

Schooling and social exclusion in Romania

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Abstract:

The article discusses several levels on which education contributes to social inclusion and well-being in Romania. Using secondary survey and official data we analyze the evolutions of educational mobility in the last decades and theorize on the institutional and structural avenues of social stratification and inequality reproduction. Our main argument is that the post-1990 developments have deepened social inequalities in Romania, continuing a process of social polarization already started in the 80s, and the education system has been transformed accordingly as a mechanism of social selection and reproduction with little political concern for the inclusive potential of schooling.

Keywords: social inclusion, educational opportunities, social and educational mobility

Introduction¹

In the last 16 years Romanian society has become familiar with exclusion. Existing forms of limited citizenship had been brought to light while these and newer ones emerged and developed as dramatic consequences of economic and social restructuring. Policy makers and social scientists have acknowledged poverty, rural-urban development gaps, the plight of Roma, the problems of disabled people or abandoned children, of drug users and the homeless, and the list might go on. Social inequality have increased severely or, at least social mobility has lowered (Cârțână, 2000), and although official discourse is wary of using terms like ‘class’, conflict or interest, it is more than obvious that we are living in an heterogeneous society where access to the benefits of citizenship is unequal. Romanian policy has also recently adopted the language of ‘social exclusion’ as part of the discourse required by the European integration. Policies had been drafted to fight social exclusion in the last 7 years such as, for example in 2002 the left-wing government issued an “Anti-poverty and social inclusion plan” commissioning a governmental agency (CASPI, 2002) to monitor and asses its implementation. Little reflection was consumed however on the kind of society, in terms of patterns of stratification and mobility, Romania has been becoming since 1990.

Naturally, governments of any political orientation have used education as a tool and target in their attempt to achieve a more ‘just’ society, whatever ‘just’ means in this

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