

Social and school differentiation in urban space: inequalities and local configurations

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Abstract. The distribution of school provision in the greater Paris metropolitan area, including the availability of certain courses and study programs, is strongly correlated with the social profiles of the different localities and corresponds to sharp disparities. The highly diversified, attractive school options in localities whose residents are highly privileged in socioeconomic and occupational terms stand in contrast to the less diversified educational resources, including fewer course and study-program options, and reduced private school presence in more markedly working-class municipalities. Different approaches to school choice are strongly linked to parents' socioeconomic status but do not amount merely to practices for avoiding stigmatized middle schools in working-class localities. Those approaches make sense when considered in relation to what may be tightly circumscribed social and school environments and differentiated social positions and demands. The results presented here call into question the effectiveness of school-districting rules in France aimed at regulating the social profile of middle schools. As in London, Amsterdam, and Madrid, school dynamics and urban space in the outskirts of Paris are closely intertwined and increasingly interact in producing segregation.

Why study how urban segregation and school segregation fit together?

Urban segregation and school segregation have traditionally been studied in French sociology as parts of two important but distinct fields: one concerned with urban life, the other with education. These two research areas developed parallel to each other, with only a few points where they meet or developed common projects. Nevertheless, the distribution of school provision in the greater Paris metropolitan area, including the availability of certain courses and study programs, is strongly correlated with the social profiles of the different localities and corresponds to sharp disparities. The highly diversified, attractive school options in localities whose residents are highly privileged in socioeconomic and occupational terms stand in contrast to the less diversified educational resources, including fewer course and study-program options, and reduced private school presence in more markedly working-class municipalities. Different approaches to school choice are strongly linked to parents' socioeconomic status but do not amount merely to practices for avoiding stigmatized middle schools in working-class localities. Those approaches make sense when considered in relation to what may be tightly circumscribed social and school environments and differentiated social positions and demands. The results presented here call into question the effectiveness of school-districting rules in France aimed at regulating the social profile of middle schools.

From its beginnings, and in line with the pioneering studies of the Chicago School, French urban sociology has always considered the division or differentiation of social space a fundamental theme. This approach produced, on the one hand, mainly quantitative studies measuring social and spatial segregation along with analysis of how segregation has evolved over time, and on the other hand, more qualitative, locale-focused analyses of social practices and urban ways of life. Seldom has an attempt been made to combine these two ways of proceeding systematically. We have maps and

overall interpretations of how various urban spaces came to be populated, but it is not at all clear how to use them for more general analyses of these developments in terms of social relations. To grasp more qualitative dimensions of relations among social groups and the inequalities likely to be associated with specific sociospatial configurations, the only useful sources available are monographs on particular neighborhoods.

Qualitative studies in this field often refer to schooling; in some cases they even discuss types of reasoning and behavior that pertain directly to the issue of school segregation. But schooling in these studies is only one area of local life among others, albeit an important one. While parallels are regularly drawn between the social profile of a given neighborhood and its school dynamics, the often sharply local nature of these studies (monographs, urban ethnography) does not usually allow for establishing more general ties between urban and school segregation. And the question of how socio-occupational types of space fit together with school-choice characteristics has seldom been treated in quantitative urban studies in France—Rhein (2004; Rhein et al, 1996) is one of the few researchers to have examined these two dimensions.

The same observations may be made of studies in the sociology of education. Though we now have a certain number of quantitative studies showing social differentiation among schools, they rarely provide statistical links between this feature and the characteristics of the urban spaces in which the studied schools are located. School and urban-locale data are seldom systematically crossed (Barthon and Monfroy, 2003; 2005; Korsu, 2002; 2003), as if each type of data was in itself enough to account for overall trends.

As is the case in urban sociology studies, it is the qualitative, local, sociology of education studies that are more likely to examine how the two dimensions fit together, but their approach makes it difficult to move up to more general observations—exceptions are Léger and Tripier's pioneering study (1986), followed by Henriot-van Zanten's study (1990). Case studies of a given school or network of schools in a given locality or neighborhood propose analytical components situated at the intersection of the urban studies and education fields and make it possible to specify what family—school relations are produced by specific social profiles. The difficulty, however, is how to determine models that would account more systematically for relations among social profiles of given spaces at different scales, educational resources (both public and private), and family school choice.

The same observations apply to other countries. In the United States, the quantitative study of school segregation is particularly well developed, with much emphasis placed on ethnoracial dimensions. However, here too, we find a marked separation between urban and education studies. In the United States this means the issue of social mix is treated only as it intersects that of racial segregation. There are therefore more analyses of racial segregation intensity and of the effects of policies for racially desegregating schools and housing than in France. In studies of residence choice, that choice is seldom studied in relation to parents' school choice. It is significant that for a city like Chicago, for example, though there are great quantities of rich, readily accessible data on the distribution of ethnoracial groups, test results, income brackets, etc for individual schools, there are no data on enrolling children outside their school district by social category and neighborhood characteristics. There are therefore few studies on school-avoidance practices, though observers of the local school system acknowledge that highly selective admissions practices do exist among other schools—and not only among private ones. For a quantitative approach to ethnoracial segregation by school district in American cities, see the Brown University website, "The State of Public School Integration", <http://128.148.62.132/schoolsegregation/index.htm>; for data on individual Chicago schools, see <http://schoollocator.cps.k12.il.us/>.

The binary distinctions characterizing the study of urban and school segregation—urban studies/education, quantitative/qualitative, social/ethnoracial—are also to be found in Europe (though there are some countries, namely Italy, where the theme is comparatively undeveloped). The cases of London (Ball et al, 1985; Butler and Robson, 2003) and Amsterdam (Gramberg, 1998) are particularly interesting. For these cities the problematic has given rise to original research specifically focused on the intertwining of residence and school choice, particularly in middle-class households. As explained at the end of this paper, some of the trends identified and observed in these studies are also underway in the Paris metropolitan area.

The topic seems particularly important given that ‘the school’ is a major issue in France; it is much more likely to arouse passions and cause controversy here than it is in other European societies. It can therefore be said to occupy a central place in French social life (Dubet, 1999; Dubet and Duru-Bellat, 2000). Academic evaluations and rankings have particular social relevance; they affect individuals’ social prestige and possibilities for reaching the best socio-occupational positions. The educational system and the schools themselves are regularly criticized from all sides, and *l’école* continues to be *the* institution in terms of which the individual’s social development and future are conceived and even fantasized about.

Does this mean the institution can be considered a victim of its own success? Never has the school’s ability to ensure ‘equal opportunity’, to function as an essential lever of social mobility, and to integrate individuals been so widely challenged. Institutional actors and parents alike make exaggerated demands and have exaggerated expectations of schools, and they behave around education in ways that turn schools into spaces of acute competition for the highest academic honors. In this context, can it be said that both access to schools presented as the best-performing and avoidance of schools perceived as sharply disadvantaged work simultaneously to produce a trend toward strong school segregation? If so, how can we better apprehend the impact of these phenomena on urban segregation? And, is location in social and urban space an important dimension of the process?

A stronger trend?

There is no dearth of studies indicating a trend toward stronger social differentiation among schools (Lévy et al, 1986; Trancart, 1993; 1998). While assessments of the effect of relaxing school districting regulations show that only a minority of families make strategic school choices, the relatively high cultural and social level of the most selective families works to further concentrate pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds within certain schools (Ballion, 1991). Léger and Tripier’s 1986 study of the outskirts of Paris in the early 1980s already brought to light upper-class and middle-class family avoidance of neighbourhood schools from as early as the primary level. Over time, this process leads to the overrepresentation of children of working-class and immigrant parents in the schools studied. Henriot-van Zanten et al (1994) reached the same conclusion: there was a much greater concentration of foreigners in neighborhood primary schools than in neighborhood housing.

These studies were further developed by Barthón (1987), Broccolichi (1995), Broccolichi and van Zanten (1997), and van Zanten (2001), who also confirmed a high degree of avoidance of public schools in the most stigmatized suburbs of Paris. Barthón showed that the school does not merely reproduce the social and ethnic divisions of a given urban space but strengthens polarization: whereas working-class and, above all, immigrant populations represent a minority in some neighborhoods, they may, nonetheless, represent the majority of pupils enrolled in local public schools. A full set of factors, ranging from privileged households’ avoidance strategies

to school-catchment-area anomalies (which in Barthón's case study reinforce school homogeneity) and hierarchical ordering of local school provision, explain a situation of pronounced social contrast among public schools and even sharper contrast between the public and private school sectors.

More recent studies, investigating a single Paris *arrondissement*, two municipalities in the closest ring of Paris suburbs, and two municipalities in the second ring (Maresca, 2003), respectively, bring to light significant avoidance practices starting at the middle-school level while underscoring three specific features: (1) such practices are more or less widespread depending on local context and level of segregation and stigmatization (ranging from 2% for an Alfortville school to 72% for a school in Poissy); (2) changing residence location is not the strategy most often used (the most frequent practices are instead requesting exemption from school-district constraints and turning to the private sector, though this also varies by local context); (3) it cannot be concluded with certainty that there has been an increase in strategizing to avoid public middle schools over the past twenty years.

In Great Britain Butler and Robson (2003) and Savage in his forthcoming study of "lifestyles and social integration" make use of the habitus theory to characterize middle-class social practices and representations, while emphasizing social reproduction strategies used in gentrified neighborhoods or ones used in the process of gentrification. They underscore how these urban spaces are taken over and organized in ways consistent with the resources (capital) that these classes require to reproduce themselves. Various means of protecting conditions for reproducing school capital are discerned in families' highly strategic relation to local school provision.

In Amsterdam Gramberg (1998) has found a high level of primary-school avoidance among the middle and upper classes by schools' social and, above all, ethnic profile. He relates phenomena which indicate spreading school segregation to residential segregation in the school catchment area.

In Madrid (Fernandez Enguita, 2005) the number of private schools has risen considerably, leading to greater social and school selection. A highly developed bus system is making private schools accessible to a large part of the city. In this case the direct impact on urban segregation is not as strong, but schools are becoming increasingly disconnected from the space they are located in. This process contributes to reinforcing school segregation.

In Italy it seems that there are fewer interactions between residence choice and social choice because of less restrictive school-attendance areas. Expectations of school and schools themselves are socially differentiated but these do not represent a major issue for most people—in any case, it is not as crucial as it is in France. The social and ethnic differentiations among schools do not produce widespread avoidance of public school. It is difficult to evaluate this process exactly, however, because there are so few studies on the topic in Italy.

School choice and residential choice

We have few studies in France that enable us to examine what has changed over time in the way households choose where to live. I would, nonetheless, hypothesize that, whereas proximity to relatives and/or workplace used to be the strongest structuring factor(s) of this choice, in cities the school issue now tends to be taken into account. It is not that children's education used to be considered less important. In France pupils used to be oriented earlier (end of 5th form/7th grade), meaning a large proportion of pupils of working-class background moved directly into short vocational programs. This in turn mean that the local middle school's academic level or performance was hardly an issue, let alone that of the local lycée. Only '*bons élèves*' (good students) were

admitted to general-education middle school and later to lycée. Urban segregation at the time ‘protected’ middle and high schools in well-off neighborhoods from attendance by workers’ children, while the other middle and high schools outside Paris were not considered ‘bad’. In those other schools, middle-class children were educated alongside the best pupils of working-class background, and there was seldom cause to circumvent the nearest middle school or high school. This situation changed radically with the repeated urban riots at the beginning of the 1980s, the media’s sensationalist handling of them, and the instituting of university education for the masses. It was when pupils with working-class and immigrant backgrounds moved into the schools (Dubet, 1999) that parents became increasingly concerned about their children’s ‘scholastic opportunities’.

Avenues for analyzing segregation in the schools

In the French case, particularly in urban areas, there are several reasons to hypothesize strong interaction between the dynamics operative in the production of urban segregation and those leading to school segregation. The relation is complex and suggests several research avenues:

(1) Examining *the link between social profiles of urban spaces and social profiles of the schools* (primary and middle schools for the public sector) that officially draw pupils from those spaces. France’s *carte scolaire*, the system by means of which all cities and localities above a certain size are carved up into school districts or catchment areas, means that place of residence and proximity determine to a great degree what public school a pupil is assigned to. In other European contexts, residence location is not such a decisive factor in determining the location of the school (and therefore the type of school) a child attends. By comparing social profiles of urban spaces with social profiles of urban schools we can account for discrepancies resulting from avoidance of certain schools.

(2) Examining *spatial distribution of school provision by social characteristics of localities studied*: how the social profiles of populations with school-age children act on and are acted upon by school-supply characteristics. The point is particularly important for the French case, where there is an official concern to apply ‘positive discrimination’—to give more personnel, educational resources, and funding to schools that educate pupils from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. It is important to the Ministry of Education to be able to claim that it guarantees the same educational services to all children regardless of place of residence. Whereas in (1) the focus is on the relation (and discrepancies) between the school-district social profile and the real school choice and enrolment, here the focus is on the relation between the social profile of school districts and characteristics of educational resources.

(3) Examining *the link between the social characteristics of urban spaces and households’ school choice*. This vast point refers to many facets of actors’ relation to schools. Avoidance of district middle school, for example, which with few exceptions is located in the municipality of residence, can be studied by means of the indicator ‘extramunicipality enrolment’. Another component of this issue is the link between residence location (the basis for spatial distribution of the different social groups) and school choice. In other words, given the school-catchment-area constraint indicated above, together with reasoning in terms of proximity, we can analyze and assess the degree to which residence location choice and school choice are intertwined, and grasp the impact in terms of urban and social segregation.

This paper focuses on point (2) and one of the areas of point (3)—enrolment of children outside their municipality or locality of residence—using a survey conducted in



Figure 1. Municipalities of the département of Hauts-de-Seine.

the Hauts-de-Seine *département*⁽¹⁾ (Oberti, 2004; see figure 1). Considered a privileged area, this *département* in fact contains strong contrasts. Many managers live there, but the north side remains a working-class area, with large amounts of public housing and communist local government. In comparison with Paris, residents in higher-level public sector professions are less represented and are concentrated in only a few localities. In other residential municipalities of the department, managers, engineers, and self-employed professionals are predominant. In the last two decades, increasing numbers of lower-middle-class people have moved to working-class municipalities because of the high cost of housing in the Paris metropolitan area. These local contexts, because of

⁽¹⁾ The data for socio-occupational positions and school choice come from the French National Census (Recensement Général de la population) done in 1999 by INSEE (National Institute for Statistics in France). These data concern households and have been elaborated with the help of a CNRS research center (LASMAS). For local analysis, we have used the so-called '*recensement au 1/4*', which gives the possibility to use the same data at the block level [Îlots Regroupés pour Information Statistique ('IRIS 2000')]. Data for schooling in private middle school at the municipal level come from the DEP (Direction de l'Évaluation et de la Prospective of the French Ministry of Education).

their social mix and heterogeneous expectations, create very pertinent cases for studying the interaction between urban and school segregation.

School provision and the social profile of localities in the département of Hauts-de-Seine **Public educational resources**

Not all courses and study programs are available in all middle schools of the Hauts-de-Seine département.⁽²⁾ A strong correlation may be observed between the socioeconomic and sociocultural profiles of the different localities and the characteristics of courses and programs in their public middle schools (called *collège* in France). Middle schools in the most privileged localities offer a great variety of elective courses, unusual languages, European and international 'sections', musical and artistic classes at specially arranged hours, etc in comparison with what is available in schools situated in working-class localities. The few exceptions to this are not enough to mask the fact that the best-endowed middle and high schools are concentrated in localities whose populations are the least working class. This is probably the perverse effect of a 'positive-discrimination' policy: in school districts with 'difficult' pupil populations, the state has mobilized funds and energy to struggle against scholastic failure, while, in more privileged districts, those funds and energy have been used to diversify courses and study programs. We have increased diversity and sophistication of the types of study offered in the most privileged middle schools, and ongoing action to assist pupils and combat scholastic failure in the others. Although this observation is hardly surprising, and seems in fact to confirm the inadequacy of Ministry of Education efforts to help schools in the most disadvantaged localities, the fact remains that these measures have not gone together with any attempt to provide a comparable supply of the more selective courses and programs in these same schools.

The increase in social differentiation among middle schools, closely linked to the social profile of school districts, ultimately consolidates a hierarchy of public schools, one that in turn works to 'specialize' those schools so that they either maintain scholastic excellence à la française (focused on general education) or receive 'difficult' pupils. As shown by data collected by the DEP, middle schools in the most markedly working-class towns in the outskirts of Paris have a hard time ensuring both a form of teaching adapted to less privileged pupils, and the courses and study programs that would enable them to compete with middle schools in upper-class and middle-class localities.

Significant in this respect is the situation in a département such as Hauts-de-Seine, considered privileged despite strong internal contrasts. The richest course variety and the most demanding courses and programs are concentrated in middle schools and lycées located in localities where the presence of high socioeconomic groups is strong. These same localities are also where the most selective and highly reputed private schools are located.

This imbalance may be understood in part with reference to the distinction between the decidedly more working-class northern part of the département, where there are almost no 'rare' electives, and the south, which has long been a 'pole of excellence' due to the town of Sceaux and the Lycée Lakanal. Though most département middle schools now offer a set of three European languages (English, German, Spanish), few have

⁽²⁾ In this connection, the issue of the territorial unit studied is crucial. The French Ministry of Education reasons on the basis of the *'bassin scolaire'*, a territorial unit encompassing several localities, precisely in order to ensure that most electives and courses of study are available within it. Nonetheless, identifying which localities within a single bassin scolaire have these electives and programs and which do not brings out a strong link between the social profile of a given locality and its school provision.

courses in other languages at the 4th form/8th or even 6th form/6th grade level (the first year of middle school in France). the same is true for ‘music and dance’ classes at specially arranged times, which pupils may attend only after passing conservatory tests. These particularities of education supply are not without effect on middle schools’ socio-logical profiles; they allow pupils whose families live outside the districts with the best-endowed schools to be admitted to those schools through either a selection process or a request for exemption from catchment-area constraints—practices which of course require detailed knowledge of school provision and are based on specific strategies (learning an instrument at the conservatory, acquiring particular language skills, etc).

The inequalities with regard to available courses and programs at the middle-school level in the public sector recur at the lycée level, especially for the location of lycées offering *classes préparatoires*, two-year preparatory courses for admission to France’s most selective and prestigious higher education institutions, the *grandes écoles*.

Private educational resources

Maps of private education ‘excellence’ resources and public education ‘excellence’ resources are similar in many respects. The percentage of middle-school pupils enrolled in private schools is particular high in the most markedly bourgeois localities, which also contain the preferred public middle schools. At the other extreme are the most heavily working-class localities, with the most sharply stigmatized public middle schools and no private schools.

The private sector, then, does not work to compensate for the less diversified, selective public school provision in working-class localities but rather further enriches schooling supply in localities that already have the most highly regarded public schools with the widest variety and most selective academic electives and programs. The superimposition of these two types of school provision, public and private, reinforces inequalities among localities, to the obvious advantage of the most bourgeois among them. This development is especially strong given that in most localities private schools are not only fairly unselective but also highly selective and in direct competition with the most highly reputed public schools.

Social profile of locality and ‘school mobility’

Given that, with some exceptions,⁽³⁾ school-district boundaries are drawn on the basis of official municipality or locality ones, enrolling children outside residence locality can be considered an indicator of families’ avoidance of the middle school they are districted for. In other words wherever middle-school-age children (12 to 15 years) are massively enrolled in their residence locality, it is fair to conclude that the middle schools of that locality are attractive or in any case not significantly shunned. Conversely, a higher rate of extramunicipality enrolment for this age group would indicate lesser attractiveness of the middle schools in question and more widespread avoidance of them.

Although the choice of electives, among them foreign languages, makes it possible for children to be enrolled in an different district within their locality and even in a different locality altogether, this remains a relatively marginal move as the ‘standard’ set of courses and programs tends increasingly to be organized at the locality scale.⁽⁴⁾

⁽³⁾ This study is restricted to municipalities in the Hauts-de-Seine département, where middle-school districting functions entirely on a municipality basis. This explains why Bois-Colombes, Bourg-la-Reine, Garches, and Marne-La-Coquette were excluded.

⁽⁴⁾ This applies to choice of the most currently studied foreign languages and European sections (English and German). For first and second spoken language electives (Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, etc), supply is organized more at the scale of the bassin scolaire, though for the most unusual languages it is sometimes necessary to take into account an even greater area.

Requests for exemption from school-districting constraints (effectively, permission to enrol children outside the locality) pertain either to highly specific nonacademic electives (music, sports) or to unusual languages (Russian, Chinese, Japanese; Italian, Spanish, or Portuguese for ‘first spoken language’). Choosing these electives in many cases indicates a strategy for acceding to reputed schools, but only a small number of families do choose them, and, though this group is highly significant in social terms (the practice is typical of highly educated middle-class and upper-class families), its weight in extralocality school choice at the middle-school level is quite moderate.

Other ‘personal convenience’ motives for requesting exemption (child care, nearness to workplace, enrolling siblings in the same school) are less and less likely to be accepted by the authorities at the middle-school level; this in turn reflects a trend toward greater strictness in granting requests not to enrol children in their district middle school.⁽⁵⁾ It is therefore more likely that what has allowed families access to extralocality enrolment is recourse to the private school sector. The presence of a private middle school in or near a locality (or readily accessible by transportation) should be taken into account when interpreting these dynamics.

Extralocality enrolment by private school provision

The presence of private schools in a locality seems likely to rein in the practice of extralocality school choice. Because private schools broaden supply at the locality level while in certain cases allowing for academic and social selection, private middle schools can respond to some of the local dissatisfaction with public schools (Bartho and Monfroy, 2003). Moreover, religious private schools can respond at the local level to the wishes of families who want their children to receive an education linked to a religious framework. This should result in lower levels of extralocality enrolment in cities and towns with the greatest number of private schools.

That hypothesis is not at all confirmed by the facts, however. Some localities with a high percentage of pupils enrolled in the private sector have the same level of extralocality school choice as localities with no private middle schools. It is necessary, therefore, to consider school provision in a broader local context, one that extends beyond the locality yet is still relatively small and is also relevant for families as an area whose school supply they can assess as a whole. But, as we shall see in the next section, the ability to assess school provision at a greater spatial scale is in itself closely associated with families’ economic and social resources. Figure 2 identifies four types of school situations, which are then presented synthetically in table 1.

Extramunicipality enrolment by social category

Rates of extramunicipality middle-school enrolment by municipality and for all households mask important differences by parents’ social group. Among the four groups in table 1, only group-1 localities (few children schooled outside the municipality and a high proportion of municipality’s middle-school pupils enrolled in private schools) are characterized by sharply lower extramunicipality enrolment of children of upper-class background and, with the exception of Neuilly and Meudon, by weak variation for this rate by head-of-household’s social category. This result is perfectly logical as courses and programs available in local schools are rich and selective enough to respond to the wishes and expectations of all social strata, particularly the upper classes.

In the three other groups, however, differences by social category are much more pronounced and reveal the same logic at work in all three groups: upper-class households in both middle-class and working-class localities enrol their children outside

⁽⁵⁾ In Hauts-de-Seine, the policy for granting school-districting-constraint exemptions is being applied with increasing strictness.

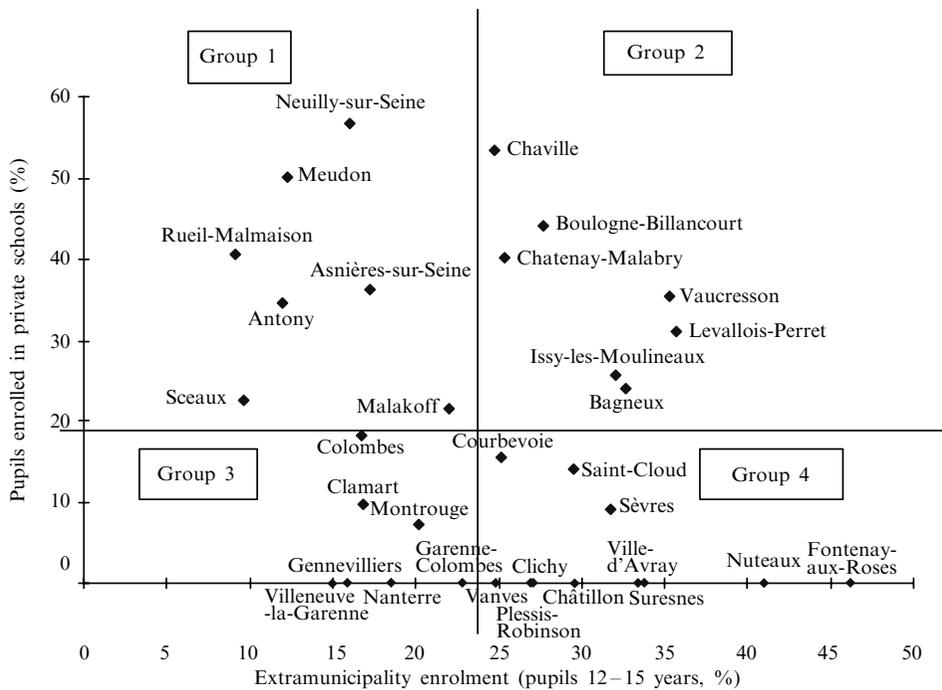


Figure 2. Extramunicipality middle-school enrolment and intramunicipality presence of private schools in Hauts-de-Seine (1999) [sources: data from INSEE – LASMAS (1999 general census) for extramunicipality enrolment and from DEP (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale) for private enrolment].

Table 1. Social profile of locality by extramunicipality middle-school enrolment and by private school provision.

	Few children schooled outside the municipality	Many children schooled outside the municipality
High proportion of municipality's middle-school pupils enrolled in private schools	<i>Group 1</i> Mainly middle-class municipalities and a few mixed localities with strong middle-class and upper-class presence	<i>Group 2</i> Privileged municipalities near excellent school supply
Low proportion of municipality's middle-school pupils enrolled in private schools	<i>Group 3</i> Primarily sharply working-class municipalities	<i>Group 4</i> Privileged municipalities

their residence municipality to a significant degree; they are also much more likely to do so than households in other social categories.

To specify how this practice varies socially by local configuration, three examples may be cited from each of the four groups (see figure 3).

(a) Very low social differentiation of practices in bourgeois localities with richly diversified courses and programs and highly reputed public-schooling and private-schooling supply (group 1).

This group is represented by the municipalities of Neuilly, Rueil-Malmaison, and Antony. All three have both attractive public middle schools (this is often due to the

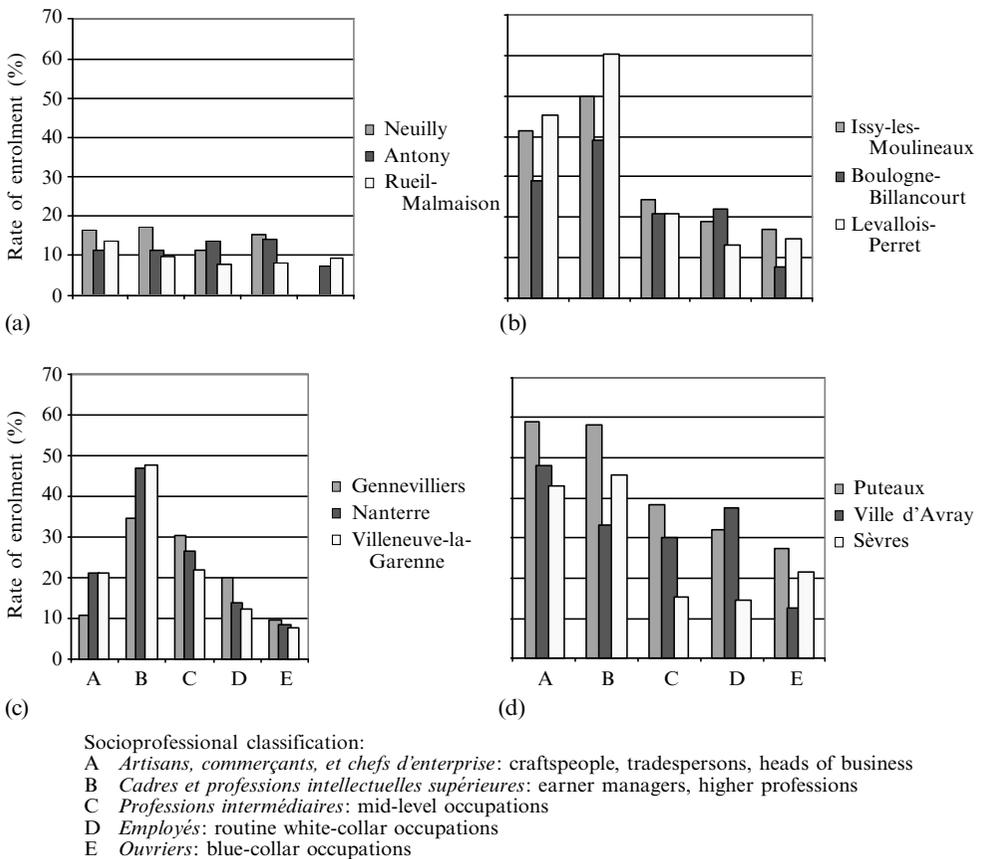


Figure 3. Rate of extramunicipality middle-school enrolment by household's socio-occupational category: (a) group 1, (b) group 2, (c) group 3, (d) group 4 (source: INSEE–LASMAS, 1999 general census).

way they have been districted, which allows several schools to draw pupils from relatively homogeneous privileged neighbourhoods⁽⁶⁾ and one or more reputed private middle school(s).

In Rueil and Antony, differences between social categories are very slight. It is true that here, as in other localities, working-class families are least likely to send their children outside the locality, but the difference with the upper classes is minor in this respect, and nonexistent in Rueil-Malmaison. Above all, these are the only localities that manage to keep almost all middle-school pupils from upper-class families in their schools.

Neuilly displays different characteristics. First, though it is the most strongly bourgeois of the three, it is also the one where pupils from the upper classes are most likely to be enrolled outside the municipality (17.4%) and where the difference from blue-collar children on this score is the greatest. This effect is surely due to the pull of the 'major Paris schools', located in the capital's most bourgeois arrondissements (the 16th arrondissement and a part of the 17th arrondissement, but also more central ones), a pull that operates because of the ultraprivileged social profile of Neuilly and despite its excellent local school provision. The difference between Neuilly

⁽⁶⁾ The question does not even arise for Neuilly, where all IRIS 2000 fall into the most elite categories of Edmond Préteceille's (2003) socio-occupational typology of space.

and the other localities with attractive educational resources (Rueil, Antony, Sceaux) is due to both the immediate proximity of Paris and the presence of a *grande bourgeoisie* with highly 'Parisian' schooling practices.

(b) High level of upper-class extramunicipality enrolment in privileged municipalities that are near excellent school provision and despite the presence of private schools (group 2).

This group shows that the presence of private middle schools does not necessarily go together with a low level of extralocality enrolment. These are quite privileged localities; flight from locality schools by these social categories reflects their proximity to educational resources deemed superior and that are also in many instances public. There is a similarity between the profiles of this group and those of group 4, which encompasses localities with a relatively similar profile (though slightly lower proportions of upper classes) but is without private middle schools. The slight difference seems to lie in the lesser likelihood of flight among people in mid-level occupations and those in routine white-collar occupations, some of whom probably turn to their locality's private school sector. In any case, the result shows that in places where families are most demanding of schools, namely those with a strong upper-class presence, excellent nearby public schools are strongly competitive with private schools, even when the private schools are located immediately in bourgeois localities.

There is also a less pronounced difference between mid-level occupations and routine white-collar occupations. The profile of the latter category here is surely different from that of the same category residing in more sharply working-class localities (group 3). Here, the main distinction is between the upper classes, on one hand, and the middle-class and working-class strata, on the other.

This situation is particularly interesting because it clearly shows that, for upper-class families living in localities where there are few working-class residents, choosing a middle school involves not only assessing the type of pupils likely to attend that school (which here may be assumed to be highly privileged) but considering its place in a fine hierarchical ordering of school performances within a mixed social environment.

(c) Strong social differentiation for extralocality enrolment in working-class localities (group 3).

This case clearly shows the difficulty working-class localities have keeping children of the middle classes and especially upper classes within them, especially when infra-locality contrasts are sharp. Nearly half of 12–15-year-olds of earner managers and the higher professions are enrolled outside the locality (compared with only 8% of blue-collar children). It also shows the ineffectiveness of school-district regulations if their aim is to favor social mix in middle school, particularly in working-class localities. The data most strikingly reveal phenomena that run quite contrary to that aim: spatial and scholastic confinement or fixing of children of working-class background, and greater facility of the other social categories to find their way out of the schools to which their residence location assigns them.

Group 3's profile on the graph reveals a strong correlation between the social background of middle-school pupils and extramunicipality enrolment. Such enrolment decreases regularly as we move down the social hierarchy.

(d) High level of extralocality enrolment among upper and middle-classes in privileged localities without private middle school (group 4).

The profile of this group is fairly close to that of group 2, but the absence of private schools leads to a high level of extralocality enrolment among tradespeople, craftspeople, and small businesspeople, traditionally likely to turn to the private sector. As this sector is absent from their towns, many of them (as many as 60% in Puteaux) enrol their children in a middle school in another locality.

As for group 2 (though extralocality enrolment rates are higher), the differences between mid-level occupations and routine white-collar occupations, but also between these groups and blue-collar, are less pronounced than for the same categories living in more sharply working-class localities.

Nanterre and Rueil: school-choice dynamics closely associated with a locality's social profile and school provision

Local context and school choice

Local and inframunicipal analysis allows us to specify precisely the dynamics of school choice. We will do it through a comparison between two bordering municipalities, which are contrasted in social, educational, and political terms. Nanterre (see figure 4) is a typical working-class municipality where manual workers and routine white-collar workers represent 58% of the working population, and it is characterized by a high presence of immigrants (16.4% of the population). Yet, there are many important differences among neighborhoods in all these aspects. For example, in some neighborhoods, more than 50% of the residents are middle or upper-middle class and only 15% of the population lives in public housing. Rueil-Malmaison is a completely different municipality, characterized by a higher presence of middle-class and upper-middle-class population (manual workers and routine white-collar workers represent only 33.2% of the working population), public housing that is more oriented to the lower middle class and houses a lower percentage of the population (only 23.5%), a weak presence of immigrants (7.1%), and fewer people of North African descent. What schools offer (options, programs, etc) is more diversified and prestigious in Rueil, where private schools are also attractive and numerous (40% of middle-school pupils are at private schools).

It is no simple matter to identify schools in terms of both their location and the officially delimited district they are supposed to draw pupils from. Aside from the fact that middle schools sometimes draw pupils from catchment areas at some distance from their geographic location, the ways schools are perceived and hierarchically ordered at

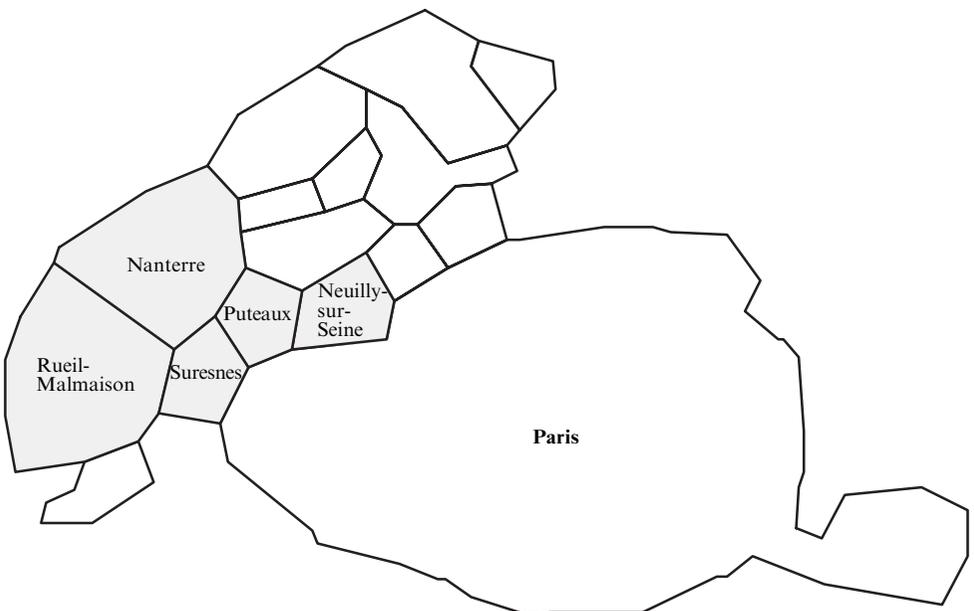


Figure 4. Geographical position of Nanterre and Rueil-Malmaison in west-side suburbs.

the local level prove particularly complex. While these types of reasoning may bring into play some 'objective' data—such as the social profile of the neighborhood and/or of the school district a school is located in, academic profile (electives and study programs available, teaching body, school history) and the appearance and quality of school building and facilities—the spatial scales used can vary considerably, meaning that the various criteria operate in various ways.

For primary schools, the reference is primarily municipal. Schools within the same town are compared, each considered in terms of the neighborhood it is located in and the resident population. Relatively consensual hierarchical orderings are already observable at this level. Analysis of interviews with parents, nonetheless, brings to light that most people dissociate their judgment about school profile (eg for a school in a particularly favored district) from their judgment about the quality of teachers and teaching methods. Working at the local scale is what makes it possible to register and identify these phenomena: for example, the fact that this or that primary school located in a disadvantaged neighborhood is perceived favorably because of its teaching team. Conversely, I have encountered criticism of the way schools situated in highly privileged neighborhoods function.

At the middle-school level, spatial scales and the criteria determining perceptions and rankings become more complex, bringing into play both the municipality space within which parents spontaneously and easily compare and rank middle schools, and also other municipalities, situated in some cases outside the *bassin scolaire*. In all cases, the municipality scale seems highly structuring for many reasons, which have to do both with school-districting constraints, the proximity factor, and local schooling policy.

The contrast between the municipalities of Rueil and Nanterre shows up most clearly when we consider their respective levels of extramunicipality middle-school enrolment.

- Such enrolment is quite moderate for Rueil, and there is hardly any fluctuation by social category.
- It is higher for Nanterre, with sharp differentiation by social category.

Whereas nearly half of children of upper-class background attending middle school in Nanterre and nearly 30% of children of mid-level occupations are enrolled outside the city, resident working-class children are massively enrolled within the city (extramunicipality enrolment rates are 14% for routine white-collar occupations and 8% for blue-collar occupations). The difference between manager and blue-collar children is great in Nanterre (ratio of 5.6), whereas these two groups are at nearly identical levels in Rueil (ratio of 1.03).

Analysis of extramunicipality enrolment as a strategy for avoiding schools judged 'undesirable' for peoples' own children brings to light that it has to do not only with the perception of the school's social profile but also and indeed just as much with academic ranking. The search for a middle school that performs better academically leads families to avoid schools which, for the municipality (ie at the municipality scale), are attended by pupils from relatively privileged backgrounds and have a fairly positive image. This shows that the academic criterion is strongly autonomous; it pertains to local perceptions and practices distinct from those linked to residence, leisure, and local life.

It is enlightening to consider the proportion of pupils not enrolled in their districted middle-school area in relation to the social profile of primary schools these pupils came from (figure 5). Whereas in Nanterre the extramunicipality enrolment figure seldom exceeds 20%, in more than half of Rueil's middle schools it is above that threshold. It is particularly clear that the highest level of avoidance of district middle school (close to 35%) occurs in primary-school zones drawing from the most privileged enrolment pool.

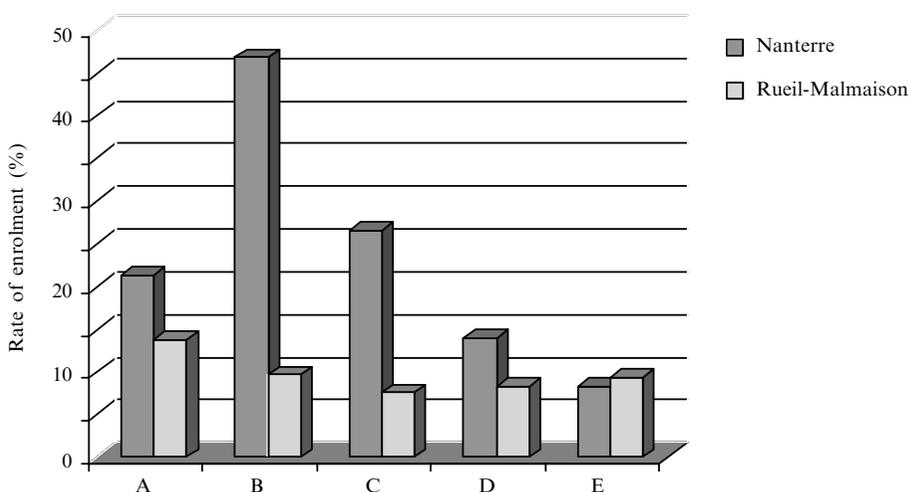


Figure 5. Extramunicipality middle-school enrolment (12–15 years) by parents' social category (for socioprofessional classification see figure 3) (source: INSEE–LASMAS, 1999 general census).

The score in such cases is particularly surprising because the middle schools in question are thought of as the most attractive in the city. Given the low rate of extramunicipality enrolment for upper-class children in Rueil, it is reasonable to hypothesize that some of them attend local private schools, either the highly selective or more standard-level ones. In diametric contrast, the primary school whose enrolment pool is the most markedly working class sends a great majority of its pupils to the district middle school, even though that school is the most sharply stigmatized in the city.

These results show that using extramunicipality enrolment as an indicator of practices of avoidance of district middle school is not in itself sufficient to account for the dynamics at work. Given the diversity of local public and private school supply in Rueil, and the social profile of the population, we can hypothesize that the types of logic characterizing school choice are internal rather than external. In this connection it can be said that, despite an overall less stigmatized school supply and a much lower level of extramunicipality enrolment than that in Nanterre, there is stronger school selectiveness in Rueil.

Comparing courses and programs available in the two cities brings to light profile differences. Whereas all Nanterre middle schools offer 'social electives' whose purpose is to combat scholastic failure and which tend to be aimed at pupils of disadvantaged social origin, only half of Rueil middle schools offer such electives. Meanwhile, it is clear that there are much richer foreign-language courses offered at Rueil middle schools for both ancient and spoken languages and bilingual or European study programs. This is not at all surprising; it seems simply to confirm the emphasis in Nanterre—a town that educates a high proportion of pupils of working-class and/or otherwise disadvantaged background—of specific arrangements for fighting scholastic failure. But, it also seems to show that the effort in this area was not accompanied as it was in Rueil by an increase in available courses and programs considered more selective, more 'distinguishing', more attractive to middle-class and upper-class families. Independently of other factors more directly linked to perception of the social environment, we can wonder about the effect of such inequalities in the supply of more selective electives (languages, among others) on school choice and enrolment practices of the middle and upper classes in Nanterre.

Conclusion

Analyses conducted at different territorial levels (the *département*, the *bassin scolaire*, the two municipalities, neighborhoods, subneighborhoods) confirm a strong hierarchical ordering of urban spaces which corresponds to contrasting local educational resource configurations. The best performing, most diversified, and most attractive school provision is concentrated in the most privileged urban spaces, while the most heavily working-class spaces have objectively less developed public and private educational resources, including courses and programs—in particular, fewer available ‘selective’ electives—while being subjectively widely disfavored. However, this dual view of the situation does not suffice to account for parents’ school-choice and enrolment practices. Much more complex dynamics emerge, which can be grasped and understood only if related to local contexts, as these are the social and spatial frameworks in which parents’ perceptions and actions make sense.

Middle-class and upper-class families living in neighborhoods with a strong working-class population are not the only ones to avoid their district middle school. As we have seen in this study, in which avoidance is considered in terms of extralocality enrolment, upper-class families in certain privileged localities strategize at scales that go well beyond the locality framework as early as middle school, even when their local schooling context seems fairly favorable.

In his 2003 study of London, Butler reaches similar conclusions, observing that the best-educated among the middle classes choose schools from within vaster urban areas and develop extremely fine strategies for ‘socially controlling’ local primary schools and the development of school facilities once a neighborhood has become selective enough to ensure ‘good enrolment’ (Butler and Robson, 2003). As in Madrid for the upper and middle classes (Fernandez Enguita, 2005), urban British families seem to turn to private schools as a strategy for avoiding working-class and immigrant populations. This practice is more developed in those countries than in France, where the *carte scolaire* (catchment-area system) allows for homogeneous enrolment in public middle schools situated in privileged neighborhoods.

In Amsterdam (Gramberg, 1998), as in the greater Paris metropolitan area, a discrepancy between residential and school segregation is observed: the second type of segregation is always more pronounced than the first, especially in socially mixed neighborhoods.

What social regularities may be discerned when the complexity of local configurations is taken into account?

- Only a few localities have both public and private schools with good reputations. When associated with privileged socioresidential profiles, these localities are able to maintain nearly all upper-strata middle-school pupils in their district schools.
- In all other cases (working-class localities without private middle schools, more privileged localities with or without private middle schools), the ability to exit local context (and thus to some degree to circumvent school-catchment-area regulations) is closely linked to family’s socio-occupational characteristics. Even in localities where the population of working-class residents is low, the upper classes are the least confined by the locality framework when it comes to enrolling their children in middle school. In several localities, between 40% and 60% of middle-school pupils from this type of family attend a middle school outside their locality of residence. Both markedly bourgeois localities and working-class, even sharply working-class, ones figure among those with the greatest differences in school choice between managers and blue-collar workers (ratios between 8 and 5).

One and the same practice—avoiding district middle school through extralocality enrolment—responds to different aspirations, in turn related to membership in different social categories and the relative effects of these by local socio-urban configuration.

- At the other extreme, children of working-class families are the least mobile; the vast majority attend their district middle school. It may be observed, however, that, when the middle and upper classes are well represented overall in such localities, they are more likely to enrol their children outside the locality.
- This leads us to specify the effect of school districting—ie the *carte scolaire* (which defines what public middle school may be attended as a function of residence location)—on social mix in middle school. Presented as the main measure for combating school segregation, this practice, according to the results presented here, has little impact on the practices of the middle classes and even less on the upper classes, who are least subject to spatial constraints. Working-class families, on the contrary, are assigned both to particular residence spaces (in the most dilapidated neighborhoods this assignation is linked to a strong sense of stigmatization) and to particular schools; the attendance-area system is much more effective in controlling *them*. This is the paradoxical effect of a measure aimed to work against social inequalities in school (social mix is assumed to attenuate social and scholastic differences among schools) but which is then applied in a highly unequal way that further privileges the most privileged classes. This does not mean that getting rid of the *carte scolaire* would equalize the educational playing field. Of course, many other factors limit the mobility of the working class (money, transport, key information, etc). A policy which aims to create social mix in public middle schools has to deal with all these factors. But these results raise some questions about maintaining the actual territorial boundaries of the *carte scolaire*. One way should be simultaneously to homogenize school provision in urban space, to redefine the scale of the catchment's area, and to give more mobility to disadvantaged people.⁽⁷⁾

The real impact of school districting can be grasped only in relation to the characteristics of neighborhoods, households, and local educational resources (including the presence or absence of private schools). While a nonnegligible number of pupils in Rueil living in school districts that feed into nonstigmatized public middle schools do turn to private schools, this is not so much to avoid a 'difficult' middle school as to accede to an excellent one in the local private sector. Highly relative microhierarchies may be constructed on the basis of families' discourse and practices, within which their perceptions of the spaces and populations in question combine with their evaluation of strictly academic performance as well as other criteria.

These aspects should also be seen in relation to localities that developed according to very different models, models which in turn affect the social and political identities of the two cities today and also, in a way, affect the influence of the ideological frameworks associated with them.

Nanterre remains deeply marked by the fact that it was populated by workers and immigrants in response to the economic boom after World War 2. The urban and social landscape of this city remains closely associated with this history and with that of the French Communist Party, which has been running it politically since the war. Nanterre developed as a 'red' suburb of Paris, and, despite the change in population in certain neighborhoods, the image of the city and a significant part of local policy are still structured by its vast public housing neighborhoods. Though the effect is difficult to assess, the heritage of the place did not work to attract the upper classes early on, despite

⁽⁷⁾ For more details about the limits of the actual policies and possible new programs to struggle against school segregation, see Oberti (2006).

their heavy presence in adjacent western Paris. More recently, an increased middle-class presence in the most highly favored neighborhoods has increased population-profile diversity and changed local political balances, to the detriment of the Communist Party, whose traditional electorate and scores shrink with each election.

These recent dynamics, and others, such as the vast Seine-Arche development project for extending La Défense, have put the themes of social mix and the arrival of the middle classes on the local political agenda. The stigmatizing of certain schools and the effects of this on middle-class school choice have also been raised as political issues today and are causing tension—the political stakes are so high. The Nanterre city government is confronted with a new demand—on the part of social classes whose influence on the city's political future can only increase—for school provision that will be competitive with that of other municipalities. Interviews currently conducted in the framework of a study of the middle classes and social mix nonetheless suggest that a part of that class in Nanterre, particularly families sending their children to public schools, has a relatively strong attachment to local policy in favor of the working classes, particularly for housing and for leisure and cultural activities. If so, this attenuates claims that the middle classes are tending to 'secede' from the working classes (at least in urban contexts where it is not a pure gentrification or urban-outskirts settlement phenomenon) or that there is desire for a radical change that would mainly benefit the middle classes. From this perspective, it is clear that local history—referring as it does to how the city came to be populated, its social and economic development, how it has been run politically and policy-wise—affects the structuring of social practices and representations of social mix today.

The development model for Rueil-Malmaison is radically different. Early on, the mayor established an urban development and settlement policy aimed to attract and accommodate the middle and upper classes. In contrast to Nanterre, where the entire city was structured by an ambitious public housing policy conceived on the classic social model of the red suburb, Rueil practiced a housing policy whose dominant focus and aim were mid-range, single-family housing and property acquisition. Rueil thus developed as a residential space, and sought to be attractive precisely to urban middle classes, promoting its pleasant living environment, facilities, and policies in favor of the family and children, not to mention its 'school patrimony'. Up against increased competition to be comparable with the best Paris schools (concentrated in arrondissements often inaccessible to middle classes with children), Rueil developed educational resources which attracted a nonnegligible number of people from these social strata and thus became a determinant factor in local policy and settlement. The town government proudly publicized the quality of its living environment and schools. Like other municipalities whose population has increased in the last ten years, Rueil-Malmaison has tended strongly to *embourgeoisement*, whereas the population in working-class suburbs of Paris (Nanterre) has decreased or stagnated.

It is hard to say whether a sort of intermunicipality competition is developing to attract certain social categories and insidiously keep out others, or what the place in such a strategy would be not only of housing policy but perhaps, increasingly, of school policy. In any case, the question raises problems for working-class suburban municipalities which—after thirty years of a policy for accommodating the most modest population groups, namely by massive construction of public housing—would now like to encourage more balanced settlement and induce greater social mix. Not only do they have to deal with the 'stigma' attaching to them after fifteen years of social and urban crisis, which makes them fairly unattractive to the middle and upper classes, they also have to compete against municipalities whose urban and social history makes it much easier to implement policy to attract these social classes.

Although certain urban contexts are characterized by sharply contrasted social and school characteristics—with on one side the wealthy neighborhoods of Sceaux and Neuilly and their middle schools, and on the other the vast public housing neighborhoods of working-class municipalities with a high proportion of immigrant families and stigmatized middle schools—a greater number of urban spaces are becoming more mixed, and these are characterized by more complex dynamics with regard to how the different social groups in them cohabit, collaborate, or avoid each other. It is surely by studying these contexts and situations more systematically that the social sciences will be able to shed greater and as it were more relevant light on a theme as ideologically charged as social mix.

In most neighbourhoods, the positions and images of primary and middle schools reflect each other in areas where highly local public and private school competition partakes of a complex hierarchical ordering that involves different spatial scales, different social groups' frameworks of perception, and different perceptions of the proper place of education. School environment is an essential component of the relation that families with children establish with their cities and neighborhoods. Urban (residential) space and school space fit together in complex ways and are intertwined in the production of social inequalities.

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