulla & Zikhali, 2018). A higher level of education of the household head and access to stable employment and income (which can be a major instrumental gain from getting a university degree) are key determinants for households to achieve economic stability. In 2015, 73.1% of the population living in households whose head did not have a formal education were classified poor, versus 2.6% of those living in households whose head had an education beyond upper secondary school. Similar patterns hold for individuals. In 2015, the median income for people in South Africa with a university degree was almost six times that for those without one (Makgetla, 2018). Importantly, only one in four South Africans can be considered securely middle class, whereas the other three are either poor or, even if in the emerging middle class, still face the risk of downward mobility if their circumstances change. It takes more than one generation to secure middle class status (Southall, 2016). Higher education for children from these families could make a significant difference in family class stability, while for poor families it may work

to help lift the family out of poverty. This would be especially the case for black families where commitment to the welfare of the extended family remains strong.

Overall, opportunities are constrained by a dysfunctional public schooling system. Public schools are divided into five quintiles which are rough proxies for socio-economic status. The lowest quintile (Q1) schools are the poorest, while Q5 are the formerly advantaged schools and the best performing. Q1 to Q3 schools do not charge fees, while Q4 and Q5 schools do, with Q5 schools charging the highest fees. The latter will tend to be located in well-off suburbs at some distance from low income black townships and hence requiring investment in travel costs. The majority of public schools are in Q1, Q2 and Q3 providing low quality education for some 75% of young people (Spaull, 2012), with the remaining 25% attending fee-paying, good quality Q4 and Q5 public schools. For example, in the poorest 80% of schools, only 1% of learners in grade 8 will go on to pass grade 12 (the final year of school) and obtain a C symbol or higher (60%) for Mathematics and Physical Science (the prerequisite for most mathematical or science degree programs at university). Approximately ten times as many students reach this level in the wealthiest 20% of schools. As a proportion, the number of Q5 students in Grade 8 that will go on to pass grade 12 with a university entrance pass is four times higher than that for Q1 students. A wealth index for school districts compiled by Van Broekhuizen, Van Der Berg and Hofmeyr (2016) confirms that university access is positively associated with the wealth index of the schools that learners attended. Spaull (2012) therefore characterizes South Africa as having two public schooling systems, suggesting considerable access obstacles for those students in low quality schools and expanded opportunities for those in good schools. Van Broekhuizen et al. (2016) report that in general learners from urbanized areas like Gauteng and the Western Cape have the highest university access rates, while rural areas have the lowest. In Free State province (where the students in this study originate) only some 21.8% of learners attain the necessary grades in the final year of school that will admit them to study for a degree at university, and of these, 70% go on to university, making students in the case study effectively 'best cases' of access. Most students choose to attend one of the two universities in the province, although the highest achieving students may prefer an elite university, such as the University of Cape Town.

Attending a good (Q5) school does not always correlate with coming from a better-off family as families may choose to make trade-offs in order to enable a child to gain better schooling. In a relatively fluid class structure like that of South Africa with its emerging black middle class, there is no neat correlation between social class, mobility and academic achievement, even though by and large emerging and established middle class children (black and white) in good schools will perform better. Race, parents' education, parents' occupation, and

place of birth all influence available opportunities (Sulla & Zikhali, 2018). Gender appears to be positive for girls—through schooling and university—excepting those from poor black families (Van Broekhuizen & Spaull, 2017).

These contextual trends will influence (but not over-determine) opportunity and choices at the micro level. To evaluate inclusion and justice, we also need to know about the actual experiences of students and their agency, their day-to-day realities in making decisions and getting into university or forming and sustaining their aspirations for social mobility. This is where a capability approach (Sen, 2009) informed understanding is valuable. As Sen (2009, p. 18) reminds us, 'justice cannot be indifferent to the lives that people can actually lead'.

3. Capabilities

The capability approach (Robeyns, 2017; Sen, 2009) enables us to think about higher education access in terms of expanding people's capabilities (also called 'freedoms') to access a university and programme of their choice. The actual exercise of capabilities to make choices would enable the person's options to 'function', that is, actual achievements like access. Converting a bundle of resources into capabilities and capabilities into 'functionings' is shaped by 'conversion factors', including structures of race and social class (see Figure 1). Thus, according to Robeyns' (2017), the capability approach points to the effect of: 1) (adequate) resources as the means to achieve (income, wealth, schooling, and so on); and 2) general conversion factors (structural constraints such as social norms, other people's behaviours, race and class, and so on) which shape each person's capability set, in this case to achieve access. Fair university access should then focus on the extent to which people have the same opportunities, with capabilities as the informational basis for interpersonal and comparative evaluations.

In this case study, conversion factors include the political situation, such as changes to government policy post 1994 to widen access by black (African) students. Indeed, the headcount number of black students continues to increase—from 640 442 out of 938 200 students in 2011 to 701 482 out of 975 837 in 2016 (Council on Higher Education [CHE], 2016, p. 3). The participation rate has increased slightly for African students from 14% to 16% but remains much higher for white students at 50% in 2016 (although falling from 57% in 2011; CHE, 2016, p. 6). Government policy also provides government loans and bursaries to students from very low income families, and from 2018 first time entering low income students have not had to pay university fees. Wider conversion factors include political factors such a policy of (limited) redistribution through social grants and pensions for the poor, but also the historical effects of racial disadvantage and the scarcity of available university places for those who qualify, which will affect differently positioned students unequally (Walker, 2018). On the other hand, gender may work as an advantage for most girls as noted above.

Southall (2016) argues that race and social class still define schools (and by implication achievements post-school) so that both working together would be a conversion factor, but also bearing in mind the fluidity of social class in South Africa and the potential impact of higher education on family mobility. Also important would be the family history of education and the quality of the school attended. Finally, urban infrastructure can also work as a conversion factor especially in the light of persistent apartheid patterns of spatial segregation. This determines the distance and cost involved to travel to school or university (further for the poor and black), the affordability of accessing a university which is far from one's home, and the lack of cheap and safe local, regional and national public transport in South Africa.

These general factors work out in the form of individual circumstances and options. For example, social class and race might work out for an individual student in a black parent who recognizes the crucial role schooling plays in class mobility and makes every possible effort and trade-off (the family goes without other goods so that school fees can be paid, or money is borrowed) to get a child into a good quality school rather than send her to a low quality neighbourhood school. Families and parents may constitute crucial preference formation mechanisms (what I take to be desirable and attainable for me) in positive or negative ways. At one extreme are the middle-class parents who engage actively with regard to their children's school choice, schooling and their extra-curricular activities. For students where there is no knowledge or experience of higher education in the family, it is the students who must be agents—of school choice, school subjects and choice of university. Schools constitute a further specific case of social institutions working out as individual options and access pathways. In some schools—primarily high fees Q5 schools—admission to university is more or less embedded in the life of the school and expected as the normal biography of most or all students. Students are provided with considerable information to navigate admissions and to choose careers, as well as a great deal of additional academic support. A low income black student who can get into such a school will have more and better information than if she had attended a township school. But a student from the poorest schools will have to make the most of her own talents and agency, often with at least some support, however limited, from a teacher.

Another way of thinking about the nexus of the person and general conversion factors is Nussbaum's (2000) notion of 'combined capabilities', that is 'internal capabilities' (such as having the aspiration to go to university), together with the external-social uptake conditions that effectively enable that person to exercise the capability as an achieved aspiration. The strength of the capability approach is that it combines both internal capabilities—as in one's skills, attitudes, knowledge and information—

with the options one has to act on them within one's social context and its constraints. Both aspects need to be the focus of our attention in education. Thus, general conversion factors work out as each person's specific conversion factors, shaping the combined capability set for that person.

No single conversion factor works on its own and intersecting general conversion factors shape but do not over-determine life chances in the face of agency, but it is nonetheless fair to say that material resources, especially access to income, is foundational to opportunities. We then have something that looks like this (Figure 1) to show the conversion points of resources (endowments) into capabilities and functionings.

A capability set is mobilized under conditions of possibility but is also shaped by the person's 'self-efficacy' (Bandura, 1994) which 'thickens' Sen's (2009) notion of agency as the pursuit of the goals one has reason to value. Bandura (1994) defines self-efficacy as people's beliefs about their ability to exercise influence over events that affect their lives. Thus, self-efficacy beliefs shape how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave; a strong sense of self-efficacy can enhance human accomplishment and personal well-being. Low self-efficacy manifests in low aspirations and weak commitment to one's goals. We cannot assume that high efficacy necessarily correlates to being middle class in South Africa, nor that low self-efficacy applies to low income students. Indeed, the latter may be more likely to have a robust sense of self-efficacy, enabling them to overcome unfavourable circumstances to convert their schooling outcomes into a university place. When people overestimate their capabilities (university looks objectively like an impossibility, but the person aspires to go) this need not be seen in a negative light in that it en-

ables aspirations beyond the person's immediate reach and fosters the effort needed to achieve such aspirations. The South African case is remarkable for the determination of low income students to create capability and choice pathways, to perceive choices which may not yet be in place, and to hold high aspirations. Self-efficacy may be significant in forming preferences which direct a student to choose and succeed in higher education and hence may be a foundational capability for access. Both agency and its driver of self-efficacy, however, must always be understood as happening under conversion conditions, they are not free-floating possibilities, as Figure 1 shows.

Self-efficacy may also contribute to overcoming what Sen (2009) calls 'adapted preferences', where choices may not always be in a person's best interests—for example, choosing a university programme which seems attainable even though it is not what the student wants to do, and even though another more suitable choice is also possible. Such choices might make it difficult to realize a capability which would otherwise be valued. People may also undervalue important capabilities because of their social circumstances. For example, if a community as a whole sees little point in education beyond grade 12 or even high achievement at school, a person may not value hard work or doing well and may not aspire to university, even though they have the basic ability. Or if her peers are high-achieving girls' intent on university, a student may adapt her preferences upwards. Such adapted preferences may emerge from gender, race, class or intersections of such structures and will begin forming rather early in life. Such preferences (and the corresponding choices will then be iterative through a person's (educational) life as she makes choices that reduce or expand her opportunity set.
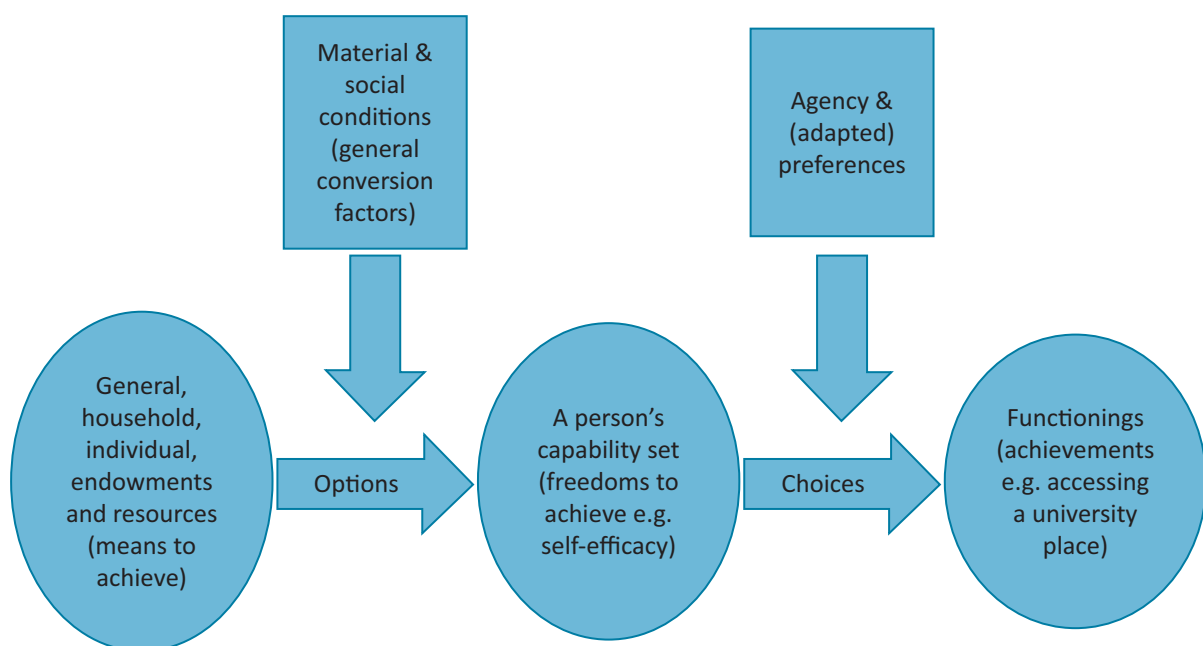

Figure 1. Adaptation of DeJaeghere and Baxter (2017, p. 70).

4. Identifying Capabilities through Interviews

The UFS is a mid-ranking research and teaching university with a majority black student population and draws students from the Free State, but also the adjoining Eastern Cape and Kwa-Zulu Natal. To consider the combined capabilities of diverse students, in 2017 54 interviews with first year students at the University of the Free State (UFS) were conducted by the research team after which we divided up the writing of a one-page synopsis on each student. We are all researchers at the University but have no other relationship to any of the students interviewed. All students were given pseudonyms. We did not interview families but did interview six staff members with responsibilities for marketing the University to and at schools. This article focus focuses only on the students. In 2017, the UFS lacked school quintile data for around 25% of the undergraduate intake. Of those for whom they had information out of the total entry, 25.52% came from the best (Q5) schools and 10.42% from Q4 schools, also fee-paying but not as prestigious. The rest came from non-fee-paying schools often of low quality: 15.19% from Q3, 8.21% from Q2 and 11.5% from Q1. This suggests reasonable access by students from non-fees schools and the possibility that the University is regarded as an attainable aspiration.

Some students were in the first year of the extended programme which allows admission with a lower score (made up from the subjects studied for grade 12) but adds an additional year of study to the degree. We contacted students at random via telephone, using a first-year list. We hoped for 60 participants but ended up with 54. Of the 54 students, 36 were female and 14 were white so that white students were over-represented in the sample according to the university's demographics. Across the school quintiles the majority came from Q5 (29) and Q4 (6) schools, with the remainder spread across Q1 to Q3. Only two students came from the very poorest (Q1) schools. 23 of the students had parents with no post grade 12 education. The rest had parents with a mix of post grade 12 diplomas and university degrees, meaning there was some educational history of study beyond grade 12.

Individual interviews lasted around 45 minutes and were recorded and transcribed in full. In the interview students were asked to talk about their secondary school, their families and communities, the affordability of higher education for them, how they came to choose the UFS, their first experiences of university and their future aspirations. Analysis across the data set focused on 14 descriptive codes generated by the interviews: decision-making, critical moments, significant others, family, community, schooling, hard work, funding, friends, out of school, future plans, information, language and transport. From there, conceptual themes of choices, agency, conversion factors and capabilities were extrapolated.

While all the students in this study had made it to university, the terrain of choosing was uneven. To this end, I now focus on three narratives to show in more detail how conversion factors and agency pathways work out

for diverse students, taking the example of three black girls to control for race and gender and across the spectrum of fee and non-fee schools. One student is from a Q5 school, one from a Q3 school and one from a Q1 school. The Q5 example is chosen both because interpersonal comparison and variation is important in the capability approach, but also to illustrate the earlier point about the fluidity of the emerging black middle class so that higher education is rather important to gaining but also to securing middle class status—as parents recognize (see Southall, 2016).

4.1. Illustrative Narratives: Palesa, Aphiwe and Thabile

Palesa's narrative is similar to that of other girls at Q5 schools whom we interviewed, although the black girls in general demonstrate a stronger sense of agency than the white girls who can rely on generational family histories of university and family wealth, making university an easy choice. For the black girls like Palesa from emerging middle class families, they have no inherited wealth but there is at least one parent who has been to university and has a professional and secure job. Her mother, a primary school teacher in the local township, places great store on education as the way to secure social mobility for the family and the individual. While her mother's job is secure it will not be especially well-paid and finding money for school fees was a struggle. Palesa lives with her mother (but during university terms she now lives on campus) and her younger sister in an urban black township and finds little community support there for her aspirations but a number of people in her extended family have gone to university or post-grade 12 colleges. Her father does not live with them and she did not mention him in the interview at all. Hard work is emphasised by her mother who believes that 'you live in your child's school bag'. She was determined that Palesa would go to a good high school, moving her from a Q4 primary school to the leading all-girls school in Bloemfontein, which advertises itself as offering 'access to opportunities'. Being in a leading Q5 school greatly helped Palesa gain access to higher education:

> It would open doors for me and they would help rear me as an individual….I showed potential if I can put it that way….[The school] just help[s] you to be proud of who you are.

Although the fees were high, her mother managed to find the money. The limits of township schools are clear to Palesa, even though 'they try by all means to prepare the children but there's only so much you can do with limited resources'. She is aware of the agency these students need to get to university: 'the children who are here are the children who took initiative'.

The school fostered Palesa's development in all kinds of ways—academic achievement, confidence, and involvement in activities. It 'was academically excellent' with a 100% grade 12 pass rate and 97% university en-

trance passes. Teachers had very high expectations of students, so much so that 'it was exhausting'. Students had to attend extra maths classes in the evenings and maths camp in school holidays. In addition, Palesa also attended the Science Olympiad and the World Knowledge Olympiad. The school assisted in choosing subjects for grade 10, offering careers guidance and aptitude tests, although Palesa did not pay attention to the latter and chose 'subjects I knew I would be able to do'. Her mother also assisted by encouraging her to keep 'her options open' in her subject choices. Subjects like an African language (widely offered in Q1 to Q3 schools) were not offered unless you were 'failing'. In the end Palesa chose business studies, physical science, maths and drama. Her mother wanted her to do maths and science and 'did not quite believe' in business studies; she was concerned that Palesa should not limit herself. Palesa then decided to change from business to history but without telling her mother until Palesa could show her mother her good marks. History, Palesa felt, would equip her better for university. Overall, Palesa commented on the volume of work at school, on being expected to work independently, and learning to deal with a large volume of theory, so much so that 'my friends from other schools were amazed at the number of books I carried'.

Palesa had 'always' planned to go to university; it 'was expected' and in grade 12 decided on law. She had discussed this with her mother but was determined to make her own decision because '[she felt] like each child should have a choice of what they want to do'. Extended family members (aunts, uncles, grandmothers) were involved in so far as they influenced her mother, but Palesa 'was not having it'. While she accepts that 'your parents should guide you' and that some career choices ('such as fashion design') should be ruled out, she wanted to make up her own mind. But her mother did support Palesa's eventual choice to study law. In making up her mind, Palesa had access to wide information about higher education from her family and via her school. A number of leading universities had visited her school, including the elite universities of Stellenbosch and Cape Town but also the local universities (UFS and Central University of Technology [CUT]). She had also attended (and could afford to travel there) UFS Open Days in both grade 11 and 12. Initially Palesa did not plan to go to UFS, preferring UCT: 'Cape Town was the goal for me….It's the best university in South Africa'. But she did not think she would have high enough marks for Law there. UCT offered her a place in Social Science but she had also applied for Law at UFS and was offered a place there, just making the lower academic requirements. By April of her first year Palesa had heard that she had full funding from the Free State provincial government, although this was conditional on her working for them for four years after graduating. She would prefer to join a leading law firm so, 'it [was] not ideal but it's what you have to do'. Still, her path to university was relatively straightforward and well supported by her family and her school. Even though her academic achievement

did not allow her first choice of university she did end up in the programme of choice (law). Race and gender together worked to her advantage in enabling funding from the provincial government. Without it her mother would have struggled to pay the full costs of university.

By and large, across Q1–Q3 schools, students demonstrate significant agency and determination in forging a pathway that does not yet exist in the family but that will get them to university. Thabile attended a Q3 school. Her parents were not involved in the choice of school—she made the decision because 'the school had a good image'. Indeed, her mother showed little interest, saying: 'Oh if she wants to go there so let it be'. No-one in her family has been educated beyond grade 12. There are five siblings to support. Her parents are divorced—her stepmother is unemployed ,and her father does house painting when he can get jobs. After she went to live with her father (she does not get on with her mother) she had a long journey to school each day but felt it was worth it. The resources at the school were limited and her peers did not work hard. For example, they refused to stay after school for study periods but Thabile commented that, 'this thing is not going to help learners'. For herself she worked hard and chose business subjects because she did not want to do science. Her parents 'never intervened much' including in her decision to go to university although they did not stand in her way: 'Everything that I make I don't have parental support, so whatever I decide to do, I do'. She had some support from teachers in that they support the 'clever' children and she had an accounting teacher who was 'very inspiring'. There was limited contact with universities who did not come to the school, although one student would be selected to go to an open day, usually someone doing maths and accounting. These students would keep the information to themselves and 'not share'. Thus, Thabile had to deal with the university application process on her own. She applied at CUT, which accepted her for auditing but then Thabile found she had been awarded a government bursary to study at UFS where she had applied to do Education with Accounting as her major, so she chose this. She is 'thrilled' to be at university.

Aphiwe attended a Q1 school in Thaba'Nchu, a poor area about an hour's drive from the UFS main campus. Her single mother, who works in a creche, chose the school based on its reputation. Aphiwe's brother, who did not complete grade 12, works in a bakery. Her community struggles with unemployment, crime and teenage pregnancies so that there is a 'circle of poverty' because uneducated parents do not see the value of education and do not help their children 'to make good decisions'. But Aphiwe's mother encouraged her to study, to read, and she checked that homework had been done. The school had few resources and no access to computers, but teachers seemed to have tried by offering extra classes and holiday camps for matric students. On the other hand, they did not encourage student like Aphiwe who were not good at maths and had chosen maths lit-

eracy. According to Aphiwe teachers told them that they would fail and 'not make it in life'. Aphiwe did not expect to go to university and only applied after she received the qualifying grade 12 pass. There was no help in applying from her school where teachers 'didn't even give any advice so I made my own choice'. Her teachers were also not demanding about assignments being done on time so when she submitted her application to study social work late she did not think this would be a problem. Thus, she did not get into social work and has ended up doing psychology but is satisfied. Aphiwe has a government loan, without this she could not go to university, as her mother had only managed to save enough for the initial registration fee. The loan covers fees, food and book, while her mother helps with the cost of the bus to get to campus from her home. She sees university as a way to make her mother proud and to help change people's lives after she graduates.

4.2. How General Conversion Factors Shape Each Person's Capabilities

Across the three students the general conversion factors of: government policy to widen access for black students; gender generally favouring girls; economic context and social class intersecting with race; family educational history; and school quality work out as each student's personal set of conversion factors. Being low income is a setback in making choices but not insuperable, but discouraging teachers do not help. Nonetheless, economic factors make a considerable difference, whether in the family or via government funding support. Undoubtedly being at a Q5 school is important in having more choices but this is offset by the determination on the part of Aphiwe and Thabile to get into university once they make the decision. All three students demonstrate agency and self-efficacy, and have reason to value this, but all three act under conditions not entirely of their own choosing. Palesa's goals are more clearly formulated, whereas for Aphiwe and Thabile they are more serendipitous. Preference formation mechanisms surprisingly do not necessarily generate downward adapted preferences—all three are aiming for the best they can achieve.

Palesa, Aphiwe and Thabile—from different starting points—seem set on social mobility pathways. For Palesa from the daughter of a primary school teacher to a lawyer, for Thabile the daughter of a house painter with grade 12 to a high school teacher, and Aphiwe the daughter of a creche worker to a degree but in this case with less clear career prospects as she cannot be a social worker. By evaluating their capabilities, the variations, and the conditions for capability formation and choices which lead to access, we can shift the axis of analysis to interrogating the conversion factors that enable individuals to make decisions about their lives. Self-efficacy can be considered a key educational good or internal capability for university access but needs to be combined with supportive external economic conditions for this to

become a combined capability. All three students value the capability for social mobility and being able to improve the situation of their families or getting support from teachers who believe in them so good relationships clearly matter too. The internal capability of hard work and the value of academic achievement is strong in all three, despite variations in school quality, family support, and in their academic preparedness for university.

Across all the interview data there is a pattern of students who go to fees-free Q1-3 schools mostly choosing the school themselves, more rarely a grandmother or mother will make the choice if they know that a particular school has a good reputation. In some but not all cases mothers and grandmothers are influential in making decisions about education by encouraging hard work. Nonetheless, low income township pupils had to rely on their own resources in choosing their grade 12 subjects (this is done at the end of grade 9), or having the school make the choice for them. There were experiences of unemployment in these families and varying levels of parental interest in their schooling. Overall, low income students experienced little support from schools, who were aiming just to get students through grade 12, or from parents unfamiliar with higher education, in applying for university or funding. Where teachers were encouraging it was only of the 'clever' children. In some cases of Q4 students parental support came only after they had got into university so that only once the realised aspiration became 'real' was it supported by the home. While there was information about university available at Q4 schools, it was the Q5 schools in which the assumption of proceeding to university was most strongly embedded. This was complemented by family expectations that going to university was non-negotiable, or that 'everyone in the family knows that university is the next journey after grade 12'. There was support and knowledge available in families and at the school, while the schools also instilled the need for hard work and provided considerable support for university applications. These were also the schools visited by universities looking to recruit the best students.

Only for some students then is there a virtuous trilogy of school-family-university enabling wider personal options in the light of general conversion factors. We see this working most successfully for Palesa in being able to operationalize her combined capabilities, while the way her school prepared her for university study means that she ought to be able to iteratively realize her combined capabilities to succeed at university. But it is also clear that students do not have equality in substantive freedoms (in Sen's terms) to make choices about who they want to be and to do. Just looking at three lives we can see that not all three girls are in the position to make the same kind of choices and to develop their capabilities and functionings. This difference persists into university study based on what students told us about their first months of study, where some were well—prepared and others not at all.

5. Concluding Thoughts

In South Africa, as elsewhere, choosing higher education, choosing a university and choosing a programme of study are not simply personal decisions but sit at the intersection of the person, her schooling, her family, university actions (such as school visits), government policy and social structures. How these multiple factors intersect will either give the green light for genuine choice in access (achieving a place of choice at the university of choice), or an amber light for constrained choices. At the same time, the capability approach allows us to see human agents with the power to act, even where social arrangements get in the way. Thabile and Aphiwe show remarkable agency and navigational skills in overcoming general conversion factors to construct personal options.

Policy through dialogue and consultation might aim at a 'general' capability set (to include for example, self-efficacy, knowledge and good relationships) which would be valuable for any student, whether or not they directly value the capability. A general set could be a guide both to evaluating whether people have the capabilities to access university, and to making changes to expand capabilities. While universities may not be able to compensate for poor schooling they can visit low income schools, explain access pathways, encourage aspirations, and help with applications, acknowledging the agency and internal self-efficacy capability that many students in these schools have, enabling this as a combined capability for a social mobility pathway.

However, as things stand now, when we look across the life chances of low income South African youth who do not have access to better schools or a significant 'other' providing support and encouragement we are some way off the kind of equitable access that does not allow circumstances to limit opportunities. Achieving a place and being satisfied with that achievement (or functioning) choice are affected by multiple factors in each person's life, including uneven capability sets shaped by resources, social conversion factors, preference formation and individual talents and qualities. At the same time, we should not lose sight of possibility summed up by Thabile who told us:

> Coming to university is like putting one step into your future, into a brighter future….Others have a brighter future even if they don't come to university. But some of us are not born with that thing to just be successful, you have to get an education before you become successful.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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Article

The Widening Participation Agenda in German Higher Education: Discourses and Legitimizing Strategies

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Abstract
Although participation in higher education (HE) has expanded in Europe, social inequalities remain a major political challenge. As HE expansion has not led to equal access and success, the mechanisms behind policies seeking to reduce inequalities need to be examined. Focusing on the widening participation agenda, this article investigates how universities translate political demands to their local contexts. The translation perspective is adopted to study the German HE system as an example characterized by high social exclusion. Based on policy document analysis, the study first explores the rationales underlying the discourse on widening participation. Second, a multiple case study design is used to investigate the organizational responses to the demand of widening participation. The findings indicate that the political discourse is dominated by two perspectives that regard widening participation as either a means to bring about social justice or to ensure a reliable pool of skilled labor. The study further reveals that different legitimizing strategies serve to link the policy of widening participation to local contexts. This study contributes to research on social inequalities in HE by introducing a translation perspective that permits analysis at both macro and organizational levels, while acknowledging institutional variations in organizational responses to political demands.

1. Introduction

The shift from elite to mass higher education (HE) system has resulted in the expansion of participation rates that has not necessarily lead to ensuring access for groups who have been traditionally underrepresented in HE (Osborne, 2003; Schuetze & Slowey, 2002). Facilitating access and participation is strongly voiced in the European policy agenda (Goastellec, 2008, 2012). Germany provides an example of introducing political reforms to promote wider participation in an HE sys-

tem characterized by a traditionally high level of social exclusion (Mergner, Mishra, & Orr, 2017). This can be traced back to the institutional separation in Germany between academic and vocational education, representing the "German education schism" (Wolter, Banscherus, Kamm, Otto, & Spexard, 2014, p. 12).

Access to HE is still primarily determined by school-based qualifications that are in most cases acquired at Gymnasiums (Orr & Hovdhaugen, 2014). However, there is no clear and consistent definition of widening participation. Depending on the national background, the po-

litical discourse on widening participation entails rather different ideas about equal access and success. Further, since widening participation represents not only a political demand, but also a social one, institutions and actors translate these ideas very differently, depending on their own institutional context and identity. Consequently, the question of whether inequalities in HE access and success have been either exacerbated or reduced is often met with controversy, depending on the definition of widening participation (Clancy & Goastellec, 2007).

In addition to the varying meaning given to widening participation, there is a lack of research on how German HE institutions respond to this political demand and how it can be explained theoretically. According to neo-institutional assumptions, it is expected that HE organizations comply with this demand—at least on a rhetorical basis—to fulfill normatively appropriate behavior and ensure their legitimacy (Brunsson, 1989). The result is organizational isomorphism, which provides only a limited role for agency on the side of organizational actors (Lawrence, Suddaby, & Leca, 2009). Contrary to this theoretical assumption, a closer look at the organizational level reveals that HE institutions differ considerably in the way they approach the call for promoting access and participation and the extent to which they turn it into a relevant issue for their own agenda (Hanft, 2012; Kehm, 2000). This observation calls for a theoretical approach that highlights the intentional actions taken by organizational actors to meet external expectations (Greenwood, Oliver, Sahlin, & Suddaby, 2008). However, very little is known about the mechanisms behind different responses and how universities legitimize them.

To provide empirical insights into the mechanisms behind the policies seeking to reduce inequalities, this article is guided by two research questions. First, it examines what constitutes the idea of widening participation within the political discourse in Germany. Second, it investigates how this idea is translated within the local contexts of HE institutions. To achieve these research aims, this study adopts a *translation* perspective (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996), which appears particularly suitable for studying both the macro level of the political discourse and the organizational level of HE institutional responses.

2. The Travel of the Idea of Widening Participation

2.1. A Translation Perspective

The concept of translation has its origin in the wider theoretical context of Scandinavian Institutionalism, which seeks to understand how organizations perceive and interpret institutional demands and how these interpretations, in turn, influence organizational action in their daily life (Boxenbaum & Strandgaard Pedersen, 2009; Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008). Based on the translation perspective (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996), the theoretical framework of this article assumes that institutional de-

mands transport underlying ideas about appropriate organizational responses that are translated as they travel from one local context to another. During travel, these ideas are subject to modifications, which result in local variations of the idea and, thus, an increased heterogeneity in organizational fields (Wæraas & Sataøen, 2014). By referring to literature on sense-making (Weick, 1979), this perspective emphasizes the position of actors as "interpreters of institutional pressure and hence as mediators of the institutional pressures on organizations" (Boxenbaum & Strandgaard Pedersen, 2009, p. 190). Thus, the translation literature opposes the classical neo-institutional assumption that organizational actors are passive recipients who adopt the "the same thing for the same reason" (Mueller & Whittle, 2011, p. 3), and instead acknowledges that actors modify ideas through a process of transformation to fit the unique needs of their organizational context.

In addition, the translation perspective provides a link between the macro level of organizations' environment and the organizational level of HE. On the macro level, widening participation can be conceptualized "as a story of ideas turning into actions in ever new localities" (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996, p. 13). Accordingly, this idea travels around the organizational environment and is materialized by several means and actors. Since political actors play the most influential role within the publicly funded German HE system (Schimank, 2009), special attention needs to be paid to the political discourse surrounding the widening participation policy agenda (Archer, 2007; Boch Waldorff, 2013).

2.2. Discourses and Legitimizing Strategies

Previous research has revealed that widening participation represents a complex concept loaded with inconsistent normative values, rationales, and expectations within political discourses (Kehm, 2000). For example, research from the Australian context shows how political ideologies frame the discussion about social inclusion and its respective measures (Gidley, Hampson, Wheeler, & Bereded-Samuel, 2010). In the UK, it has been criticized that diversity rhetoric is employed in the discussion on widening participation, giving the discourse symbolic power based on notions of equity, resulting in a "moral discourse that silences other competing accounts" (Archer, 2007, p. 635). Also in the European context, Davies (2003) demonstrated how different narratives have been enacted within the widening participation discourse related to topics of social equity, while the chosen instruments of reform initiatives have in fact been more driven by economic imperatives than social equity rationales.

Drawing upon previous work on the "new rhetoric", we focus on explicitly political or interest-laden discourses constructed by political actors (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005). Based on the assumption that discourses "originate from actors producing texts, while si-

multaneously giving these actions meaning, thereby constituting the social world" (Boch Waldorff, 2013, p. 286), we conclude that discourses entail patterns of interests, goals, and shared assumptions that can be identified via institutional vocabularies that are used to express a particular means of interpreting reality (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005, p. 43). Institutional vocabularies are readily utilized in the context of soft regulation instruments, which include policies that are open for (local) interpretation. On the one hand, this leaves a relatively large scope for actions on the side of HE institutions, as they can choose their own priorities and highlight certain aspects over others. On the other hand, the vague definition also produces uncertainty because organizations are required to position themselves and legitimize their actions against the background of this policy demand. Therefore, these soft regulation instruments provide an opportunity for valuable insights into the way HE institutions legitimize their practices (Boch Waldorff, 2013), while the policy analysis serves as a frame of reference for the analysis of organizational responses.

To analyze organizational responses to the demand of widening participation, the theoretical framework of this study builds on research on legitimizing strategies, which are used by organizational actors to justify their positions within the public discourse (Boch Waldorff, 2013; Vaara & Tienari, 2008; van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999). The strategy of *normalization* consists of arguments that refer to what is regarded as a normal function or behavior, for example, by linking recent organizational measures to similar occurrences in the past or future. *Authorization* is a strategy that refers to requirements on the side of institutionalized authorities in terms of laws or regulations. *Rationalization* is in use when organizational measures are legitimized by referring to expected benefits, purposes, functions, or outcomes, thereby displaying a means-ends rationale. *Moralization* refers to argumentations that are based on moral and ideological grounds by emphasizing specific values that are regarded as important for the organization. *Narrativization* involves the creation of a narrative structure of time and agency to dramatize concrete events. Based on storytelling, evidence of acceptable and preferential behavior is created.

These five strategies are used to create legitimate meaning by constructing local variations of the idea of widening participation through a process of translation (Boch Waldorff, 2013). Thus, instead of yielding a passive response, organizational actors participate in the process of establishing legitimacy (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008). Further, the local interpretations result in a variety of organizational practices (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005). This perspective is of particular interest for research on HE organizations as they are regarded as information- and sense-processing systems, in which images of policies are selectively reflected and communicated in a way that suits the respective local context (Krücken, Kosmützky, & Torka, 2006).

3. Methodology

The research design combines a document analysis of the political discourse on widening participation with a multiple case study that examines the organizational responses of selected universities in depth. The document analysis guided by the first research question draws on policy documents, statements, and program descriptions from central political actors. This includes the Federal Ministry of Education, the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Culture Affairs, and the German Science Council, who all produce the political discourse on widening participation by means of funding programs, decisions, and recommendations. In total, 40 documents were collected and analyzed thematically (Schreier, 2014), supported by the QDA software MAXQDA. The coding of the data was informed by a literature review on policy implementation and widening participation research in the international and German context.

Regarding the second research question, organizational responses were analyzed within a qualitative case study design. Building on the previous document analysis, we selected one funding program as an example for the external demand of widening participation, namely the Quality Pact for Teaching Program, due to three reasons. First, this nation-wide program resembles one of the most extensive programs in terms of financing and outreach, with a total funding volume of two billion euro subsidizing 253 projects at 186 HE organizations in the first funding period (2011–2016; BMBF, 2017). Second, this program aims to contribute to a more general improvement of the quality of teaching and learning, while simultaneously supporting initiatives that focus on the first year of study programs to "acknowledge the heterogeneous student composition" (BMBF, 2010, p. 2). This open character provides HE organizations with a high degree of autonomy in choosing to what extent they connect their initiatives with the topic of widening participation. Third, selecting this example allows us to analyze initiatives within regular bachelor and master study programs in order to examine how the traditional activities of teaching and learning are affected by widening participation.

To examine variations in organizational responses of HE organizations, the multiple case study design includes a diverse set of cases. While the selected universities are all funded within the Quality Pact for Teaching Program, they differ according to type of institution (university or university of applied science), location (metropolitan/periphery), and institutional profile (research-oriented, teaching-oriented, or regional-oriented). The final set of three cases consists of one university located in a metropolitan region characterized by a research orientation (HSA), one university located in a peripheral region with a regional orientation (HSB), and one university of applied science located in a metropolitan region with a teaching orientation (HSC). Although

case studies are not representative, the comparison of these cases allows for exploring how HE organizations translate the idea of widening participation and use legitimizing strategies that are highly context-sensitive.

Data sources include publicly accessible documents concerning widening participation, such as mission statements, project presentations, and annual reports of the three HE organizations. Data were further complemented by six semi-structured interviews with organizational actors, including HE administrators and project assistants involved in the process of conceptualization, implementation, and coordination of widening participation projects at the respective HE organizations. The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim, while the data was again analyzed thematically. A coding frame (Schreier, 2014) was developed by combining inductive and deductive coding, informed by previous studies about discursive legitimizing strategies. For the purpose of anonymization and transparency, we choose acronyms indicating the type of data material and data source. Document data are abbreviated by 'doc', interview data are abbreviated by 'int'. Documents are numbered consecutively; interviews with HE administrators are abbreviated as 'intA', interviews with project assistants are abbreviated as 'intB'. Data materials from the three HE organizations are anonymized by referring to them as HSA, HSB, or HSC respectively. Following this coding logic, we distinguish between data sources including documents from main political actors (referring to the number of cited document and line, e. g., doc_20/12), documents from the three HE organizations (e. g., HSB_doc_4/2), and interview materials from the three HE organizations (e. g., HSC_intA/45).

4. Discourses and Institutional Responses to Widening Participation

4.1. The Political Discourse on Widening Participation

The analysis of policy documents revealed that the political discourse on widening participation in Germany is dominated by two different perspectives, the social justice perspective and the economic perspective. Although they are often intertwined, the two perspectives differ in their definition of the main objectives and underlying rationales associated with widening participation.

On the one hand, the key problem is seen in the underrepresentation of certain social groups in German HE organizations due to structural and financial barriers. From this perspective, political actors such as the Federal Ministry of Education refer to aims like "increasing the educational opportunities of all citizens" (doc_40/711). Accordingly, the main institutional vocabularies are "educational equality", "equal opportunity" and "equity of chances". The underlying rationale of widening participation is defined in terms of social justice, as it is supposed to foster greater social equality through the inclusion of traditionally underrepresented social groups in HE.

These groups are mostly defined in socio-demographic terms with a special emphasis on gender, socioeconomic status, and migration background. Furthermore, some documents refer to students with care-giving tasks or students with disabilities or health issues. As this definition of target groups implies that the main reason for the underrepresentation lies within financial and structural barriers, the respective policies focus on investment in scholarships, social HE infrastructure, and student financial assistance, regarding the latter as "the central state instrument to secure equity of chances in education" (doc_54/1728). For HE institutions, the policy aims to improve study conditions and provide more flexible learning and teaching practices that "acknowledge the increasingly heterogeneous learning needs of different student groups" (doc_40/1187). Accordingly, special support structures are highlighted, like child care services, learning material for students with disabilities, blended-learning concepts, or dual study programs for students who work during the course of their studies. The underlying rationale is that there are structural barriers anchored within society, while HE organizations have the social responsibility to contribute to removing these structural obstacles. Thus, HE organizations are regarded as promoters of educational equality with the high external expectation that they are able to ensure "equal participation in education with regard to access, progress and successful completion of studies" (doc_40/30).

On the other hand, the policy documents relate widening participation to demographic change and a shortage of skilled labor, which threatens the country's economic competitiveness. Therefore, widening participation is associated with the aim of "sustaining the demand for a skilled labor force" (doc_13/6) to "strengthen the international competitiveness of Germany as a location for science" (doc_6/23). Regarding institutional vocabularies, the policy documents refer extensively to "demographic change", the "need for skilled labor", and the current "lack of skilled labor". The rhetoric used in the documents tends to create an atmosphere of pressure and urgency for action. The solution is seen in increasing the attractiveness of HE and, consequently, the number of students and (successful) graduates. Thus, by "exploiting the existing pool of talent and knowledge" (doc_54/1293), widening participation is displayed as a means of raising individual and collective wealth and thereby improving economic performance. Instead of highlighting the impact of structural barriers, this perspective assumes that everyone has the same opportunities if only willing to demonstrate high performance. This economic-oriented rationale focuses mainly on one target group, namely, vocationally qualified persons. The suggested measures concentrate on improving the permeability between vocational and academic education and the possibilities for lifelong learning. The main regulative obstacle for this target group was abolished with the political decision of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Culture Affairs in 2009 that al-

lows access to HE for vocationally qualified persons without having formal HE entrance qualifications. To increase the numbers of students coming from this group, this political decision was complemented by several funding programs to help HE institutions improve the attractiveness of their study programs by developing more flexible study structures and instruments for the recognition of prior vocational learning. According to this perspective, HE institutions are expected to fulfill their role as providers of professionals for the economy by operating as drivers of innovation and answering the growing demand for a skilled labor force, both of which are needed to strengthen the national economy.

While the document analysis allowed two dominant functional claims to be identified, it also showed that support for equal access and the supply of a skilled labor force are emphasized in the policy documents to a different extent. Often, they are even intertwined, as illustrated by the following example:

> We can only overcome the challenges of the demographic change and an imminent shortage of skilled labor by relying also in the future on good education for all and supporting all people in our country in the development of their potentials. This is why the improvement of educational equality was and will be a central aim of our work. (doc_21/968)

Both perspectives postulate similar organizational measures to widen participation, but they differ in ascribing meaning to how HE organizations contribute to widening participation due to a different underlying rationale about the key problem and respective solution. According to the social justice rationale, the problem lies within structural barriers that hinder certain social groups from beginning and/or finishing their studies. Inequalities can thus be diminished by removing these barriers. According to the economic rationale, in turn, the not yet fully exhausted potential of talent among vocationally qualified persons is regarded as the key problem. Inequalities can only be reduced by encouraging potential students to participate in HE. The distinction between these two rationales is often blurred though, as illustrated by the above quote. Additionally, both perspectives postulate organizational actions regarding widening participation in a rather vague way. As a wide range of possible measures are listed in the policy documents, HE institutions are left without clear guidelines about what actions are required to support widening participation.

4.2. Discursive Legitimizing Strategies in the Context of Widening Participation

The three case studies reveal how HE organizations translate the idea of widening participation into their local understanding of their (societal) functions. Thereby, organizational actors make use of three strategies to legitimize organizational responses to the demands of widening participation, including rationalization, moralization, and profilization. The specific context of HE organization has led to some adjustments in the definitions of the strategies of rationalization and moralization in comparison to the original definitions included in our theoretical framework. Further, based on expert interviews and document analysis, we identified a third strategy that has not been defined before. The following section illustrates how these strategies are used in the specific contexts of our three case studies.

4.2.1. Rationalization

According to the first strategy, widening participation is perceived as an already existing condition due to a heterogeneous student body that requires a rethinking of institutional learning and teaching practices. Organizational actors use rationalization as they legitimize organizational responses based on evidence derived from empirical findings or observations based on common knowledge, as indicated in the following quote from an expert interview:

> This is of course not a scientifically valid and representative picture. This perception just relies on saying that we now have a different student population when 40 or 50 percent of an age cohort are studying in comparison to the time when I began to study…where…15 percent of one age cohort went to university. This, of course, has consequences.…It does not always mean that the people are less able or, not to say, more stupid. But it is obvious that we now have a broader range of students, where old procedures do not work any longer. This is just a fact that results from the mass university. (HSA_intA/36)

In this quote, the speaker emphasizes the changing student population due to increasing participation rates that are assumed to result in widening participation in HE. The quote associates widening participation with more students entering HE who possess heterogeneous or insufficient qualifications. Without defining a special target group, the consequences of this new situation are presented as a general challenge: organizational managers mention "hot spots in the faculties and cross-faculty red threats that have shown up everywhere" (HSC_intA/11). This creates an urgent atmosphere that signals a need for action. By legitimizing this action on empirical grounds, there seems no further need for discussion since the facts already dictate what the logical next steps should be. Accordingly, rationalization strategies are used for framing widening participation as a challenge for HE organizations. Insufficient knowledge or academic competences of students entering HE are identified as the main problem. Therefore, the HE organizations in our case study implement diagnostic instruments and bridging courses that are perceived as the solution to "compensate for disparities in educational requirements"

(HSB_doc_3/5). The aim of these measures is "to improve the study success and reduce the drop-out rates of students with respective needs" (HSB_doc_3/13).

We identified rationalization as a strategy in all three case studies, while they are mostly activated by organizational actors at the management level. Further, there is evidence for inner-institutional differences, as rationalization strategies appear more common for the context of widening participation initiatives in the natural sciences than humanities.

4.2.2. Moralization

The second strategy refers to widening participation as a moral responsibility that all universities must prevent discrimination and unfair treatment of students from different backgrounds. This strategy of moralization is mostly associated with describing a "vision for the university" that is "diverse, international, gender-responsive, family-friendly and non-discriminatory", while promoting a "culture of diversity" (HSA_doc8/3). Statements including moralization strategies are often found in the context of diversity management activities like diversity audits:

> The University acknowledges the diversity of its students and staff and advocates establishing equal opportunities and eliminating discrimination. Diversity and individuality are regarded as sources of enrichment for the whole university. (HSA_doc_8/3)

As this quote demonstrates, moralization strategies are characterized by a perspective on widening participation that regards it as a positive resource for HE institutions. They bring forward a strong normative argument for measures to prevent discrimination and support equal treatment, while serving as a moral compass displaying how the respective HE organization should position itself toward widening participation.

The main target groups in this context are defined by gender, migration background, and students with disabilities and/or chronic diseases. Measures for the latter group mostly involve access to university facilities and personal consultation services aiming to make the institution "a university for all" (HSB_doc_11/1). Measures for female students are mostly based on the legal requirements of equality directives and include career services or support for the balance between studies and work or family life. Other measures include mentoring programs for female students or students with migration background, especially in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), where these groups are especially underrepresented. These mentoring programs are legitimized against the background of the self-prescribed conception as an inclusive and intercultural university. In this line, moralization strategies underlie an understanding of widening participation as the inclusion of certain social groups that are still underrepresented and potential victims of discrimination. Therefore, widening partic-

ipation measures should focus on supporting these special groups and increasing their visibility. In the context of moralization, this means that the legitimization of actions for widening participation are based on the assumption that it represents a goal that still needs to be improved and not, as compared to rationalization, in which it is stated as a fact that the increase in student numbers has already resulted in a wider inclusion of previously underrepresented social groups.

We found evidence for moralization strategies in all three case studies as well, but again with inner-institutional differences: moralization strategies are more characteristic for the perspective of representatives from special central departments that are responsible for issues of diversity management and equal opportunities regulations.

4.2.3. Profilization

The third strategy, called profilization, includes references to the institutional profile to link the topic of widening participation more closely to the local context. In this sense, addressing widening participation becomes a narrative, in which organizational actors align their interpretation of widening participation with the specific profile of their HE institution.

On the one hand, this can mean that the traditional relevance of widening participation for a university is attributed to its specific historical background, like the example of the regional-oriented university (HSB) shows:

> The University was founded as a reformed university. In this tradition of educational responsibility, we attribute special importance to the recruitment of a broad spectrum of first-year students and to avoiding early selection mechanisms. This results in an above-average heterogeneity of the students: more than a quarter of the students come with the admission requirements of a Fachhochschulreife or a completed vocational training, the students of the university are on average older, they work more intensively during their studies, and are more likely to have children already. While nationally, one third of students come from a so-called non-academic background, in our university, it is almost half of the students. Thus, the university is particularly successful in opening up perspectives for social advancement. (HSB_doc_12/6)

As indicated in the above quote, widening participation is related to the historical foundations of HSB as a reformed university. The respective student population is defined as non-traditional, as it differs from the average student population in terms of entrance qualifications, age, living situation, and academic background. This is accompanied by a wide range of different measures that are not only directed at easing access, but also at the (successful) participation of these student groups. In this HE institution, widening participation serves as a social ladder

for socially underrepresented groups, which is a clearly stated part of this university's identity.

Similarly, the teaching-oriented university of applied science (HSC) uses widening participation initiatives to enhance their institutional profile, while their organizational responses are legitimized in the context of how widening participation initiatives fit the mission statement of the university: their teaching orientation is taken as an argument to explain why their widening participation initiatives are characterized by a focus on improving the quality of teaching within the regular study programs and not so much on providing additional support courses for certain target groups. This approach is accompanied by a broad definition of student diversity, assuming that "we need teaching and learning approaches that acknowledge different learning types and personalities" (HSC_intA/36).

On the other hand, profilization strategies are also applied when universities struggle with multiple institutional demands that they perceive as incompatible. This is exhibited by the following quote from a manager from the research-oriented university (HSA), where the external demand of widening participation is regarded as conflicting with the university's pursuit of excellence:

> If we go on with this focus on what students lack and need, we support a strong deficit perspective. With regard to reputation, this is not bearable. Then it will always be said: the [project initiative] is a repair shop. Only a repair shop. And other universities will ask: "Don't you have something excellent to offer?" (HSA_intA/44)

This quote shows how the university defines widening participation as supporting students with insufficient academic competences. This interpretation results in judging widening participation as a potential threat to excellence. Thus, widening participation initiatives are seen as problematic, since they conflict with excellence and the strong research orientation of this university.

As demonstrated above, we found profilization strategies in all three case studies, while the local interpretations led to very different meanings and organizational actions.

5. Conclusion

The findings of the policy documents indicate that the widening participation policy discourse contains two dominant perspectives, perceiving widening participation either as a means to improve social justice or to secure a pool of skilled labor. Consequently, the mechanisms behind the policies seeking to reduce inequalities differ, as they either recommend measures to remove structural barriers that hinder the participation of certain social groups or emphasize that individual student potential needs to be activated. While the first mechanism is influenced by an emphasis on equality of opportunities,

which can only be achieved by compensating the consequences of structural injustice, the latter mechanism is clearly influenced by meritocratic principle, which states that social mobility is solely based on one's individual achievement, rather than socioeconomic determinants.

The presented case studies of HE organizations further reveal how legitimizing strategies are used by universities to position themselves within the policy discourse. These strategies can be related to the two perspectives on widening participation. First, rationalization strategies are characterized by a close coupling of means and ends while locating the main problem on the side of the individual student whose academic performance needs improvement. This is in line with the economic perspective on widening participation that is characterized by a deficit-oriented logic that tends to stereotype certain student groups as in need of special support to enable their future participation in the labor market and, thus, contribute to economic prosperity.

Second, moralization strategies emphasize the social responsibility of HE institutions to contribute to widening access to HE for underrepresented groups. This is consistent with the social justice perspective on widening participation, sharing a logic that perceives socio-culturally rooted structural barriers as the main impediments of the participation of underrepresented groups in HE according to socio-demographic characteristics and, thus, for the reproduction of social inequalities. Here, HE organizations differ in the way how they understand widening participation either as a fact in the sense that student population is perceived as already heterogeneous or as a goal that still needs to be fulfilled. However, differences in perceptions do not only exist between institutions, but even more within the institutions between departments and faculties. Here, further research is needed to examine these inner-institutional differences in more detail.

Third, since profilization strategies are used to connect their interpretation of widening participation to the local context, both perspectives can be found, depending on the institutional profile. This can include, on the one hand, highlighting a university's historical role as a social ladder for certain underrepresented groups, representing the social justice perspective. On the other hand, defining widening participation as a threat to excellence reflects the deficit-oriented perspective of the economic rationale. This finding is in particular interesting in the light of the dilemma that research-oriented universities tend to have the greatest inequalities in terms of the social profiles of their students and the global trend towards greater inter-institutional differences in facilitating access (Archer, 2007).

This study contributes to research on social inequalities in HE in several ways. First, our findings from the analysis of the policy discourse within the German context support previous studies from other countries on how the widening participation discourse is dominated by economic as well as social justice imperatives (Archer, 2007; Davies, 2003) and how initiatives for widening ac-

cess to HE are influenced by different underlying norms (Goastellec, 2008). However, these studies focus mostly on the changing practices of admission procedures at the macro level of national policies (Clancy & Goastellec, 2007). We argue that access, participation and success can be regarded as different "degrees of social inclusion" (Gidley et al., 2010), in which access represents only the first step. This study broadens the scope by looking not only at changes in access criteria, but also how HE institutions support widening participation and academic success for various student groups in a more holistic way.

Second, our study calls for more qualitative-oriented research designs that comprise not only the macro level of national policies, but also consider institutional differences at the organizational level, in order to capture the different meanings given to widening participation. Such a methodological approach is in particular useful in the context of soft steering instruments due to their non-binding character, which leaves a large scope for actions for HE institutions. Due to their widespread application in the field of German HE and the increasing amount of financial resources they entail, future research on the role of soft steering instruments is crucial.

Third, our study shows how the translation perspective provides a useful explanatory tool for analyzing both the macro level of national policies and the organizational level of HE institutions. Our findings suggest that the translation process of the "travelling idea" of widening participation was guided by underlying rationales that build a frame of reference for how HE institutions should respond to this demand. Whether these more general rationales are enacted, however, depends on the prevalent assumptions and beliefs embedded in the local context.

Fourth, this study illustrates how the concept of legitimizing strategies can be applied in the context of (German) HE institutions. To date, this concept has been examined in other contexts, like multinational corporations (Vaara & Tienari, 2008), healthcare centers (Boch Waldorff, 2013), immigration control (van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999), and accounting and law (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005). In this way, this study illustrates how a transfer of this concept is possible, but we also saw the necessity to modify the definitions of the strategies to take the specific context of widening participation and (German) HE institutions into account. The newly identified strategy profilization is of special interest, since it adds to the general discussion on the role of agency in influencing institutions, by portraying organizational actors neither as passive recipients of political demands, nor as institutional entrepreneurs who purposely manipulate institutional arrangements (Lawrence et al., 2009). Instead our findings call for an alternative approach in which organizational actors' interpretations of political demands are always embedded within an institutionally defined context.

However, because HE institutions differ in their structural and cultural characteristics, future research is needed to verify our findings in other (German) HE institutions, while also accounting for the influence of other institutional characteristics besides the type of institution, location, and institutional profile. Further, for a more complete picture of translation processes, future studies should acknowledge that within the current discourse political actors represent only one of many stakeholder groups that influence the discussion about widening participation. For example, analyses of media representations might provide additional insights about how the topic is discussed among HE scholars, practitioners, representatives of economy, but also parents and students.

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Conflicts of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

Refugee Students' Access to Three European Universities: An Ethnographic Study

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Abstract
The article presents an ethnographic fieldwork carried out at three universities in Switzerland, Germany, and France, and analyses how access to higher education for refugees was addressed in the three cases, how and which institutional change and activities were initiated, and by which actors. The article argues that the topic cannot be addressed in isolation but has to consider four intersecting areas: the personal biography and migratory history of the students, the asylum system, the educational system, and the funding situation. For the refugee students, the challenge is that these areas need to be taken into account simultaneously, but what is more challenging is that they are not well in tune with one another. Solutions need to take this complex—and place-specific—situation into account.

1. Introduction

In 2015, a high number of refugees came to Europe.[1] This movement sparked debates and numerous initiatives in higher education, just as in various other fields of society. In Germany, in 2015, 17,8% of all adult asylum seekers had been to university (completed and interrupted), and 20,4% had completed high school before migrating (Rich, 2016, p. 5). The German Academic Exchange Service estimated 50,000 potential new university students amongst the refugees (Goddar, 2016). At many European universities, initiatives of solidarity and support were started to welcome, accommodate and introduce the newcomers, often by student volunteers (for the case of Germany see, Schammann & Younso, 2016). Initiatives are still running and even if there have been lower numbers of newly arriving asylum seekers since August 2016 in Western Europe, the topic is still impor-

tant, as refugees will also arrive in the future and more potential students reach the language level required for university studies. Yet, the pathway into the universities has proven to be far from simple and many issues still need to be tackled.

This article is based on an ethnographic study of the situation at three European universities in Germany, France, and Switzerland that are linked in the "European Campus"—a network situated in the Upper Rhine region where Germany, France and Switzerland share borders. The network fosters scientific collaboration and enables regular students to take courses at other universities and have the credits recognised by the home university. For asylum seeking students, however, the situation is different, as they are not allowed to move freely. This example already illustrates that the situation of asylum seeking and refugee students differs from that of local or European exchange students because different laws regard-

[1] First-time asylum applicants in Germany: 441800 in 2015, 722264 in 2016; in Switzerland: 38061 in 2015 and 25822 in 2016; in France: 70571 in 2015 and 76789 in 2016 (Eurostat, 2018).

ing migration apply to them. The term "refugees" will be used in the following to include both asylum seekers and recognised refugees, as some of the challenges are an issue for people with both statuses. In other cases, the process of asylum seeking will be specifically referred to.

The existing literature points to the fact that access to higher education for refugees remains difficult and is a largely neglected and pressing issue worldwide that has not been thoroughly researched thus far (Goastellec, 2018b; Mangan & Winter, 2017). Moreover, quite a few contributions have focused on the situation in Australia (Hannah, 1999; Joyce, Earnest, de Mori, & Silvagni, 2010; Naidoo, 2015). Other projects target Canada (Ferede, 2010), the UK (Morrice, 2009), or the situation in refugee camps in Thailand (Zeus, 2011) or Kenya and Malawi (Crea, 2016; Crea & McFarland, 2015). Even though there are parallels, the concrete situation varies between different migration and education systems, depending on national and local policies. Sometimes, initial support is also different in the same place for resettlement refugees or asylum seekers. There are still very few qualitative ethnographic studies on the situation in Germany, Switzerland, and France and also few comparative studies (for a comparative study on frames of reference of policymaking in Switzerland, France, and Germany see, Goastellec, 2018a; for the situation in Germany see the larger research project "WeGe—Wege von Geflüchteten an deutsche Hochschulen" started in 2017 at the German Centre for Higher Education Research and Science Studies).

In this article, we will present the cases of the three different universities and follow how the topic was addressed in the three cases, how and which institutional changes and activities were initiated and by which actors. Taking the perspectives of multiple actors involved into consideration, we focus on the perspective of the refugee students and the challenges they encounter; we argue that the question of access to higher education for refugees cannot be addressed in isolation in these cases but has to consider four intersecting areas that influence and distinguish the situation of refugee students profoundly from that of other students. In the case of this study, the areas that need to be considered are the personal biography and migratory history, the asylum system, the educational system, and the funding situation. For the refugee students, the challenge is that these areas need to be taken into account simultaneously, but what is more challenging is that they are often not well in tune with one another.

In the next section, the methical approach will be described. In Section 3, the four intersecting areas that challenge the situation of the students will be explained and put in the larger context of policies and framing. Sections 4 and 5 focus on the empirical data. In the fourth, the cases of the three universities are presented

in greater depth and with regard to the 4-Area-Model; in the fifth, salient observations from the perspective of the refugee students are presented. The conclusion follows in Section 6.

2. Research Methods

The research presented in this article took place in 2017. It was a qualitative study rooted in cultural anthropology. The research team consisted of the author and Tim Harder (Master student assistant). The research setup involved multiple perspectives on the topic. The project team conducted narrative semi-structured interviews firstly with three to four refugee students at each university. Most of them were in preparatory programs and not yet enrolled at their university. Technically speaking, they were potential students with refugee backgrounds. The interview partners were selected to include students with different educational backgrounds, disciplines, age groups, pre-experiences at universities, gender, and nationality. Secondly, we interviewed student volunteers (one to two per city) who were active in organising preparatory programs or other kinds of support for refugee students. Third, we conducted interviews with a representative of the university in all three cases. And fourth, we interviewed a representative of the cities' migration service in Basel and Freiburg. The interviews lasted between 1–3 hours. We also participated in events or assemblies, followed mailing lists from the refugee programs, and had informal conversations. In addition, we analysed the corresponding educational and asylum policies. The interviews were transcribed and analysed parallel to the fieldwork by employing the approach to coding, category building, comparing, and revising of the process of Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1999).

3. The Current Situation: The 4-Area-Model and the Broader Context

3.1. The 4-Area-Model

The direct admission to universities for students who come as refugees is not always simple. A number of factors work together to hinder direct access or make it more difficult than, for e.g., local students or Erasmus exchange students. These factors include recognition of prior accomplishments[2], language and computer skills, finances, restriction of movement in case the students are still in the process of asylum application, the access, understanding, and connection of relevant information, as well as the personal effects of prior experiences and forced migration. For the individual refugee students, one can say that they have to navigate in a space that is highly restricted and affects every area of life (Schroeder, 2003, p. 380), especially when they are still in the process

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[2] The universities use databases (e.g., anabin) to compare and assess the value of foreign diplomas. These databases are regularly discussed and updated. Moreover, there are preparatory programs (e.g., Studienkolleg in Germany) and additional exams (e.g., ECUS in Switzerland). However, the recognition is not possible for all diplomas and additional courses can cause practical problems which will be described in the following.

of applying for asylum (for Switzerland this situation is described in more detail in Sontag, 2018; Sontag & Harder, in press).

Goastellec (2018a, p. 25) pointed out the relevance of the four dimensions of "higher education actors, external actors, academic actors, and social services actors" in her policy case study on Switzerland, France, and Germany. As in her study, we found that it is key to take these different actors into account. However, coming from an ethnographic methodology, we focused on the perception of the students and their practices. The perspectives of other actors and the policies themselves were used to understand the students' situation and their effects on the students better. From this perspective, we describe the broad four areas of the personal biographical situation, the migration/asylum policies, the educational policies, and funding as factors that challenge the individual situation of the potential students the most. Funding is a very broad category that has to do with stipends, national, local, and university funding institutions, rules about student loans, social welfare rules, labour laws and thus the access to work, and is, therefore, itself situated at the intersection of different policy fields. The complexity of this is referred to in the description of the different cases below. Yet, from the students' perspective, it poses one area of challenges and has thus been summarised under one heading here. It might also make sense in other contexts when the goal is to understand the students' perspective and provide a basis for further inquiry. The three cases show in which way these areas intersect and how they are often not congruent. They also indicate what kind of resources actors need to position themselves in difficult intersections. We observed how formal and informal barriers and inequalities in accessing higher education develop, increase, or decrease as these four different logics interact. A student in France put it this way: "There is a problem with both situations: being a refugee and a student, because each situation has its own rules".

3.2. The Broader Context of Policies and Framing

The developments at the three universities varied greatly. This is due to the individual actors and initiatives. Secondly, it also has to do with the fact that the concrete situation at these specific universities and in the specific countries varied. The number of refugees that came in 2015 and the general atmosphere of existing initiatives differed in the three respective places. A third influential factor is the broader context of education, asylum, and funding policies in the three countries. In this broader context, as Goastellec (2018a) points out, there are significant differences between the general student population and their access to higher education that need to be taken into account. Germany and France not only have more students than Switzerland in absolute numbers, but also a higher proclivity towards academic education rather than vocational training (Goastellec, 2018a,

pp. 30–32). Goastellec concludes that in Switzerland the access to higher education for national as well as international students is more elitist than in France or Germany. She argues that the logic behind the respective migration systems works in line with this, as in Switzerland the focus is on attracting migrants who are specifically skilled professionals "allowing the state to save money on education", while in Germany, for example, refugee migration was also seen as an investment and education as a part of this investment (Goastellec, 2018a, p. 33; for policies on highly skilled migrants in Switzerland see also, Hercog & Sandoz, 2018). Sandoz (2018) analysed different pathways or "channels" of highly-skilled migration towards Switzerland such as the company-oriented, the family-oriented, the study-oriented, and the protection-oriented channel. She argues that these vary in the opportunities they provide. The asylum channel was initially thought of as a purely humanitarian one and not based on skills. In fact, in public awareness as well as in research, forced migration and high skills are also seldom connected. This situation can lead to a de-skilling or loss of cultural (e.g., the value of diplomas) and social (networks) capital in Bourdieu's sense for highly skilled asylum seekers.

In the current study, we also encountered various ways of framing and argumentation by different individual actors regarding the topic. There is the frame of equality that is discussed e.g. at the Swiss university as trying not to privilege any group over other groups, while it is discussed e.g. at the student organisation in Germany as access and support for all less-privileged groups. Moreover, we encountered arguments of humanitarian action by different actors in France, Germany, and Switzerland. Goastellec (2018a) analysed the statements on this topic by the national authorities of higher education in 2015 and identified different logics and argumentation in Germany, France, and Switzerland. While in France, the social and humanitarian responsibility and the issue of integration was stressed, Germany launched programs and a campaign for more open universities as well as against xenophobia, and Switzerland was more reserved and highlighted the importance of people returning to their home countries (Goastellec, 2018a, p. 24).

The comparison thus prompts one to pay attention to the manner in which normativities of higher education are constructed, where continuities or disruptions are taking place, and what this means in a globalising world. In their work with the concept of "eduscapes", Forstorp and Mellström (2013, p. 343) outline eduscapes as an "analytical vehicle that encompasses places and processes, institutional practices as well as spatiotemporal strategies of individuals". The three cases show how, apart from the similarities between the institutions and imaginaries of higher education, there are also differences. Different eduscapes thus exist in close proximity. Moreover, even in the same place, students can live in different eduscapes in the sense of possibilities and imaginaries. The often proclaimed globalisation and

internationalisation of education does not appear as a smooth process but produces conflicting views, expectations, and opportunities even within the same place. Discourses and arguments in this debate such as equality, humanitarianism, integration, and economic participation (Lenette, 2016) are of relevance in a much broader sense. They reflect larger societal debates on migration, and they also must be seen in the context of contemporary debates on the predicament of universities and their position, role, and task within society. One major topic here is the increasing economisation, entrepreneurial setup, and rigid management of universities, which has been criticised in Europe, for example, with regard to the Bologna reform. The current situation of refugee students prompts to reconsider the university as a "place in which concepts and insights are constantly rethought, have to be constantly rethought and can be rethought" (Arens et al., 2013, p. 10, our translation). As the cases show, local universities here are places in which the questioning of political categories of differentiation, intersecting policies, and change in reaction to changing environmental conditions can take place.

4. Three Programs

4.1. Basel: Student Volunteers

At the University of Basel in Switzerland, an initiative was started by members of the university's Amnesty International student group. The group of students set up an association called "Offener Hörsaal" (Open Auditorium) and brought together supporting faculty members, private donors, foundations, and cooperated with the university. The program they set up includes consultations and cultural programs for potential refugee students as well as a buddy program in which an experienced local student is matched with a refugee student. The association raises money (10000 CHF per semester) and finances language courses at the university for their participants. This is necessary, because in some Swiss cantons, asylum seekers do not receive language courses, and recognised refugees do not receive language courses at the required level for university studies. They also finance guest auditorships, so that students can attend selected lectures—albeit without receiving credit points (one language course and one to two other classes add up to around 500 CHF per person per semester). The initiative is remarkable, as the students set up a functioning organisation, and organised various cooperations (and also training for themselves). Said one of the founders when asked about his motivation:

> I have the feeling that with this project, one can move something, also very directly, it's very concrete….I somehow think it's a certain—duty is exaggerated—but the task of a student, if you have the possibility to influence something that is immediate.

He assumed that he had invested around 15–20 hours per week of voluntary work in the initiative. In the beginning, 20 refugee students were admitted into the Open Auditorium program per semester, the number declined to around 13 in 2018, yet only two to four of these could actually enrol at the university per year.

With regard to the 4-Area-Model of intersecting challenges, a few issues are especially influential in this case. An important topic is the recognition of prior certificates of the students. Some certificates, such as the Syrian high school diploma require an additional exam in Switzerland, the ECUS. The preparation courses are delivered by private institutes and involve costs that are difficult or impossible to pay for by refugee students, and the exam itself is expensive as well. Some of the students may not have a working permit or have difficulties finding a job that could allow them to pay for the exam. Moreover, when students are enrolled, social aid is stopped, as it is for other students. Thus, the combination of the demand of the educational system, the funding, and the position as asylum seekers creates a predicament for the students. A second issue is language courses. Paying for high-level courses privately is again almost impossible for refugee students. At the University of Basel, though, a proof of language skills is not compulsory to enrol, and the student association is raising the money to pay for courses. A third issue concerns immobility, as asylum seekers are sent to their living places and have to stay there, and these places may be far away from a university and commuting is often too expensive—or one has to know how to apply for funding for this. This shows how the demands of the asylum system, the educational system, and funding are clashing.

4.2. Freiburg: Network of Initiatives

Just 80 km to the North, at the University of Freiburg in Germany, we encountered a different situation. Here, too, an impressive student association called "Uni für alle" (University for everybody) is active and organises buddies, cultural programs, and consultations. Freiburg as a city features a dense network of engagement for refugees so that a number of institutions can collaborate and provide consultancies and refer refugees to other organisations that address their specific needs. This network starts right at the arrival centres, where our interviewees were directed towards "Uni für alle" or to the student services at the university, e.g., by so-called "circles of helpers". Moreover, the university itself offers preparatory and language courses funded by the German government through the "integra" program (Fourier, Kracht, Latsch, Heublein, & Schneider, 2017). The university also provides free access to language labs and offers free guest auditorships. Freiburg has a professional coordinator dedicated to the topic of university access for refugees. The situation in Freiburg is specific, not only because of the long-established volunteer networks, but also because of the much higher numbers of refugees who came in 2015.

While around 3,000 people arrived in Freiburg, there were merely around 500 in Basel. In Freiburg, around 50 (potential) refugee students took part in the program organised by the students, and 40 took place in the preparatory course offered by the university.

In Freiburg, in the 4-Area-Model, the national educational policy must be acknowledged, as funding for preparatory courses was provided at this level. Moreover, in the area of the migration and funding system, a number of changes were decided in 2015 and 2016 in Germany (Deutscher Bundestag, 2016). The place of residence became more restricted, which hindered asylum seeking students to access universities in other cities—or to join preparatory schools (Studienkolleg) to validate their certificates, of which only one to four exist in each German federal state. It was thus not possible for some of the students to follow the rules of the educational system and the asylum system at the same time. However, there were also changes in the funding system, which made it possible for refugee students with certain residence titles to access Bafög, the national financial student support, after having resided for 15 months in Germany (directly for recognised refugees) and not after four years, as the rule was before, thus connecting the areas of funding, education, and asylum in a beneficial way for the students (BMBF, n.d.).

4.3. Mulhouse: University Initiative

To the West of both Freiburg, and Basel lies the University of Mulhouse in France, where, again, we found a remarkable initiative with, again, a very different setup and story. In Mulhouse, the initiative is carried by the university and in particular, one faculty member was active in setting it up. The refugee students we met here were recruited from refugee camps around Syria via an NGO and could then travel with a permit and did not have to go on the dangerous journey undocumented. The university, and in particular the Centre de Compétences Transfrontalières (Novatris) and the language centre organised a program that included housing, language courses, a cultural program, and trained volunteer support. In Mulhouse, the church and other NGOs also supported the program.

Here, the first area of the 4-Area-Model, the individual migratory situation, was thus different than for other students who had travelled undocumented. Moreover, those who came met supportive infrastructure at the university, which also had different policies than in Basel or Freiburg. Recognition of diplomas was, for example, not problematic for the Syrian students and language courses were organised by the university. The university, in turn, had little financial support by federal or national agencies, making it difficult to establish the new structures sustainably. Despite the broad assistance offered, the university still has no influence on the asylum process, which means that the students might find themselves in an inverted situation compared to the other

two cases: while having full academic support, basic residential and financial issues could be pending. In fact, some interviewees talked about organisational difficulties with the government agencies. In France, the access to student support (CROUS), unemployment support (RSA), and asylum support (ADA), differs depending on residence status, enrolment at university, but also age, creating a complex scenario and leaving groups of students (such as those with subsidiary protection or those above 28 years of age) in precarious situations. Some of the students also mentioned that it was very difficult to find a job and explained this was due to the general employment situation, as well as possible discrimination. In France, information is available on the RESOME Platform, and there is also the network group "Migrants dans L'enseignement Supérieur" (migrants in higher education, MEnS) that was founded by 40 universities in 2017. MEnS is very actively exchanging best practices within the group and entertains an active dialogue with local and national policymakers.

5. The Students' Situation

5.1. Uncertainty

For students, the complex situation of the 4-Area-Model with its intersections, produces uncertainty. We met one student in Switzerland who had waited for his asylum decision for five years. He had to flee his home country just before finishing his degree. He attended different preparatory programs, learned German, but did not find a way to enrol in his discipline. He is still searching for a way to get a diploma while starting to do internships in order to find a way into the job market. When we asked him where he saw himself in five years, he responded:

> Most difficult questions. If you live in Switzerland as a Swiss person it is very different, you can really plan. But if you are dependent on the government agencies and, for example, yesterday they said you can do this and then…they say no, it works differently and you cannot study or something like that. And then you have to plan anew, that's why it's difficult, really. And in our countries this has really influenced us, one is scared of the future.

The biographical experiences of uncertainty, violence, and loss thus add to the experience of uncertainty and difficulty to understand the intersections of the educational, asylum, and funding system.

As in this quote, we sometimes detected frustration from potential students. The fear that one could be stuck, not able to move forward, lose one's energy, or become depressed was expressed if no perspective for the future seemed visible, as in this student's quote: "I am 21 years old, I have many dreams, I also want to study at university and I do not want to lose this energy". Often, the students are accepted only temporarily by the migration system.

Moreover, there is the group of refugees whose asylum claim has been denied, but who will not be deported, because this is not possible in the current situation, so they just remain in the country—but without the right to receive academic grants or to work.

5.2. Motivation and Engagement

Even though some of the students felt insecure or frustrated, there was a strong motivation and ambition that was tangible in all of the interviews. Also, a strong notion of engagement was expressed. This could be social, personal, or political engagement, often it was voluntary translations or community work. Some of them had already been engaged back in the place of departure. Their statements about studying sometimes had a similar connotation, of being able to find one's place, to contribute or even to give something back through the job they would have with a university education, as expressed in the following passage:

> I like learning because it's my future. I think it's everybody's future. They have to learn if they want to be up-to-date. But my wish is to make a new life, get back the life that I had in my country and be an important part of Switzerland. I don't like to live without doing anything in my life. Without having an effect on my life or on the others' lives, on everything.

As conveyed in this passage, education has often been described as a means of societal participation. De Wit and Altbach (2016) raised the question of the effect on the countries of departure and "brain drain" consequences. Here, the responses we received were mixed. Some of the students said that they will go back and help build up their country or continue their engagement and take everything they have learned back with them. One of the interview partners, for example, actively tried to interact with politicians and political institutions to learn as much as possible about the ways in which the local democratic structures work. Others again said that they wanted to stay and felt the need to find a place where they can live peacefully and build a life for themselves.

5.3. The Personal Value of Supporting Initiatives

The preparatory courses at the universities provide networks and platforms for participation. A group of interviewed students, for example, started their own cultural association. Even though full enrolment and equal possibilities should be the goal, it is important to acknowledge the value of supporting structures on a personal level of developing social networks, friendships, motivation, and finding information and orientation in the educational system—and it should also be acknowledged that the outcome of such a process of orientation could mean a decision to drop out or move on. As one of the interviewees explained:

> Yes, I can attend lectures in the context of the Open Auditorium, but it is really about getting a taste, how things are working at the university in Switzerland, the curricular design, because it is something completely different, and it has the benefit to meet people and to network.

When evaluating such programs, these criteria must be taken into account apart from the direct value of preparation for enrolment.

5.4. The Educational System

The following point was not raised by the students in the interviews, possibly because we did not accompany them long enough. It was rather mentioned by those working with the students but seems worth taking note of. Orientation is also necessary, because expectations, imaginaries, educational systems, and thus eduscapes differ. Often, when looking at the topic of refugees in higher education, full universities are the focus and the present study is no exception. However, the educational environment does not only consist of universities. There are also other colleges, universities of applied sciences, and vocational schools that play a role, especially in Switzerland, but also in Germany and France, and this is often new to incoming refugees from different educational systems. Here, eduscapes might clash not only on the level of possibilities and access but also on the level of expectations and imaginaries. The incoming potential students might have a career in mind that requires a university education in the educational system they come from, but may be a college education or vocational training in the new educational system, such as for example nursing. Especially in Switzerland, ⅔ of all students follow a vocational training rather than an academic education (Goastellec, 2018a, p. 31). Access to the job market might even sometimes be easier with an applied education than with a university education. Some of the students who recently arrived still have to learn about both, the educational system and the possible future chances in the job market in the new place. So here, it takes "translation" and very individual consultation to explain the differences and to help make decisions, something which also happens in the preparatory programs.

6. Conclusion

By examining three different ways to facilitate university access for refugees, their respective strategies, challenges, and discursive frames, formal and informal obstacles for refugee students became visible. While the specific problems differed from case to case—e.g., Syrian High School diplomas are partly recognised by university departments in Mulhouse and Freiburg but require an expensive additional exam in Basel—they share the quality of being located at "area intersections" and thus the fact that access to higher education cannot be observed

in isolation. The 4-Area-Model put forward in this study rather includes biographical experiences, the asylum system, the funding situation, and the educational system. The issue of refugees' access to higher education is situated in a historically grown structure of policies of education, migration, and funding with their own logic and aims. However, the challenge is that the topic does not fit smoothly into these sets of policies. The current situation of refugee students rather makes effects and conflicts of these policies, as well as different positions and eduscapes visible.

The difficulty in finding funding illustrates how refugee students can feel caught between two stools. Social assistance is usually not paid to registered students, but asylum seekers also have limited or no access to other funding sources (e.g., cantonal scholarships, Bafög, CROUS; in certain German federal states, like Berlin, the problem was addressed by extending the financial aid for asylum seekers when they enrol as students). Thus, they either take a significant financial risk when enrolling as a student, or they have to spend additional work on finding individual solutions. Being a student and a refugee at once means not having a usual route to follow but being affected by interfering regulations.

The comparison of the current study also showed that rethinking of policies must be done for very specific policy intersections, current demands and goals of education and migration in the specific places and cannot be generalised. The proposal of the new French law on asylum and immigration, for example, includes among other things a special residence status for fled academics (in Art. 21, section 5). This status can be requested while still being in the asylum process and is just a slight variation of the already existing "French Tech Visa". However, required prerequisites—such as financial independence, linguistic proficiency, and being a registered student—do not match the most common problems that were encountered during this study. In fact, this concept privileges those individuals who have already overcome most hurdles (RESOME email correspondence).

The article presented different possibilities of change and engagement as well as ways of positioning in the three universities, such as dropping the requirement to prove language proficiency at the time of enrolment, initiating preparatory courses, or supporting students to enter the country without going on a dangerous journey. Moreover, the student initiatives on a mostly voluntary basis campaign and provide consultancies, programs, networks, or even funding that help refugee students to get in touch with universities in the first place.

However, there are also still major obstacles such as the recognition situation in Switzerland with the very expensive ECUS exam, the question of funding for special supporting measures and the sustainability of supporting structures and special consultancies. The future will show if and how these initiatives will sustain or change. The best solution, as one of the student volunteers put it in our interview, would be to make such initiatives re-dundant by providing locally adjusted policies that do not hinder access to higher education.

In the current situation, knowledgeable consultation for potential refugee students is key, because of these four intersecting areas of challenges and because each situation of each student is individual and different, more individual consultation specialised in higher education and asylum is necessary.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

Reliability of Longitudinal Social Surveys of Access to Higher Education: The Case of Next Steps in England

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Abstract

Longitudinal social surveys are widely used to understand which factors enable or constrain access to higher education. One such data resource is the Next Steps survey comprising an initial sample of 16,122 pupils aged 13–14 attending English state and private schools in 2004, with follow up annually to age 19–20 and a further survey at age 25. The Next Steps data is a potentially rich resource for studying inequalities of access to higher education. It contains a wealth of information about pupils' social background characteristics—including household income, parental education, parental social class, housing tenure and family composition—as well as longitudinal data on aspirations, choices and outcomes in relation to education. However, as with many longitudinal social surveys, Next Steps suffers from a substantial amount of missing data due to item non-response and sample attrition which may seriously compromise the reliability of research findings. Helpfully, Next Steps data has been linked with more robust administrative data from the National Pupil Database (NPD), which contains a more limited range of social background variables, but has comparatively little in the way of missing data due to item non-response or attrition. We analyse these linked datasets to assess the implications of missing data for the reliability of Next Steps. We show that item non-response in Next Steps biases the apparent socioeconomic composition of the Next Steps sample upwards, and that this bias is exacerbated by sample attrition since Next Steps participants from less advantaged social backgrounds are more likely to drop out of the study. Moreover, by the time it is possible to measure access to higher education, the socioeconomic background variables in Next Steps are shown to have very little explanatory power after controlling for the social background and educational attainment variables contained in the NPD. Given these findings, we argue that longitudinal social surveys with much missing data are only reliable sources of data on access to higher education if they can be linked effectively with more robust administrative data sources. This then raises the question—why not just use the more robust datasets?

Keywords

higher education; household income; longitudinal study; missing data; sampling bias; Next Steps

1. Introduction

Secondary datasets are useful resources for educational research. This article presents findings on the comparison of two existing datasets, Next Steps and the National Pupil Database (NPD), which have been linked and made available for the purpose of research. We assessed the research feasibility of the two linked datasets in predicting young peoples' entry to higher education. The analysis presents the strengths and limitations of the Next Steps and the NPD and the potential in linking the two for assessing educational outcomes. However, the results show that the participant dropout and missing data in Next Steps introduces bias in the findings

while the NPD provides more complete and reliable information that explained most of the variation in the outcomes. The findings have research implications, emphasising the need for completeness and follow-up of the dropout cases. The implications for widening access policies in higher education are to select the indicators with high reliability for use in contextualised admissions and similar.

2. Background

The expansion of higher education is a worldwide phenomenon which has enabled increasing numbers of students to enter a range of forms of higher education within increasingly internally differentiated national higher education sectors (Arum, Gamoran, & Shavit, 2007; Marginson, 2017; Jerrim & Vignoles, 2015). In the UK, around fifty percent of young people now progress to higher education at some stage compared to just five percent prior to the first wave of higher education expansion in the 1960s (Boliver, 2011; Department for Education [DFE], 2017). However, some inequalities in access have persisted, with those from lower socioeconomic groups significantly under-represented in UK higher education, especially in the UK's most prestigious higher education institutions (Boliver, 2015; Broecke, 2015; Gorard, Siddiqui, & Boliver, 2017; Harrison, 2011; Triventi, 2011) and in some subjects leading to the professions (BIS, 2013; Connor et al., 2001; Smith & White, 2011). These patterns of unequal participation have improved since the 1960s (Crawford, Gregg, Macmillan, Vignoles, & Wyness, 2016; Gorard, 2013), but they still exist despite expansion in the 1960s and 1990s (Adnett, McCaig, Slack, & Bowers-Brown, 2011).

The existing evidence for the UK shows that access to higher education is substantially predicated on prior attainment at secondary school level (Gorard et al., 2007), which is itself stratified in terms of socioeconomic background (Chowdry et al., 2010). Students from less advantaged backgrounds are under-represented in higher education, and especially in more academically selective institutions and courses, at least partly because their prior qualifications are lower on average (Gorard et al., 2017; Younger, Gascoine, Menzies, & Torgerson, 2017). Even in the 'Russell Group' universities, which include many of those considered the most prestigious in the UK, rates of participation have been found to be similar for different socioeconomic groups with ostensibly the same levels of prior attainment, at least in some studies (Marcenaro-Gutierrez, Galindo-Rueda, & Vignoles, 2007; Chowdry, Crawford, Dearden, Goodman, & Vignoles, 2013), but less so in others (Zimdars et al., 2009). There is some evidence that a substantial proportion of high attaining disadvantaged students are not accessing the most prestigious forms of higher education, despite being qualified to do so, and despite nearly £842 million being spent on widening access initiatives in England in 2016 alone (HEFCE, 2017).

The emerging evidence on the enablers of and barriers to access to higher education is informed by analysis of two main types of data: administrative data, and data obtained by means of social surveys. Administrative data is collected by government agencies and can be linked year on year to enable individuals to be tracked longitudinally throughout their educational careers. A major benefit of administrative data is its census-like nature which results in near-total population coverage, comparatively minimal missing data, and thus a highly representative analytical sample. A common disadvantage of administrative data in the UK context, however, is that it contains limited information about the broader context of young people's lives. For example, one key administrative dataset, the NPD, contains information about whether school pupils are eligible for free school meals (FSM, an income-contingent welfare entitlement) but does not contain information about other aspects of socioeconomic background such as parental social class, parental education or household income. Moreover, while the NPD contains information about young people's educational attainments and transitions, it contains nothing on attitudes, aspirations and decision-making in relation to education.

A second type of data resource is the prospective longitudinal social survey which collects much richer data on young people's circumstances and life outcomes. A key prospective longitudinal study is the Next Steps survey of young people in England which sampled 16,122 young people aged 13–14 in England in 2004 and tracked them annually until age 19–20 with a further survey at age 25–26. This cohort study was conducted by the DFE, England as an investigation of the underlying factors that determine young people's outcomes in life after post-compulsory stage in education. The Next Steps study measured the educational aspirations, achievements and choices of young people during their final years of secondary schooling and documented various life-course outcomes including access to higher education and transitions into the labour market. This study is an important data resource that collected detailed information on young people's lives at home and at school. There are rich details on young people's socioeconomic circumstances including information on parents' education levels, job statuses, incomes, and aspirations in relation to their children's education. On the face of it, the richness of prospective longitudinal studies like Next Steps make them an especially valuable resource for studying the determinants of access to higher education. The true value of this data source, however, depends heavily on the representativeness of the analytic sample, which is of course likely to be compromised by nontrivial amounts of missing data resulting from item nonresponse and sample attrition over time.

In this article we examine empirically the relative merits and demerits of administrative data from the NPD and longitudinal survey data from Next Steps, and we consider whether the demerits of each can be counter-

balanced by the merits of the other. Helpfully, the two datasets are linked by the UK Data Service (n.d.) and made available in the secure access environment for the purpose of research.

It is possible to link data from the NPD to data from the Next Steps survey at an individual level, and so we are able to compare these two datasets directly. More specifically, this article sets out to answer the following questions:

- To what extent does Next Steps suffer from missing data due to item non-response and sample attrition?
- In what respects does missing data in Next Steps result in a biased sample?
- How well does the available socioeconomic background data contained in Next Steps predict access to higher education, over and above the predictive power of the more limited information contained within the NPD?
- Can sample bias be ameliorated by linking Next Steps with census-style administrative data from the NPD?

3. Item Non-Response in Next Steps

As outlined above, the Next Steps survey includes questions relating to a range of measures of pupil social background characteristic. However, some of these measures suffer from a high degree of item non-response (Table 1). Gross household income is actual income reported by the parents in two consecutive waves of the study, but is available for less than half of the total sample. This under-reporting of household income is one of the main challenges for using this indicator for any subsequent analysis or for comparison with other available measures of disadvantage. The following waves (3 and 4) collected information on household income by using a household grid approach where income bands were presented to the households to identify the income band in which their gross annual income falls. However, this categorical indicator is less precise and complete than the actual income reported in the first two waves. It is not considered further in this article, but will be pursued in the next.

All misreporting and missing data creates a potential for bias. Such data can never be assumed to be random in nature, and there is clear long-standing evidence that data is missing from a survey for a reason (Behaghel, Crepon, Gurgand, & Le Barbanchon, 2009; Hansen & Hurwitz, 1946; Sheikh & Mattingly, 1981). Any bias in the substantive results caused by missing data generally cannot be corrected by any technical means (Cuddeback, Wilson, Orme, & Combs-Orme, 2004). For example, weights can only be used post hoc to correct for variables for which all true population values are known, making weighting pointless, and weighting a sample in this way clearly cannot correct the values of other variables for which the true population value is not known (Peress, 2010). If data from other variables in Next Steps were used to model the likely income for the missing 58% of cases, then any subsequent analyses would then be blighted. A correlation between any of those other variables and income would be bogus, and at least partly based on the income values having been mostly created by that correlation in the first place. Generally, using existing data to make up for data that does not exist exacerbates the potential for bias.

Therefore, we must assume that the 42% of values that Next Steps does contain are biased (and evidence in support of this appears below). The other SES and pupil background variables in Table 1 all have less missing data at the outset, but even for these there is evidence that this creates bias (Table 2). Where family income is known but parental education is not, cases missing parental education have a clearly lower average income. Missing data can never be assumed to be random. Here, removing the 20% of the cases which are missing parental education information would mean over-representing the advantaged group. Simply ignoring or deleting the cases with missing data accepts that level of bias, and anyway leads to many fewer cases.

4. Sample Attrition in Next Steps

Unfortunately, this is not the end of the problem of missing data in NS. Each year after wave 1, more cases dropped out and/or were missing data (Figure 1). By the time of application and entry to university, 46% of the ini-

Table 1. Completeness of records in wave 1 of Next Steps.

Household characteristics	% of cases with valid values
Gross household income wave 1	42
Gross household income wave 2	47
Parental education	80
Household composition	97
Main parent employment status	98
No. of siblings	94
Housing tenure	97
Special educational need (SEN)	96

Note: N = 16,122.

Table 2. The difference in household annual income missing or not-missing background data in wave 1 of Next Steps.

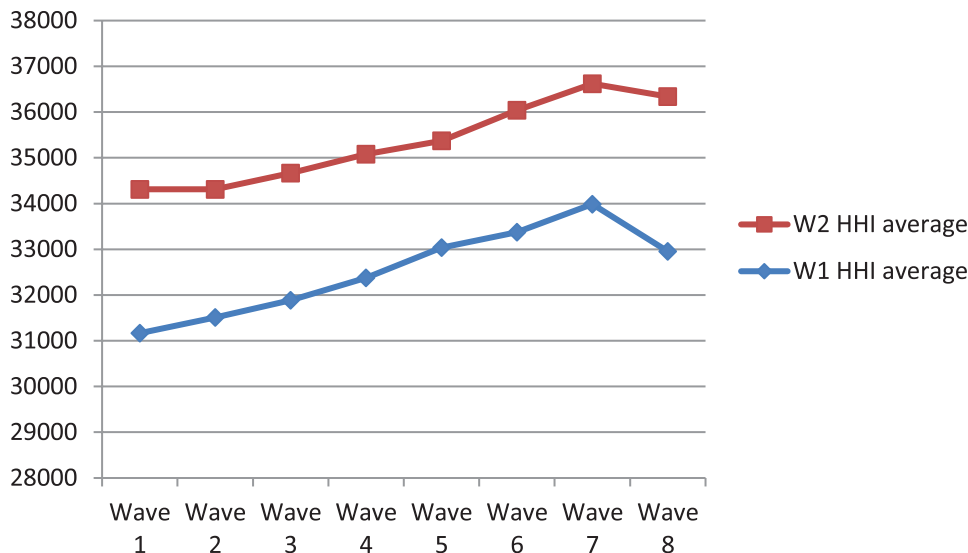| Background characteristics	Average household income (missing)	Average household income (not missing)
Parental education	£27,437	£32,375
Household composition	£26,291	£32,307
Main parent employment status	£22,012	£32,314
Housing tenure	£25,969	£32,355

Figure 1. Number of participants in each wave of Next Steps.

tial participants had dropped out, and the situation continued to deteriorate with each wave.

On average, these dropouts were more likely to be from low-income households, and attained lower average scores at secondary school. Again, there is never a reason to assume that dropout is random. All missing data will tend to bias ensuing results. Figure 2 shows the average incomes reported in waves 1 and 2 but averaged again for successive years for only those still participating in the study. It looks as though the average income has increased every year simply because the high-income participants in waves 1 and 2 were more likely to remain in
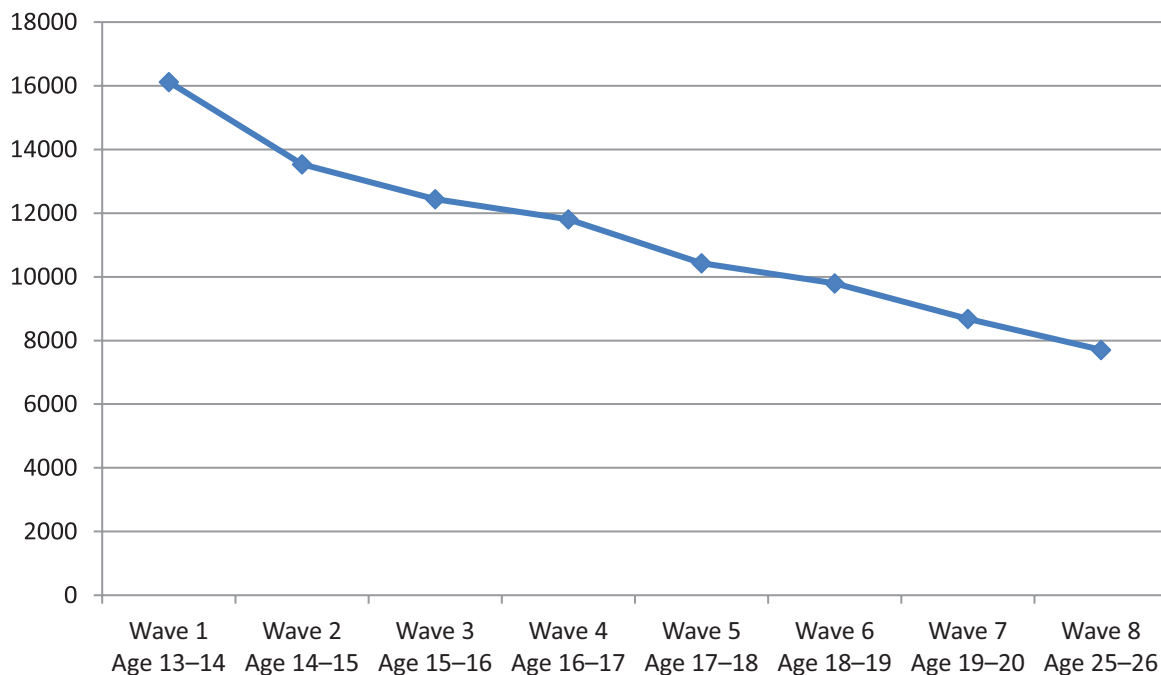

Figure 2. How average of initially-reported income changes with dropout.

the study. Some earlier participants who had dropped out were re-recruited in wave 8 via financial incentives.

Another consequence of participants dropping out over time, is that Next Steps only has valid data on the higher education status at age 19 of 54% of the cases. This is likely to greatly over-estimate the proportion and income of higher education students.

5. The NPD Data

The NPD is national administrative data in England, officially required information from all state-funded schools by the Department for Education (DFE). It contains details of pupils' attainment at school, as well as key indicators of background characteristics and possible disadvantage. But these key indicators are more complete, verified and reliable than those in a survey like the Next Steps. One such indicator is eligibility for FSM. The identification of FSM-eligible pupils is based on clear legal criteria defined by the DFE—such as coming from families in receipt of state support in the form of benefits, allowances and tax credits due to annual gross income below a threshold of £16,190 in 2017–2018 (for the latest details on children's FSM eligibility criteria see DFE, 2018a).The equivalent figure for 2004, when Next Steps wave 1 was surveyed, was £13,480 (Hobbs & Vignoles, 2010).

Some studies have criticised this measure because it misses out some families who ought to be eligible but do not apply or are missing appropriate documentation (Iniesta-Martinez & Evans, 2012; Storey & Chamberlin, 2001), and does not fully capture poverty in a variety of dimensions such as fluctuation in the economic cycles and period of recessions, and long-term poverty (Gorard & Siddiqui, 2018). Despite these limitations FSM is the key indicator and a context within which the academic

performance of state-maintained schools and pupils is judged (DFE, 2018b), intervention targets are set, and evaluation outcomes of programmes and policies are demonstrated (The Education Endowment Foundation, 2017). FSM is imperfect but currently the best available indicator in comparison to the alternatives which have additional problems other than missing data such as based on sample, aggregated socioeconomic measures and dependent on multiple definitions (Taylor, 2018).

In the NPD, around 4% of cases in state maintained schools are missing data on FSM-eligibility and a further 6% to 7% are in private schools not completing this section of NPD (Gorard, 2012a). However, when the 2004 NPD dataset is individually linked to wave 1 of Next Steps, around 27% of cases are missing FSM-eligibility data (and 28% missing SEN data, and the same occurs with other variables). This is largely because a pupil's status on FSM and SEN is classed as highly sensitive information, therefore the data linking policy seeks participants' consent. This exacerbates the situation of data already missing in one or other the linked datasets. Missing FSM and SEN as available in the linked dataset does not necessarily mean that this information is missing in the main NPD as well, just that it cannot be linked.

The NPD has been linked with Next Steps for the sample achieved in the first wave of the study. This means NPD information was linked for only those participants who consented to be included in the study in wave 1. The linked NPD data is for the year 2004 which is when the first Next Steps data sweep was conducted. A sample boost of 600 young people was introduced at wave 4 in the year 2007 and the NPD information is missing for these cases, and so is ignored for the rest of this paper. Table 3 shows that data is missing particularly for FSM and SEN.

Table 3. Percentage of cases with complete and missing data for key variables in the linked dataset.

NS participants in the linked NPD		% in the linked NPD dataset
School type	Comprehensive	89
	Selective (independent, grammar and special)	7
	Missing school type	3
FSM status	FSM	12
	Not FSM	61
	Missing FSM	27
Special Education Status	SEN	12
	Not SEN	61
	Missing SEN	28
Ethnicity (major)	White	65
	Not white	33
	Missing	2
First Language	English	86
	Not English	9
	Missing	5

6. Comparing Household Income and FSM in the Linked Next Steps–NPD Dataset

In order to reduce missing data and cases, we have combined the data on income from waves 1 and 2. If the income data is missing for wave 1 we have used the reported income in wave 2. While this maintains as many cases as possible, this may further compromise the reliability of household income indicator because there are differences in the reported income for two consecutive years of data sweeps, where available. After combining the income data from waves 1 and 2, the remaining number of cases missing gross household incomes was compared across FSM categories (Table 4). Around 60% of the cases missing gross household income data have the FSM status available, while 40% have neither household income nor FSM status for the year 2004.

Pupils with a family income below £13,480 ought to be eligible for FSM. Now using only those cases with values for both, Table 5 compares FSM status and income. Around 73% of pupils below the income threshold of £13,480 are labelled as in receipt of FSM in the NPD. And around 79% are identified as not FSM with an income in excess of £13,480. These are all sensible figures in accord with the idea that FSM is for families with low incomes. Some participants could have misreported their incomes somewhat and this can explain some of the 21% with higher incomes considered FSM-eligible and vice versa. Or these differences could be due to genuine changes between the time at which FSM was recorded for the NPD and income surveyed for NS.

The differences mentioned explain the way socioeconomic poverty is indicated in the form of different indicators and the linking the two indictors might not perfectly match and show exactly the same patterns of disadvantaged characteristics. This also raises the issues of selecting indicators that accurately target the disadvantaged for widening access initiatives.

7. Entry into Higher Education at Age 19

Wave 7 of Next Steps provides information on whether young people have entered university or alternate higher education or not at age 18–20. The response rate by this phase is below 53% of the initial sample. Table 6 shows that on average 52% of the young people enter higher education by age 20, which is more than happened in that age cohort nationally, suggesting that the missing cases have biased the sample towards the more qualified. Table 6 shows the average household income differences in the three categories for those who stayed in the study until age 20. It also shows how much more the family income was in the homes of young people proceeding to HE. This is more in line with national figures (Gorard et al., 2017).

Of the 6,284 cases from the original wave 1 stayed in the study at age 19, 4,306 have unknown FSM status, and 1,978 have unknown higher education status. This illustrates how poor quality Next Steps and even linked Next Steps–NPD data is for analysis of higher education entry patterns using background and traditional data.

The one main advantage of the smaller, weaker Next Steps than the NPD is that it contains additional information such as the variables on aspiration for higher education. These could be important predictors (Croll, 2010; see also, Gorard, 2012b). Whether students aspired to admission in university was collected in the initial waves when the drop-out was less of a problem than for higher education entry itself. However, by wave 7, only 46% of those remained to report if they achieved admission in

Table 4. Cases missing income and FSM data in linked dataset.

Missing gross household income	% indicated in the NPD status
FSM	24
Not FSM	35
Missing FSM	40

Note: N missing = 6,422.

Table 5. Comparison of FSM status and household income in linked dataset.

	FSM	Not FSM	Total N
Household income ≥ £13,480	73%	27%	411
Household income ≥ £13,480	21%	79%	7571

Table 6. Average household income and higher education admission status.

At age 19 in higher education and not	Average household income	Number of young people
Missing information	£35,089	5,963
In higher education	£40,294	3,100
Not in higher education	£29,453	2,863

higher education or not. Leaving these cautions aside, there is a relatively weak link between aspirations at age 13 and actual higher education entry by age 19 (Table 7). The vast majority of young people said that they were likely to enter higher education and 62% of these did so. Of the minority who said that university was not likely, 80% did not enter by age 19.

The research implications of the findings so far are that the Next Steps longitudinal survey-based study is promising for understanding life trajectories and outcomes, but that dropout and missing data weakens the reliability of results perhaps to such an extent that the data are effectively useless.

8. How Good Is the Linked Dataset at Predicting University Entrance?

In order to assess the usefulness of the linked dataset with additional variables to the NPD, such as aspirations, a binary logistic regression model is presented in which getting admitted to university or not is the outcome. The selected explanatory variables from the linked NPD-NS dataset are introduced in two separate steps. This analysis tries to include the full sample of young people for whom the information was collected in wave 1. As explained so far, simply deleting all cases with any missing values leads to almost no cases. Where categorical variables have missing data, this is retained as a separate 'missing' category. Missing data for all key variables is linked to negative outcomes (not entering university here). Missing data is important and must be respected. Of course, where the outcome variable is not known the cases cannot be included.

Of the cases retained, 52% attended higher education and so this is the base figure for the model in Table 8. Adding data from the NPD raises the predictability of HE entry to 73%, and adding the extra Next Steps variables raises it a further 3%. FSM and SEN status, coupled with prior attainment are the key predictors. These are the ones that policy and practice should focus on. The weaker data on family income, parental ed-

ucation, household structure and aspirations add little more (as also found for national linked NPD and Higher Education Statistical Agency [HESA] datasets by Gorard et al., 2017).

This is a relatively poor model, and a stronger predictive model for entry in higher education can be made with the full NPD data alone, with the best single predictor being prior attainment. Gorard (2018) presents a simple regression model with near 80% success in predicting entry in higher education using prior attainment and a few key indicators from NPD, and using the full age cohorts of 600,000 young people in England with very little missing data. Therefore, the linked dataset model is probably not worth investigating further for research purposes, despite the additional or alternative variables.

Despite having the potential for linking pupils between Next Steps and the NPD the limitations of each dataset cannot compensate for the other. Next Steps captures a more detailed set of information on young people's life but it is far from complete in terms of information in each category. The NPD does not capture so many details about pupils but it is more complete than Next Steps and highly reliable as the information recorded has been validated against well-defined measures. The NPD does not have in-depth information on pupils which seems highly correlated with life-long outcomes of young people. However, just relying on the information available from the linked NPD we can successfully identify the most disadvantaged groups for whom overcoming the barriers in learning and achievement is the main challenge.

The indicators such as household income, parental education, household composition and house tenure are relevant to educational outcomes. However, the main challenges of using these indicators are lack of definitions, missing data, and high level of reliance on respondents' self-reporting. It is better to use NPD data and map pupil trajectories from the moment they enter school and, if desired, link these data to HESA and University and College Admissions Services [UCAS] records. Sample surveys such as Next Steps offer very little in comparison.

Table 7. Link between higher education aspirations at age 13 and higher education admission outcome at age 19.

Aspirations for higher education at age 13	In higher education at age 19 %	Not in higher education at age 19 %	Number of young people
Likely to get admission	62	38	6,064
Not likely to get admission	20	80	883

Note: N = 6,947.

Table 8. Summary of correctness of prediction of higher education entry using Next Steps–NPD data.

Main outcome	At age 19 in higher education or not
Base	52%
Step 1 (linked NPD indicators)	73%
Step 2 (Next Steps indicators)	76%

Note: N = 8,682.

9. Conclusions

Household income is highly sensitive information, and for many households it is not a clear composite figure. Self-reporting of gross household income has a large margin of error and misreporting for reasons such as respondents' unawareness of gross household income or simply not being willing to share this sensitive information. Gross household income could be an important indicator of relative advantage in education, and be highly representative of respondents' socioeconomic status. But according to our findings, it is not a strong predictor of pupils' academic achievement given its lack of data quality, especially once we know FSM status for only one year of students' life in school.

Assessing the reliability of FSM as indicated in the NPD using self-reported gross household income from Next Steps is problematic. In Next Steps there is a high level of item-nonresponse for gross household income and our findings have clearly shown that item non-response is not random in Next Steps. Income in Next Steps therefore cannot be considered a reliable indicator of FSM assessment in the NPD. In the linked NPD and Next Steps there is some missing FSM status information, but our findings have shown that this missing data does not particularly affect the predictions of a regression model. FSM is more complete and accurate than the self-reported gross household income, and so should be a preferred in practice.

Parental income is not easily available to researchers from any source, and the information is highly dependent on respondents' self-reports. This information could be important and highly correlated with young people's higher education outcomes therefore it has potential to be captured administratively. However, other than permitting researchers routine access to the UK Government department responsible for the collection of taxes, the payment of some forms of state support and the administration of other regulatory regimes including the national minimum wage records. There does not seem to be source that will not repeat the challenges of misreporting or non-response in Next Steps. There could be even more challenges in accessing parental qualifications or education because there is no clear definition of this characteristic, unlike with FSM eligibility.

The findings show that household composition is relevant to the secondary school academic outcomes and it has less missing data than gross household income. Schools are more easily aware of pupils' family composition than parental education or income because family composition is related to issues concerning pupils' safety, wellbeing, attendance, and learning. There are clear definitions of family characteristics, and schools could accurately register and update this information in the annual census to obtain a more complete picture.

Administrative records from the NPD are generally robust, complete and longitudinal in tracing the specific characteristics of young people (Gorard, 2018). The somewhat limited indicators of disadvantage available in the administrative records can predict young people's academic outcomes to a great extent. However, finer grained details could enrich research findings and be relevant in understanding the characteristics of poverty and developing targeted interventions. Therefore, although sample-based longitudinal studies such as Next Steps may be of little help on their own (except insofar as they allow us to link aspirations and academic outcomes, for example), a promising way forward in increasing our understanding of the characteristics of disadvantage could be a better policy of data linking between longitudinal studies and available administrative datasets including the NPD, HESA or UCAS data. Whatever route is followed, much more attention needs to be given to missing data at all stages than is happening at present. All missing data is a source of potential bias and can therefore produce misleading results. Replacing missing data using data that is not missing is likely to increase the bias.

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Article

Equal Access to the Top? Measuring Selection into Finnish Academia

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Abstract
In this article, we draw a parallel between equality of opportunity in educational transitions and equality of opportunity in academic careers. In both cases, many methodological problems can be ameliorated by the use of longitudinal rather than cross-sectional data. We illustrate this point by using Finnish full-population register data to follow the educational and academic careers of the 1964–1966 birth cohorts from birth to the present day. We show how the Finnish professoriate is highly selected both in terms of parental background and in terms of gender. Individuals of different backgrounds differ greatly in the likelihood of completing different educational and academic transitions, but much less in the age at which they make these transitions. By contrast, women's academic careers differ from those of men both in terms of timing and in terms of rates, with women's PhDs and full professorships seemingly delayed compared to those of men. We additionally show with the help of a 2015 cross-section of Finnish professors how such differences are easily overlooked in cross-sectional data.

1. Introduction

The social background and gender of the individuals who eventually reach the top of academia is of interest both with an eye to equality of opportunity in education and academia, and because the composition of the top of academia is likely to affect the nature and direction of teaching, research, and arguably society.

In this article, we summarize and reflect on some of the methodological challenges in estimating equality of opportunity in educational transitions. The same challenges are also present when estimating equality of opportunity in academic careers. In both cases, many statis-

tical and interpretational problems can be greatly ameliorated by following cohorts over time rather than for example studying cross-sections of graduates or academics in any given year. We illustrate this point by showing who does and who does not reach the top of the Finnish academic career ladder by tracing the educational and academic outcomes of the Finnish 1964–1966 birth cohorts from birth to age 49 using population data that combines information from multiple administrative registers held at Statistics Finland.

We find that the Finnish professoriate[1] is highly selected both in terms of parental background and in terms of gender. In the cohorts we study, the children

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[1] In the Finnish context, assistant and associate professor positions are rare, and the term "professor" typically refers to a full professor working at a university on a permanent contract.

with different levels of parental education obtained their master's degrees, PhD degrees, and professorships at vastly different rates, but interestingly enough typically at largely similar ages. By contrast, women obtained their PhD degrees later, and their first professorships both later and at substantially lower rates.

The apparent delays in women's academic careers can easily be overlooked in cross-sectional data. At the end of the article, we use a full population cross-section to show that while in 2015 there were more male than female professors in Finland, their age distributions were similar to each other, especially for young professors. This finding would on its own be consistent with an absence of delays in women's academic careers. Such a cross-sectional analysis however conflates between-gender differences in timing and between-cohort differences in rates, and the finding can thus also be explained by women obtaining professorships at higher ages than men, in combination with newer cohorts of women being granted professorships at higher rates than previous ones. Without the use of longitudinal information, we would not be able to separate between the two and may in some cases not even realize how women's careers are delayed. Similarly, we would not be able to know how similar graduation and professorship ages are across socioeconomic groups without the use of longitudinal data.

The article proceeds as follows. In Section 2 we give an overview of the methodological challenges involved in estimating selection into education, and by extension, into academia. In Section 3, we summarize some of the existing literature on inequality of opportunity in academia. We give a short overview of higher education in Finland in Section 4. We present our data and methods in Section 5, and our empirical results in Section 6. In Section 7 we discuss the implications of our results, as well as directions for future research.

2. Measuring Inequality of Opportunity

One interpretation of equality of opportunity is that factors beyond the individual's control should not be allowed to affect outcomes (cf. Roemer, 1998). Since the individual neither chooses parents nor gender, aggregate differences across socio-economic groups and genders can thus be thought of as indicative of violations of equality of opportunity.

Between-group differences are unlikely to capture all inequalities of opportunity for a variety of reasons. With respect to parental background, socio-economic groupings for example hide considerable within-group heterogeneity. Furthermore, individuals are exposed to childhood circumstances which are incompletely captured by fixed parental background variables. There are also within-family differences in opportunities. Siblings for example differ from each other in which genes they happen to inherit from their parents, and in how much time their parents spend with them. A literature review by Björklund and Salvanes (2011) shows just how large the

effect of parental background is when such factors are properly taken into account.

There exists a long tradition of studying educational transitions with the goal of pinpointing where, and how differences in attainment occur. It has however proven difficult to interpret the magnitudes of specific transition probabilities. One reason is that the decision to transition to the next level of education is also affected by past choices and future prospects. High school attendance or completion may for example be less attractive to students who do not want to attend higher education, or do not expect to be admitted to higher education. Transitions can also be interdependent in other ways. Individuals may for example have preferences to obtain a certain relative position in the educational hierarchy. A decrease in the selectivity of one level of education can then lead to an increase in the selectivity of the transition to the next level. Because students not only select into levels of education, but also into tracks, strata, fields, institutions and geographies, such countervailing stratification effects may also be observed at the same level, but in a different dimension. (Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997; Lucas, 2001; Epple, Newlon, & Romano, 2002; Torche, 2011).

The measurement of differences in outcomes by parental background is further complicated because newer cohorts grew up with parents that differ greatly from previous cohorts' parents, among others in their level of education. If we compare the outcomes of children of university educated parents today with those a few decades ago, today's group will be much less socially selected in relative terms, even if the parents of both groups had the same level of education in absolute terms. Both relative and absolute levels of education are relevant measures of parental background, but conclusions may differ depending on which measure is used. Karhunen and Uusitalo (2017) show that while Finnish intergenerational educational mobility has increased during the past decades when using an absolute measure of parental education, when using parents' education relative to their birth cohort, mobility has remained constant or even decreased. This finding largely mirrors results from other countries. Bukodi and Goldthorpe (2016) and Fujihara and Ishida (2016) for example draw a similar conclusion based on British and Japanese data respectively, while in Triventi, Panichella, Ballarino, Barone and Bernardi (2016), mobility in Italy has increased whether one uses a relative measure or not.

The selectivity of transitions today not only reflects the equality of opportunity facing the current generation, but also that of previous generations; it matters for measured child mobility how the parent generation was selected into levels of education (Nybom & Stuhler, 2013). As a consequence, equality of opportunity may be increasing when mobility is measured to be decreasing, and vice versa.

In this article we stress the importance of separating the probability that members of different groups obtain specific educational degrees or reach specific milestones

at all from the age at which they do so. If two groups would for example always have been awarded degrees at the same rate, but at different ages, this would still cause the proportion of group members in the work force having those degrees to be skewed at any given time. Furthermore, in practice neither the rate of attainment nor the timing of attainment is constant within groups across cohorts. The interplay of rate and timing changes complicates the interpretation of observed cross-sectional compositional changes. If we for example observe an increase in the proportion of young women among new professors, we cannot easily know whether this is due to a decrease in the age at which women are awarded professorships, or due to an increase in the rate.

3. Inequalities in Academia

Transitions into PhDs and further into academia are much less well studied than lower-level transitions. Nevertheless, studies based on survey data from the US (Mullen, Goyette, & Soares, 2003), the UK (Wakeling & Laurison, 2017), Canada (Zarifa, 2012), Italy (Argentin & Triventi, 2011) and Germany (Jaksztat, 2014) suggest that high-SES graduates are more likely to transition to the postgraduate level. Triventi (2013) arrives at different conclusion. Using a survey of individuals graduated from European institutes of higher education in 2000 he does not find evidence to support that enrolment in PhD programs would be socially selective conditional on graduation from the long programs that allow access to such programs. On the other hand, Mastekaasa (2006) finds that the transition into PhD programs is socially selective using Norwegian register data from 1985 to 1998. Mastekaasa (2005) uses similar data to study gender differences in PhD enrolment and completion and finds only small gender differences in enrolment, and no gender differences in completion rates, even if men and women may drop out for different reasons.

The available evidence suggests that academic careers are socially selective (Andersen, 2001; Möller, 2014; National Science Foundation, 2016). Studies on the experiences of working-class academics (Haney, 2015), and representatives of ethnic minorities (Kelly & McCann, 2014) in academia highlight the importance of cultural or social capital on entering and progression on academic careers (Bancroft, 2013; Pezzoni, Sterzi, & Lissoni, 2012), as well as feelings of displacement or alienation both internationally (Heller, 2011) and in Finland (Järvinen, 2006; Käyhkö, 2014). Studies on the academic careers of men and women suggest that women face a leaky pipeline (Goulden, Mason, & Frasch, 2011; Van Anders, 2004), especially in terms of access to the tenure track and to tenured professorial positions (Goastellec & Pekari, 2013; Goulden et al., 2011; Pinheiro, Geschwind, Hansen, & Pekkola, 2015). This phenomenon has been explained among others by differential family responsibilities (e.g., Ginther & Kahn, 2006), gender differences in the size and depth of professional

networks (e.g., Carvalho & Santiago, 2010; Vázquez-Cupeiro & Elston, 2006), undermeasurement and underappreciation of female academics' productivity (e.g., Boring, 2017; Wennerås & Wold, 1997; cf. Bosquet, Combes, & García-Peñalosa, 2018; De Paola, Ponzo, & Scoppa, 2017), and a relative dislike of competitive settings among women, including the competition for senior positions (Bosquet et al., 2018; De Paola et al., 2017). The analysis of the relative importance of actual productivity, its evaluation, and career choices is complicated by their interdependence in a way that mirrors the interdependence of educational transitions. Women in academia may for example shy away from applying for positions they feel they will not be considered for in any case. At the same time, gender gaps in all of these factors seem to vary across country, field, and especially time (cf. Boström & Sundberg, 2018; Ceci, Ginther, Kahn, & Williams, 2014; Van Arensbergen, van der Weijden, & van den Besselaar, 2012).

4. Finnish Higher Education

As in other Nordic countries, Finnish education policy has long been characterized by an emphasis on equal opportunity in access to education. Even if the intake to individual higher education programs is limited by a so-called numerus clausus, public expenditure on higher education is high, tuition fees low or non-existent, and financial support for students relatively generous. (Ahola, Hedmo, Thomsen, & Vabø, 2014; Isopahkala-Bouret et al., 2018; Pechar & Andres, 2011).

University education had gone through a rapid expansion between the 1960s and the 1980s, especially in rural areas (Välimaa, 2018), and the 1964–1966 birth cohorts that we study in this article thus had a width of educational opportunities available to them that would not have been available to their parents. Before the establishment of vocationally-oriented polytechnics in the mid-1990s, universities were the only institutes of higher education in Finland (Välimaa, 2001). University graduates typically graduate with a master's degree, and we use the terms master's degree and university education interchangeably in this article. We thus ignore the intermediate university bachelor's degrees that have been (re)introduced in recent years.

To a lesser degree, the 1964–1966 cohorts have also benefited from an expansion of PhD education. While the number of awarded PhD degrees was growing already in the 1980s, Finnish PhD education lacked organization and funding prior to the graduate school reform of 1994 (Ahola et al., 2014; Välimaa, 2001). The first systematically structured PhD programs were launched in 1995 when the Ministry of Education funded the establishment of nearly a hundred graduate schools with paid PhD student positions (Välimaa, 2001). As a consequence, the yearly number of new PhD degrees has nearly tripled during the past 25 years, with 1 749 PhDs awarded in 2017 (Ahola et al., 2014; Vipunen, 2018). The

number of research staff employed on fixed-term basis through external funding has similarly grown since the mid-1990s, whereas the increase in the number of teaching staff holding permanent contracts has been relatively modest, even slightly decreasing in the most recent years (Aarrevaara, 2007; Löppönen, Lehvo, Vaahtera, & Nuutinen, 2010; Nuutinen, Mälkki, Huutoniemi, & Törnroos, 2016; Pekkola, Kuoppala, Liski, Puhakka, & Rautopuro, 2015). Though Finnish universities have gradually introduced tenure track positions after 2010, assistant and associate professor positions are rare, and the term "professor" typically refers to a full professor working at a university on a permanent contract (Pietilä, 2015).

5. Data and Methods

Much of the existing evidence on equality of opportunity in postgraduate education and academic careers has been based on cross-sectional survey data. They use of surveys always raises questions of representativeness, especially when sampling is not carried out in a way explicitly designed to correct for differential nonresponse, for example by drawing a replacement sample for missing respondents or by the construction and use of survey weights. Surveys also raise questions of measurement error, especially when respondents are asked to recall past events.

We base our study on full population data held at Statistics Finland. These contain information from multiple administrative sources, including population censuses from 1970 onward, and linked employer-employee data from 1987 onward. The data are linked using unique person identifiers based on social security numbers, and the links are thus exact. Both nonresponse and measurement error are likely to be dramatically lower than in survey sources.

From the full population, we select all individuals born in Finland in 1964, 1965 and 1966, residing in Finland in 1988, and having at least one parent present in the registers at any time between 1970 and 2015. The parental restriction is necessary for us to have information on parental education, and removes about 3% of the sample, equally distributed across cohorts. The proportion of residents born outside Finland was very low in this age group in 1988. We thus see this sample as roughly representative of these birth cohorts in 1988.

Because we follow the educational and academic careers of people who were all born at approximately the same time, we greatly ameliorate many of the problems associated with the use of cross-sections. The longitudinal dimension allows us to clearly separate the timing of different educational and academic milestones from between-cohort differences in overall attainment rates. This is particularly important because the large changes that were made to PhD education as well as career tracks in Finnish universities imply that many transitions may look very different for different cohorts. Furthermore,

since the distribution of parental education does not differ for observations made at different ages, this reduces the need to separate relative from absolute education levels.

Educational qualifications are based on census information for degrees obtained before 1970, and on the Register of Completed Education and Degrees (RCED) from 1970 onward. We classify sample members as having highly educated parents when at least one parent is observed to have at least a master's degree, as having parents with an intermediate level of education if at least one parent is observed to have any other post-secondary degree, and as having parents with a low level of education if the sample member does not have a known parent with a post-secondary degree. The sizes of these groups are about 10,000, 35,000 and 166,000 people respectively for these cohorts, illustrating how the vast majority of cohort members did not have parents with any post-secondary education at all. For each sample member, we furthermore take the age at which s/he obtained his or her first master's degree if any, and likewise his or her first PhD.

We also consider as an outcome if the sample member was observed to be employed as a professor at a Finnish university. This information is based on the Longitudinal Employment Statistics File (ESF), which contains information on the main employment contract of all individuals in residing in Finland during the last week of each year. The information in ESF originates from state-run pension registers that cover all legal employment contracts, and contains detailed occupational information for the last week of 1995, 2000, and 2004–2015. Since sample members belong to three different birth cohorts, their occupational status will be observed at slightly different ages before 2006 and after 2013. At the end of 2015, for example, the 1964 cohort is observed at age 51, while the 1966 cohort is only observed up to age 49. We therefore limit the analysis to observations at age 49 or below.

It should be noted that we do not observe the outcomes of permanent emigrants. Our results should therefore be interpreted as pertaining to Finnish academics in Finnish academia. About 99% of the sample is however observed as residing in Finland at least once between 2000 and 2015.

6. Results

Panel (a) of Figure 1 shows the timing and incidence of cohort members' first master's degrees by parental education. As can be seen from the figure, the timing looks quite similar across groups, with graduations peaking at age 25 for all three groups, but with lower proportions of cohort members receiving a master's degree at lower levels of parental education.

Panel (b) of Figure 1 shows how the timing of PhDs is largely similar across groups too, with a small negative relationship between parental education level and
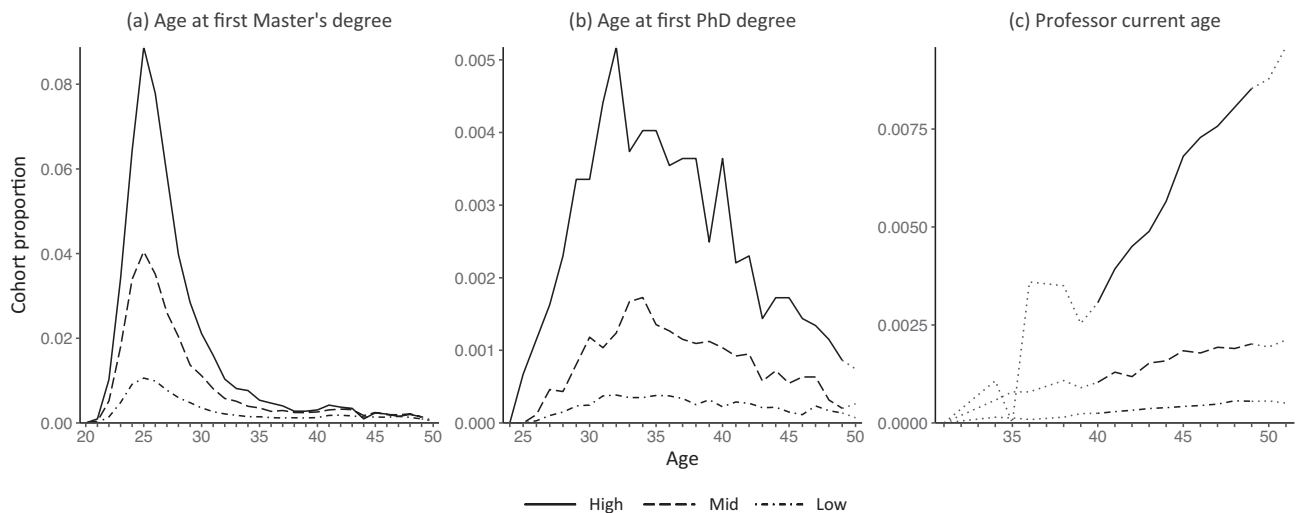
Figure 1. Educational and academic transitions over the lifetime by parental education. Panel (a) of the figure shows the proportion of cohort members obtaining their first master's degree at any specific age separately by the level of parental education. Panel (b) similarly shows the proportion of cohort members obtaining their first PhD degree at any specific age. Panel (c) shows the cohort proportion employed as professors at Finnish universities at different ages. The dotted lines in Panel (c) represent ages for which information is incomplete.

the age at which the PhD is received. In terms of levels, PhDs seem even more selective, with the relative probability of receiving a PhD being even higher for children of university educated parents than among master's degree holders.

Since first professorships are a relatively uncommon occurrence even in population data, we show the stock of professors by age and background in Panel (c). These are the proportions of sample cohorts that are employed as professors at a Finnish university at different ages. Grey, dotted lines indicate ages at which occupational information is missing for at least one out of the three

cohorts. The estimated proportions are more variable at these ages both because of the smaller sample sizes and because of compositional effects. Concentrating on ages 40–49, where we have information on all three cohorts, we see that professorships have (proportionally) similar age profiles across groups in terms of timing, but it is hard to see from the figure whether professors are more socially selected than PhDs.

Figure 2 shows similar graphs by gender. From Panel (a), we see that for these cohorts, both the timing and level differences are relatively small for typical master's degree graduates, even if many more women
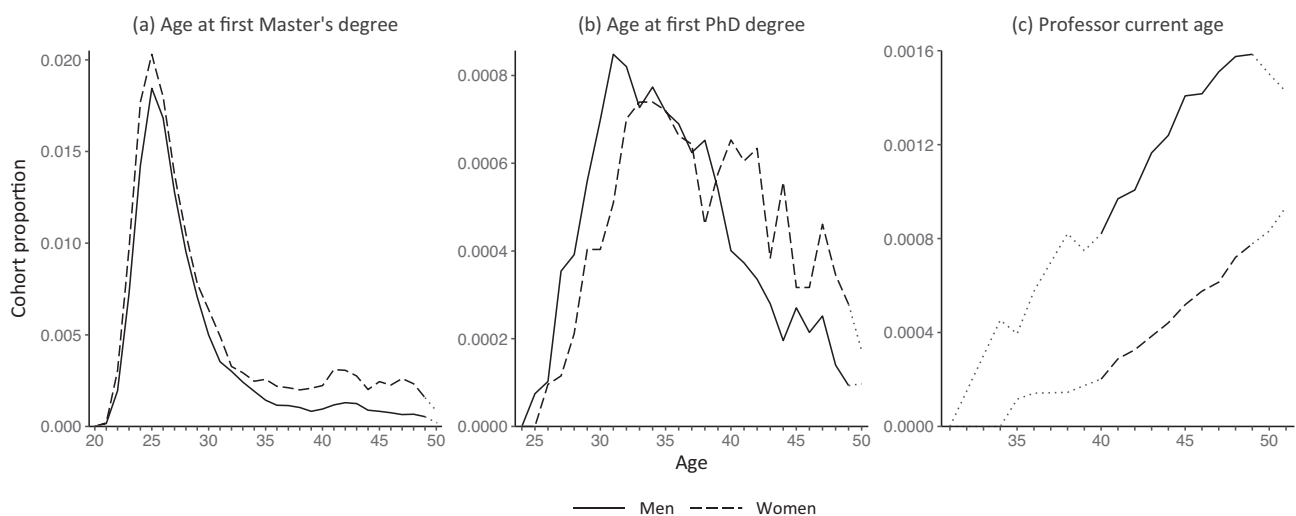

Figure 2. Educational and academic transitions over the lifetime by gender. Panel (a) of the figure shows the proportion of cohort members obtaining their first master's degree at any specific age separately by gender. Panel (b) similarly shows the proportion of cohort members obtaining their first PhD degree at any specific age. Panel (c) shows the cohort proportion employed as professors at Finnish universities at different ages. The dotted lines in Panel (c) represent ages for which information is incomplete.

than men complete a master's degree after the age of 35. When we look at PhDs in Panel (b), there is however a clear timing shift visible, with modal female PhDs receiving their degree two to three years after their male counterparts, and new female PhDs vastly outnumbering new male PhDs during their 40s. Since the 1964–1966 cohorts are still of working age, it is hard to know how many female cohort members will eventually become professors, and therefore to which degree the pattern in Panel (c) is indicative of a pure delay in female academics' careers, and to which degree it is indicative of women not becoming professors at all, but it is clear from the figure that for these cohorts, more men than women are professors by age 49, and that the women who did become professors by that age, did so at a later age on average.

Table 1 shows quartiles of graduation ages and of the age at which individuals become professors. As we have seen in the figures, for the median graduate, differences in the timing of degrees are small by parental background, as are differences in the age at which individuals of different backgrounds receive their first professorship. By gender, median differences are small in the timing of master's degrees. At the PhD level, the median woman defends her PhD 2.3 years later than the median man. The gender difference is about two years for the median first professorship in our data, but since other members of these cohorts will become professors even after age 49, the relatively small size of the difference is likely to be something of a statistical illusion.[2] In Figure 2, the trajectory for women seems to be shifted to the right by about 10 years. While 10 years may thus not be an unreasonable guess for the typical size of the delay, the true figure will be fundamentally unknowable for another decade or two, when these cohorts retire.

For the sake of completeness, we have tested statistically whether the age at which a milestone is reached is identical across groups for each combination of quartile, milestone, and grouping variable. As can be seen from the table, the grouping variable is highly significant everywhere but for the age of first professorships by parental education. Differences in significance levels across tests are however more a reflection of the respective sample sizes than of the magnitude of between-group differences.

We now turn to differences in rates. Table 2 shows the cohort proportions that ever receive a master's degree, a PhD, or a professorship at or before age 49. From the table can for example be seen that 51% of cohort members with at least one university educated parent had received a master's degree by age 49, 6.5% had received a PhD, and a little over 1% had become a professor. As can also be seen from the figures, these numbers are much lower for cohort members whose parents had lower levels of education. Within parentheses, we have added the proportion of cohort members within each group that attained the next level of the academic hierarchy divided by the proportion in the previous column. From the table, it can for example be seen that a little under 13% of master's degree holders with highly educated parents also received a PhD, while only 8% and 7%, respectively, did so in the other two groups. Similarly, about 19% of PhDs of highly educated parents became professors, while in the other two groups the respective proportions were 15% and 13%.

Table 3 shows similar results by gender. About a third more women than men receive master's degrees, about equal proportions receive PhDs, and only about half as many women as men have ever been employed as a professor at a Finnish university by age 49. As a consequence, among men a larger proportion of master's degree holders become PhDs, and a much larger proportion of PhDs become professors.

Table 1. Quartiles of attainment ages by parental education and gender.

	Master's degree			PhD			Professorship		
Parental education	Q25	Q50	Q75	Q25	Q50	Q75	Q25	Q50	Q75
High	25.7	27.2	29.8	32.4	36.2	41.0	39	42	45
Mid	25.7	27.5	31.0	33.5	37.1	41.8	38	41	44
Low	26.1	28.5	34.9	33.4	37.5	42.8	39	42	45
$p(H_0$:high=mid=low)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.002	0.011	0.001	0.412	0.442	0.474
Gender									
Men	25.8	27.6	30.7	32.3	35.9	40.2	38	41	44
Women	25.9	28.2	34.2	34.2	38.2	43.3	40	43	47
$p(H_0$:men=women)	0.002	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.004	0.000

Notes: The table shows the 25th percentile, the median, and the 75th percentile of the ages at which different groups obtain their first master's degrees, their first PhDs, and their first professorships. Differences in age are small at the median for individuals of different parental backgrounds, but larger between gender when it comes to PhDs and professorships. We have added to each specification the result of a Wald test for the ages being equal across groups. Professorship ages are rounded.

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[2] Suppose, for example, that a woman would otherwise have become a professor at age 48 but will have her professorship delayed until age 53. Because she is now not included in the group of professors aged 49 or less, the delay has the counter-intuitive effect of reducing rather than increasing the median age of the remaining female professors in the data.

Table 2. Attainment by parental education.

Parental education	N	Master	PhD (PhD/Master)	Professor (Professor/PhD)
High	10433	0.511	0.065 (0.127)	0.013 (0.194)
Mid	34720	0.265	0.021 (0.080)	0.003 (0.150)
Low	166279	0.087	0.006 (0.068)	0.001 (0.129)
Total	211432	0.137	0.011 (0.083)	0.002 (0.154)
$p(H_0:high=mid=low)$		0.000	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.001)

Notes: The table shows the cohort proportions of individuals obtaining a master's degree, a PhD, or a professorship at or before age 49 separately by parental education. We have added the proportional difference with the previous level within parentheses. For example, of the master's degree holders that have at least one university educated parent, about 12.7% obtained a PhD. The last two rows show the results of a series of F-test of these proportions being equal across groups.

Table 3. Attainment by gender.

Gender	N	Master	PhD (PhD/Master)	Professor (Professor/PhD)
Men	107298	0.119	0.011 (0.094)	0.002 (0.210)
Women	104134	0.156	0.012 (0.074)	0.001 (0.099)
Total	211432	0.137	0.011 (0.083)	0.002 (0.154)
$p(H_0:men=women)$		0.000	0.346 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)

Notes: The table shows the cohort proportions of individuals obtaining a master's degree, a PhD, or a professorship at or before age 49 separately by gender. We have added the proportional difference with the previous level within parentheses. For example, of male master's degree holders, about 9.4% obtained a PhD. The last two rows show the results of a series of F-test of the proportions being equal across groups.

In Figure 3 we contrast the longitudinal and cross-sectional age profile of professors. Panel (a) is a variant of Figure 2, panel (c), but with female professors plotted on a separate scale. It is clear from the figure that there are more young male professors in our sample than there are young female professors, also in relative terms, with the share of female professors increasing towards the right of the figure. In panel (b) we show the age distribution of all professors under the age of 50 working at Finnish universities in 2015, i.e., we restrict the full population to a cross-section rather than to a narrow set of birth cohorts. As in panel (a), we show male and female professors on separate scales. We can see from panel (b) that the cross-sectional distribution of ages is similar across gender for young professors. It would therefore be tempting to conclude from the cross-section that young women no longer face delays in their academic careers. In the cross-section however, individuals of different ages also belong to different cohorts. A steady increase in attainment rates can thus easily mask a permanent difference

in attainment age in cross-sectional data. This illustrates the importance of studying academic career trajectories by following cohorts longitudinally rather than by the use of cross-sections.

7. Discussion

In this article, we show that Finnish professors born in the years 1964–1966 are highly selected in terms of parental education. A large part of this selection is already present among master's degree holders, but both the PhD and professorship transitions are associated with further selectivity. For example, among master's degree holders whose parents lack post-secondary education, about 1 in 110 became professors, while the same number is 1 in 40 among master's degree holders with at least one university-educated parent. The finding that there is additional selectivity after the master's level is consistent with findings from other countries, such as for example those presented in Mullen et al. (2003) and

Figure 3. A comparison of longitudinal and cross-sectional gender gaps. Panel (a) shows the number of sample individuals working as professors at different ages longitudinally. The dotted lines represent ages for which information is incomplete. Panel (b) shows the cross-sectional age distribution of all Finnish professors under the age of 50 at the end of 2015. In both panels, the number of male professors is plotted on the left axis using a solid line and the number of female professors is plotted on the right axis using dashed line.

Wakeling and Laurison (2017). The estimates in Triventi (2013) do not have the precision necessary to determine that the transition from master's degrees to PhD degrees would be socially selective in Finland, but our estimates are nevertheless consistent with his.

We know that differences by parental education are likely to underestimate the total effects of family background (cf. Björklund & Salvanes, 2011); individuals of non-academic backgrounds who nevertheless become professors are more likely than others to have been advantaged in other ways. It stands to reason that the top of Finnish academia is therefore likely to be even more socially selected than our results may suggest.

While the share of women holding full professorships is higher in Finland than in the other Nordic countries (European Commission, 2016), Finnish professors are nevertheless highly selected in terms of gender. In the cohorts we study, women were about 30% more likely to obtain a master's degree but were about 50% less likely to have received a professorship by age 49. Though Finland thus seems to do well compared to other countries, in absolute terms gender differences are still large.

It is important to find the mechanisms behind the observed patterns. We find that while there are only small differences in the age at which individuals of different social background pass specific educational and academic milestones, women's academic careers seem clearly delayed compared to those of men. Though the literature suggests a number of reasons why such outcomes may differ by gender, among others differential family responsibilities, the relative importance of these mechanisms merit a thorough quantitative investigation. In this article, we stress the importance of using longitudinal data in studying career delays. Cross-sections almost neces-

sarily combine information from different cohorts to analyze outcomes at different ages. Since cohorts can and do differ from each other, this adds an unwelcome and unnecessary source of error. Register-based population-representative data sets spanning multiple decades are not unique to Finland, and we encourage researchers both in Finland and abroad to use them.

As important as studying mechanisms behind patterns, is evaluating the policies that seek to change them. Historically, we have seen that the democratization of particular levels of education can lead to increased, within-level segregation. The same may be true for academic careers. For example, when Germany introduced the Junior professorship system in 2002, the policy was successful in increasing the share of female professors, but women were typically awarded lower-tier professorship positions, at lower pay (Burkhardt, Nickel, Berndt, Püttmann, & Rathmann, 2016). Inequalities between levels were thus partially replaced by inequalities within levels. Attempts to restructure the academic career paths are also ongoing in other countries. Finnish universities have for example recently introduced different types of tenure tracks (Pietilä, 2015). Rigorous quantitative evaluations of such policies are a necessary complement to qualitative knowledge and suggest a clear path for future research.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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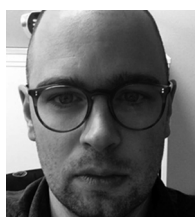
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Article

Open House? Class-Specific Career Opportunities within German Universities

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Abstract

This article focuses on the development of class-specific inequalities within German universities. Based on data on the social origin of students, doctoral students, and professors in the long-term cross-section, the article views the empirically observable dynamic of social closure of higher education since the 1950s. The focus of interest is on the level of the professorship. Data show that career conditions for underprivileged groups have deteriorated again. This finding is discussed in the context of social closure theories. The article argues that closure theories consider social closure processes primarily as intentional patterns of action, aimed at a strategic monopolization of participation, and securing social power. Such an analytical approach means that unintended closure processes remain understudied. Our conclusion is that concealed modes of reproduction of social structures ought to be examined and theorized more intensively due to their importance for the elimination of social inequality within universities.

1. Introduction

The number of students worldwide has increased massively, especially since the 1970s (Marginson, 2016), yet there has been no significant change in class-specific inequality relations (Wakeling, 2018). This is noteworthy because the educational certificates awarded by universities represent an essential social resource in modern societies; symbolically and legally they are the legitimation for the highly valued and influential professional positions. Therefore, unequal opportunities to access these educational certificates affect one's ability to access the labour market and thus to individual life chances and opportunities to participate. As scarce social goods, educational certificates are the subject of social struggles and are tightly connected with power relations. The unequal distribution of educational opportunities concerning social origin leads to an exclusive social make-up, especially in top social positions (Hartmann, 2007).

Following these initial considerations, the article analyses the changes in the socioeconomic profile of students, doctoral candidates, and professors at German universities associated with the expansion of education. These observations are discussed in the context of classical social closure theories. Following the expansion of education in the 1950s, the number of students of low sta-

tus able to participate in higher education has increased significantly over time. However, this only created a very short-term and limited social opening for the higher-status passages, such as doctorates and professorships. This opening did not last, and in subsequent cohorts, it has again given way to social closure.

First, the international state of research on the social origins of professors is examined, followed by consideration of German universities (Section 2). Section 3 discusses the social closure theories with the trend of social closure being illustrated further in Section 4 by a hypothetical cohort analysis. Sections 5 and 6 deal with implicit and possibly unintended closure mechanisms by referencing both qualitative research results, as well as current developments in higher education policy.

2. Literature Review

Despite substantial differences between national higher education and academic career systems (for comparative overviews see Enders, 2010), research on class-specific inequalities within universities shows international trends. Inequalities were mainly studied and documented for the transition to higher education, while only limited reliable data and few studies can be found for higher-status passages (Hüther & Krücken, 2018, p. 245; Wakeling, 2018). There are hardly any systematic data on the highest academic profession, the professorship, except for mainly (older) individual studies. Because these studies are based on different methodological concepts, they can only be presented to some extent. For example, there are older studies that refer to different parental occupational groups.

Based on a survey conducted in the mid-1960s, Bourdieu (1988) analysed the social origins of French professors. For this purpose, he differentiated five groups of origin by the father's profession: about 7% of professors had fathers who were farmers or industrial workers, about 26% of the fathers were clerks, craftsmen, primary teachers, or middle management employees, about 27% were engineers, industrialists, or senior managers, 24% officers, magistrates, administrative executives, or worked in liberal professions. Finally, 17% were themselves professors or intellectuals.

Nakhaie and Brym (1999) analysed the social background of Canadian professors using data from a 1987 survey of Canadian faculty members. The authors determined the social background of the respondents through their father's professional position and divided them into four different categories: Almost 10% of the fathers of the professors were farmers, about 20% had semi-skilled or unskilled occupations. Almost 37% of fathers worked in semi-professional and qualified occupations with 34% being from specialist and management positions.

In an early analysis of international data, it can be summarized that most of the professors—especially in

relation to the working population—come from privileged families.

There is a relatively small body of literature concerned with the experiences of professors with a low social background at North American universities (Grimes & Morris, 1997; Haney, 2015; Lee, 2017). Grimes and Morris (1997) conducted a study about US American sociologists from working-class families. Those professors have the feeling of being caught between the world of the family of origin and the academic world, without feeling like belonging to either. Respondents report that their parents' indifference to their college education and their lack of knowledge of how to succeed in a middle-class profession became a problem for them. Haney (2015) shows similar results for the experiences of Canadian professors from working-class backgrounds. They have to work harder and make greater sacrifices for comparable success, as they acquire less cultural capital in their families and usually attend worse schools. Their academic success is accompanied by negative aspects such as the loss of close relationships with family and friends. Lee (2017) studied the direct and indirect stigmatization of US professors due to their low socioeconomic background. The interviewees primarily describe indirect stigma. The meaning of the inequalities they experience is denied or academia is constructed as a classless space. Lee concludes that professors with low SES backgrounds, therefore, must engage in emotion work.

Autobiographies of professors from working-class families can supplement these systematic studies as they provide essential insights into the subjective perception of upward mobility in academia, although they mainly come from the humanities and social sciences. Central themes of the autobiographies can be found in the studies mentioned above: alienation, the lack of cultural capital, and stigmatization (Warnock, 2016). In addition, authors of the autobiographies address their feelings of shame regarding their social backgrounds, the fear of being exposed as a fraud by middle-class peers, as well as the fear of being perceived as arrogant by people from the milieu of origin (Wakeling, 2010). In recent autobiographies, the high financial debt by student loans is emphasized (Warnock, 2016). Bourdieu (2008) and Eribon (2013) theorize their dispositions associated with social ascension with the concept of the divided habitus.

In Germany, the available systematic data on social origin—similar to the international surveys—mainly focus on students. The significantly smaller population of doctoral candidates, whose proportions vary considerably according to discipline, is estimated concerning both the number of doctoral candidates and the number of postgraduate drop-outs (Konsortium BuWiN, 2017). At irregular intervals and without further differentiation, e.g., by discipline, the *Sozialerhebung*[1] shows the social origin of doctoral candidates. So far, no comparable data are available for postdoctoral students and habili-

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[1] The *Sozialerhebung* has been conducted since 1951 and collects representative data on the economic and social situation of students in Germany approximately every three years.

tants.[2] Furthermore, sociostructural data regarding professorships in Germany has only been gathered through individual surveys (Möller, 2015; for the so-called scientific elite see Graf, 2015; Hartmann, 2013).

Based on the literature review, it can be concluded that the socially privileged composition of scientific career positions is mainly based on large selections during the educational phases leading up to the doctorate (Lörz & Schindler, 2016). Selections are generated during the transition phases in the German school and university system, so that students, and especially doctoral candidates, already form a highly selective group (e.g., Middendorff, Apolinarski, Poskowsky, Kandulla, & Netz, 2013; Lenger, 2008). The probability of obtaining a doctorate increases for students who are already working as student assistants in the higher education system (Schneickert, 2013).

Once the doctorate has been obtained, various studies assume that there are similar career opportunities in science according to social background (Enders & Bornmann, 2001; for the phase of habilitation see Jungbauer-Gans & Gross, 2013). But the assertion of similar opportunities for different social groups after the doctorate must be put into perspective by more differentiated analyses. There are hierarchical status differences within the professorship as well (Hüther & Krücken, 2018, pp. 22–23). For example, among junior professorships, which are often appointed as early career positions shortly after the doctorate and are usually followed by a lifetime professorship (Burkhardt & Nickel, 2015), only very small shares of social climbers from the low (7%) and the middle (7%) group of origin can be identified (Möller, 2015; see also Zimmer, 2018). In the case of non-scheduled professorships[3], on the other hand, people from the lower group of origin are represented more than twice as often (17%).

Concerning the class-specific chances of obtaining a professorship, major differences can be observed between different disciplines. For example, there is a large gap between socially closed legal and medical subjects and the economic and social sciences (Hartmann, 2002; Möller, 2015), as well as between different time periods (Hartmann, 2002; Möller, 2015; Nagl & Hill, 2010). Studies that reflect a trend in the social profile of origin conclude that it has become more closed in recent decades (Hartmann, 2002; Möller, 2015; Nagl & Hill, 2010).

3. Intended or Unintended Social Closure? Theoretical Considerations

Patterns of action aimed at monopolizing and defending privileges, power, influence, prestige, and other social resources are often addressed and analysed in the context of social closure theories. Securing one's position

and resources leads to closure processes in which goods, resources, and opportunities of appropriation or participation of competing groups are (or should be) reduced. As a theory of medium range, closure theories are open and elastic enough to explain different phenomena of inclusion and exclusion (Mackert, 2004). Social inclusions and exclusions are not static, but rather procedural and dynamic. Closure theories are sensitive to such developments and can be used to analyse sociostructural dynamics over longer periods of time (Weber, 1979, p. 43).

Theories and analyses of social closure processes are often related to professions and social inequalities in the labour market (Collins, 1990; Strømme & Hansen, 2017). For Parsons (1966), rationalization in the pursuit of goals, professional knowledge, and a universalistic orientation were still among the typical characteristics of professions. In the 1970s, closure theories developed into an instrument of analysing power relations (Mackert, 2004, p. 17), which were able to examine the strategic monopolization of professional groups, as well as specific asymmetric power relations (Larson, 1977).

Social closure processes are primarily interpreted as intended, i.e., strategic action in competitive situations to achieve one's own goals. Recent research argues in favour of developing a further understanding of social closure by also looking at unintended processes and mechanisms that can lead to closures. When Wilz (2004) examined gender inequalities in professionalization processes, she stated that social closures can also be the result of an unintended action. Even if closures are not anticipated as a result of one's actions, an unintended exclusion represents a de facto closure (Wilz, 2004, pp. 228–229).

For a discussion of intended or unintended processes of exclusion, it seems productive to use Bourdieu's theory of social practice. The subjects of his power-critical analyses are often power relations and social segregations in the various fields of society. With the concept of symbolic violence or domination, he grasps those barely comprehensible and subtle mechanisms of exclusion in which not only the excluded but also the exclusionists are involved. However, the exclusionists' involvement is not conscious, but rather takes the form of self-exclusion or tacit submission (e.g., mediated through reverence and shame). Symbolic violence "is the imposition of systems of symbolism and meaning (i.e., culture) upon groups or classes in such a way that they are experienced as legitimate" (Jenkins, 2014, p. 104).

According to Bourdieu, domination is mediated in symbolic orders and in language, and accordingly above all through educational institutions, as he illustrates within the French educational system (Bourdieu, 1996; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Unequal educational opportunities are disguised by the assumptions that un-

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[2] The phase of habilitation is a specific qualification in the German scientific career between the doctorate and the professorship.
[3] The non-scheduled professorship (*Außerordentliche Professur*) is a title that can be awarded to private lecturers who have habilitated for at least four years and who have distinguished themselves through outstanding achievements in research or teaching (Turner, Weber, & Göbbels-Dreyling, 2011, p. 59). However, the title differs significantly from a normal professorship. It is not accompanied with a comparable position and holds a significantly lower prestige compared to a full professorship (Möller, 2015).

even living conditions are "natural" and unequal constellations of adaptation to cultural requirements in educational institutions can be attributed to individual talents, and not, for example, to the result of different origin-specific resource endowments that affect cultural capital. In this context, Bourdieu's concept of habitus, which works as a mediator between an actor and a field, is of great importance:

> The habitus, a system of dispositions acquired by implicit or explicit learning which functions as a system of generative schemes, generates strategies which can be objectively consistent with the objective interest of their authors without having been expressly designed to that end. (Bourdieu, 1995, p. 76)

Therefore, "the principal…strategies [in a field] are not cynical calculation, the conscious pursuit of maximum specific profit, but an unconscious relationship between habitus and a field" (Bourdieu, 1995, p. 76).

Mechanisms of social closure can thus also be understood as a consequence of certain habitual dispositions: as a form of unintended action, which not only has integrating effects but also socially excluding impact in the form of the self-elimination of structurally disadvantaged groups.

4. Empirical Observations: Opening of Access versus Positional Closing

In Germany, the close connection between social background and participation in higher education can be illustrated by time series such as the *Sozialerhebung* (see also Section 2). For a long time, the social origin was determined by four groups of origins, which are subdivided hierarchically according to the prestige of the parents' professional positions and educational qualifications. The low group of origin primarily gathers students whose parents are, for example, workers or low-skilled employees and civil servants without a university degree. In the middle group of origin, the parents are master craftsmen, foremen as well as employees in mid-level positions, and civil servants without a university degree. The upper group includes, for example, employees and civil servants in upper positions, freelancers, and similar positions with and without a university degree. Finally, the high group of origin includes mainly employees with extensive management tasks, civil servants of higher service, entrepreneurs of larger companies, and similar top professional positions with or (rarely) without a university degree (for a precise explication see Möller, 2015, p. 321).

In the long term, the social origin profile of students is subject to significant fluctuations. These fluctuations are shown below in the participation rate of students from low groups of origin: while in 1956 about 11% of the students came from the low group of origin, by 1985, their share had risen to 18% (see Table 1). The social opening in the 1980s is attributed to the overall political atmosphere of educational reform and expansion in Germany. Encouraged by education policy measures, the potential of social groups that had not previously been involved in higher education was exploited (Miethe, Soremski, Suderland, Dierckx, & Kleber, 2015).

Table 1 presents the social opening among students and the impending closure at professorial level through a cohort comparison (1–4) of students, doctoral candidates, and professors. The limitation to these qualification passages is because comparable data on the social profile are only available for these (and not, for example, for the passage of the habilitation). Because of the lack of data on the level of students and doctoral candidates, national data from the *Sozialerhebung* were used as these are the only comparable data that allow a historically retrospective cohort analysis.[4] For the professors, a survey at the North Rhine-Westphalian universities from 2010 was used (Möller, 2015). The intervals of the years correspond approximately to the qualification years, which lie between the qualification passages and the (first) appointment to a university professorship. This is a hypothetical cohort analysis because it is assumed that the professors in the respective cohorts were recruited from the corresponding student (and doctoral cohorts).

In the following we will focus on the ratio between the groups "low" and "high" (see ratio low:high, right column of the table), as this reflects the opportunities for a scientific career of the most contrasting population groups. Table 1 shows different developments:

1. For the students, the ratio of the two contrasting groups of low and high origin shows a social opening over time between the first and fourth cohorts (cohort 1: 1:3.9; cohort 4: 1:1.4);
2. In the first and second comparative cohorts, it becomes clear that the composition of the professors is more socially open than that of the students in the comparative cohort (1956): cohort 1: students 1:3.9, professors 1:3.2; cohort 2: students 1:5, professors 1:2.3. Given the enormous expansion of the higher education sector since the 1950s and the associated high demand for university teachers and the associated acceleration of careers (Bourdieu, 1988, p. 135), it appears qualified people from lower social backgrounds have also benefited;
3. This minor social opening in the professorship only lasted for a short period of time and turned into a social closure. On the one hand, the unequal proportions between the low and high groups of origin of professors between the second and fourth comparative cohorts are intensified (cohort 2: 1:2.3; cohort 4: 1:3.8). The closing trend can be seen in two steps: from the 2nd to the 3rd cohort in favour of the upper group of origin and from

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[4] Data for doctoral students are not available until the 1980s.

Table 1. Cross-sectional comparison between the social origins of students, doctoral candidates, and professors in % (Students: N = 165,800, Postgraduates: N = 1,587; Professors N = 1,313). Source: for the student data: 3rd, 5th, 8th, and 11th Sozialerhebung (Deutsches Studentenwerk, 1957, 1964, 1977, 1986). For the doctoral data: unpublished special evaluation of the 12th and 15th Sozialerhebung. For the data of the professors: survey at North Rhine-Westphalian universities 2010 (Möller, 2015, p. 206).

	Reference groups	Group of origin in %					Ratio Low:High
		Low	Middle	Upper	High	Total	
1	Students 1956 (N = 110,492)	11	35	11	43	100	1:3.9
	Professors 1971–1980 (N = 181)	11	29	25	35	100	1:3.2
2	Students 1963 (N = 21,598)	10	28	12	50	100	1:5
	Professors 1981–1990 (N = 200)	13	28	29	30	100	1:2.3
3	Students 1976 (N = 18,756)	18	23	7[5]	52	100	1:2.9
	Postgraduates 1988 (N = 880)	13	31	25	31	100	1:2.4
	Professors 1991–2000 (N = 354)	12	27	31	30	100	1:2.5
4	Students 1985 (N = 14,954)	18	31	26	25	100	1:1.4
	Postgraduates 1997 (N = 798)	11	27	24	38	100	1:3.5
	Professors 2001–2010 (N = 578)	10	27	25	38	100	1:3.8

the 3rd to the 4th cohort in favour of the highest group of origin. The data on the social background of postgraduates in Germany (third and fourth cohort) furthermore make it clear that social closure already begins with the doctorate (see also Jaksztat & Lörz, 2018). On the other hand, a comparison with the student cohorts shows that the opening of the students between the 3rd and 4th cohorts (cohort 2: 1:5; cohort 4: 1:1.4) is not reflected in the professorship, but rather suggests a social closure among the professors (cohort 3: students 1:2.9, professors: 1:2.5; cohort 4: students 1:1.4, professors: 1:3.8).

In summary, it turns out that the social opening among students has therefore not automatically translated itself into a social opening of the higher levels of qualification. On the contrary, closure processes of the higher qualification levels have followed.

These observations raise the question of how positional closures in the doctoral phase and at the professorship can be explained, given that there has been a social opening at the lower status levels.

5. Habitus Difference and Fitting Conflict: Sociopractical Approach to Explaining Closure Processes

Various mechanisms can explain social closures in favour of privileged groups of origin in science. For example, social climbers are more likely to arrange themselves modestly and without a career plan, while people from upper-class backgrounds invest early in networks and self-presentation and are therefore more likely to be successful in the academic field (Lange-Vester & Teiwes-

Kügler, 2013, pp. 188–189). Because of their socialization, people from privileged families often already have a clear "sense of play" at the start of their careers and thus save time and energy not having to adapt to the requirements of the scientific profession as others do (Hasenjürgen, 1996, p. 270). Women from working-class and lower-employee families, for example, often have less scientific capital, but present themselves as marginalized even if they are equally well positioned in the scientific community in terms of jobs, publications, lectures, etc. Therefore, original habitual dispositions often prove to be an obstacle to advancement and "career-making" in the scientific field (Blome, 2017b; Lange-Vester & Teiwes-Kügler, 2013), meaning that a successful rise from disadvantaged backgrounds to high social positions requires far-reaching habitus transformations and great achievements in adaptation (El-Mafaalani, 2012).

This reveals origin-specific habitual dispositions that favour people from higher-status families of origin in the competition for high scientific positions without any obvious, conscious trickery being attributed to them. Bourdieu (1995, p. 76) states that:

> When people only have to let their habitus follow its natural bent in order to comply with the imminent necessity of the field and satisfy the demands contained within it (which, in every field, is the very definition of excellence), they are not at all aware of fulfilling a duty, still less of seeking to maximize their (specific) profit. So they enjoy the additional profit of seeing themselves and being seen as totally disinterested.

The above assessment may not be entirely correct for the scientific field and scientific careers. To achieve a high and long-term position, such as a professorship,

[5] The reduced share of the upper group of origin and the increase in the high group is partly due to changes in classifications by academic professions (e.g., engineers and teachers) during this period of the social surveys of students. These problems are not present in the data for the professors.

requires proactive accumulation of scientific capital. In other words, the aim of scientific careers is also to maximize a specific profit. However, at the same time it belongs to the illusion of the field not to pursue science out of self-serving career interests, but out of pure interest in knowledge, and to embody this ideal as a scientific personality (Engler, 2001). The demands of the field and the demonstration of achievement of which Bourdieu speaks can rather represent those people whose origin-specific dispositions are more suitable and who do not have to overcome such great sociocultural distances. Those whose origin-specific dispositions are more in line with the scientific field, and thus do not have to overcome great sociocultural distances, may rather meet the requirements of the field to which Bourdieu refers.

While people from higher backgrounds are more likely to feel well suited to the academic field (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1971, p. 31), feelings of foreignness and distinction can lead to selections and self-elimination within social achievers. Burkart (2007) assumes that feelings of distinction automatically accompany classification fights. It usually is not about a conscious, strategically applied differentiation from others, but about the self-evident fact of belonging or not belonging to a social milieu (Burkart, 2007, p. 164).

Submission and self-exclusion despite high qualifications can therefore only be understood to a limited extent as a voluntary departure from academic careers in the academic field and as a result of selective or rational decisions, but also as an expression of habitus-structural conflicts (Blome, 2017a, p. 325, 2017b; Schmitt, 2010). Therefore, unequal degrees of integration depending on social origin should be understood as habitus-field-fit relations, which do not necessarily or exclusively make closures appear as strategic closures "from above", i.e., intended by privileged groups, but at least in part because of habitual and pre-reflective social practices that correlate closely with class relations.

Among the possibly unreflected and unintended exclusions are also unconscious prejudices and the phenomenon of homosocial co-optations, i.e., the phenomenon that mentor-mentee relationships and recruitments are often influenced by social similarity. This could also contribute to the fact that especially in socially closed disciplines (e.g., medicine or law) social advancement by those of lower groups hardly occurs due to the high proportion of people from privileged classes (Böning, 2017; Möller, 2015, p. 229).

Social practices are also (re)constituted by field dynamics and field transformations. Thus, changes in higher education policy and the changing conditions for scientific careers also have an impact on closure processes and mechanisms. It is striking that the observed social closure correlates in time with the neoliberal trans-

formation of the university and science system (Münch, 2014), and the increased uncertainty of scientific careers (Laufenberg, 2016; Möller, 2018). Already during Weber's lifetime, scientific careers were regarded as a hazard (Weber, 1997). But a lack of collateral and precarious contractual careers has increased significantly in the last two to three decades (Funken, Rogge, & Hörlin, 2015; Reuter, Berli, & Tischler, 2016). As Bourdieu (1981, p. 180) pointed out, risky and long-standing career paths are rather avoided by social climbers (Blome, 2017a), but benefit people who bring along adaptable cultural and economic capital.

The debates on elite and excellence, which have also been established with the market- and competition-oriented political control measures of recent decades, and the nationwide excellence initiative and strategy, are being launched to stratify the German higher education landscape vertically. The constructions and rhetoric of excellence and the associated effects of the concentration of resources and prestige (Bloch, Mitterle, Paradeise, & Peter, 2018; Hartmann, 2010; Münch, 2007; Reitz, Graf, & Möller, 2016) should also lead to symbolic and social closure effects.

The junior professorships implemented since the early 2000s also have strong closing effects due to their enormous, socially selective composition (cf. Section 2; Burkhardt & Nickel, 2015; Möller, 2015, p. 238; Zimmer, 2018). These can be traced back to the fact that "fast careers" are more likely to be achieved by privileged people (Hartmann, 2002, p. 70) because they already have the appropriate starting capital and career strategies, while social achievers often have to acquire them. Especially people with uneven biographies and a higher age often associated with this are at a disadvantage (the already low number of professors with a "second chance education"[6] has halved in the last two decades, Möller, 2015, p. 282).

6. Access Open to Many: Positions Reserved for a Few?

The exclusion of lower social classes is a complex phenomenon. Habitual fitting problems, phenomena of social subordination and a lack of "sense of play" for the necessary practices in scientific careers are essential for its understanding. Besides, there are open and covert acts of disclosure (e.g., discouragement, informal age limits) that have so far only been studied to a limited extent (Blome, 2017b). Making acts of discrimination and other forms of intended closures transparent seems to be just as necessary for the realization of equal opportunities between social groups as the reflection of unintended closure mechanisms are essential to overcome them.

The observed fluctuations in the proportions of people from low social groups of origin indicate that the pe-

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[6] Second chance education in Germany serves the subsequent acquisition of school-leaving qualifications. Initially limited to evening schools and colleges, this was mainly connected with the acquisition of the university entrance qualification. Since the 1970s, the expansion to include evening secondary schools, evening high schools, and elementary schools has given second chance education the task of increasing the general success of school-leaving qualifications (Harney, Koch, & Hochstätter, 2007).

riod of educational expansion, compared with the last two decades, offered more favourable opportunity structures for these groups. In this respect, the degree of inclusion and exclusion from higher positions at the university may also be related to political measures and the changed framework conditions for an academic career. Critical reflection and evaluation of science policy measures seem necessary to understand social closure processes.

Equal opportunities in academic careers concern academia but the importance of the topic goes beyond simple academic interest. The socioeconomic background of the scientific staff influences their research interests as well as their teaching approaches and pedagogical orientations (Lee, 2017). In addition, professors of low social origin can serve as role models for students from disadvantaged families increasing their chances of success (Oldfield, 2010). But in Germany, less than 20% of people with postgraduate degrees remain in higher education (Flöther, 2017). The doctorate tends to go hand in hand with a higher income and higher work satisfaction and is a prerequisite for occupying top positions in many social fields (Konsortium BuWiN, 2017, p. 36). Questions of equal opportunities in achieving a doctorate thus relate to aspects of individual life chances as well as to social power relations.

It is not only in Germany that there is a lack of adequate collection of sociostructural data from academic staff. The belief in a purely meritocratic culture of success in the scientific field continues to conceal social inequalities and to misjudge symbolic rule. In the analysis of social closures, the scientific culture of success, the conditions of habitual-fitting, and the complex changes in scientific careers should be of importance.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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