16.

Including and excluding. Schools' reputations: students, families and choices

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INTRODUCTION

Schools are key institutions in shaping inclusion and exclusion processes impacting on individual identity and social mobility. If the promise of widening participation in education has brought educational opportunities for almost all, it is not true that those educational opportunities are the same. Increasingly, the quality of education matters more as a mark of distinction, and choosing a school that brings success has replaced the quest for access in the new educational markets. Attending a certain school can lead to good grades, instil appropriate values, allow entrance to or maintenance of desired social circles and foster life projects envisioned by many families. School choice (and, in particular, upper secondary school choice) is a decision based on several factors. Rational criteria, such as geographical proximity and affordability, are certainly weighty family concerns. Subjective aspects, however, such as school leadership, safety and tailored educational projects, also carry increasing value among families of all backgrounds. While choosing a school is currently a decision more in the hands of families, given the Portuguese demographic downturn and the excessive school supply, policies driven by territorialisation and evaluation have led schools to target specific audiences and to develop distinctive profiles that help parents recognise a school as a perfect match.

We therefore argue that reputation, a concept emerging from the sociology of art, can make a useful contribution in untangling the diverse criteria that guide educational options for parents and children. Based on six case studies of state and private schools, carried out in three contrasting settings, we provide an account of objective and subjective motivations leading to a given school preference in Portugal. The chapter begins with a contextualisation of educational policies in the global and national sphere; it then moves to a careful theoretical outline of the reputation construct, followed by an application of its features to the educational sector. After a brief methodological section, we illuminate the consensus and dissensus behind parents and children's motives, highlighting inclusion and exclusion processes. Concluding remarks then focus on the value of reputation in identifying generational gaps among families.

RECENT TRENDS IN EDUCATION

In contemporary Western societies, the extension of compulsory schooling to higher levels of education over recent decades reflects a political consensus about the benefits of providing advanced training for all. More education would contribute to more inclusive and less unequal societies.

Universal schooling means eliminating barriers when entering the system. But the literature has shown that massive access goes hand in hand with more sophisticated divides, now placed inside that same system. Differences between schools and their communities introduce diversity in a heterogeneous landscape and hierarchies of prestige and reputation emerge. Not all students have access to all schools, state or private. Inclusion and exclusion processes are at play and challenge democratic ideals on equity and equal opportunities.

On the other hand, the long-term enrolment of a larger number of students with different needs and expectations brings new challenges to schools, now facing contrasting demands. With the increased diversity of students, managing at a distance complex social spaces, such as today's schools, has become more difficult in centralised education systems (among which is the Portuguese). Territorialisation appears as a new paradigm in educational policies (van Zanten 2004; Barrère 2006). It means transferring higher levels of autonomy and management responsibility to the local scale, based on the assumption that stakeholders generate better solutions to problems directly affecting them. Thus, each school acquires an unprecedented relevance by becoming the core management pillar of the educational system.

The relevance of the local territory in educational policies is one of the factors that promotes the differentiation of the school world. If each school is supposed to deal with specific challenges, its educational project should be distinct from all the others.

This structural change puts schools under pressure. How to combine education for all with the need to meet the singularity of each one? In fact, the extension of compulsory education has widened the school world's "principles of justification" (Derouet 2000). In addition to those associated with the "civic world" (equal opportunities, education for all), which inspired the development of state education systems, other principles based on values such as expressiveness, effectiveness, and market have emerged in recent decades (van Zanten 2004, 51-52).

Following a larger international trend, market-based values have also penetrated the Portuguese educational system, promoting competition between schools (Afonso 2010; Almeida et al., 2017; Antunes 2008; Quaresma and Villalobos 2016). Two sets of conditions favour competition, according to van Zanten (2005): the decrease in the demand for education (either due to demographic factors, or to a sudden lack of interest in a specific educational offer); and the efforts, made by schools, to attract "the best" students (both academically and socially) (van Zanten 2005, 569). These two sets of conditions are not only present but intertwined in Portuguese society.

The sharp drop in fertility rates have affected the dynamics of the demand (Almeida 2005). With the student population decreasing, some authors argue that the former prevailing coordination of student flows through supply is now confronted with the growing influence of demand (Barroso and Viseu 2003; Antunes and Sá 2010). In turn, parents (seen as education "consumers"), are now more challenging. Since 2001, the annual release of school rankings, based on the students' performance in the national exams became, for parents and students, an important navigation tool in the increasingly more complex education system and a strategic instrument for comparison and competition between schools (Melo 2009). Good grades obtained in a school are a major factor in attracting students (Gouveia 2017).

Largely emphasised by contemporary educational policies, the principle of evaluation (of schools, of the quality of learning, of teachers' performance, etc.) appears thus as the other side of the autonomy coin (van Zanten 2004; Palhares 2014). Furthermore, evaluation is strongly linked to reputation, a word deriving from the -Latin *reputatio*, which means pondering, meditating, examining. "Defined in a minimal way, reputation is the result of a set of evaluations" (Chauvin 2013, 132). The concept is explored in the next section.

REPUTATION – SOME THEORETICAL REMARKS

The notion of reputation is present in various social fields and is part of the explanations produced by the social sciences about them. Economics and management (Colonomos 2013; Fombrun 2015; Menger 2013; Brown et al. 2006; Rao 1994), social psychology (Griskevicius, Tybur and van den Bergh 2010), and communication sciences (Cardon 2013), apply the notion of reputation to study such different subjects as the financial activity of States,

the evaluation of companies and products, or the practices of consumers and Internet users.

In sociology, reputation has been traditionally studied in association with the world of arts, culture and their industries (Becker 1982). In his pioneering work, Becker questions the approach of reputation as derived from innate characteristics of the artist, opposing it to the idea of reputation as a social construct and process. This theoretical assumption brings new insights. Firstly, reputations are the product of the collective activity of each specific network of interdependencies (social worlds) in which they act. Secondly, they depend on criteria established by critics/experts, by which the reputed entity can be distinguished and identified. Thirdly, being a social product – not a crystallised feature of the reputed entity – reputation has a historical and a situated dimension: it varies from time to time and from place to place. Lastly, visibility is an important aspect of reputation.

In line with the same theoretical approach, political sociologists such as Gary A. Fine (2007) have also explored the concept, namely within the analysis of political reputation. Beyond the social psychological claim that "reputation constitutes a moral *gestalt* that is linked to a person" Fine (2007, 3886) points out that they are also collective representations, enacted in relationships. His definition of reputation brings along the idea of recognition: it refers "to the existence of a socially recognised *persona*: an organising principle by which actions of a person (or group, organisation, or collectives) are linked into a common assessment (Fine 2007, 3886).

In addition to "recognition" (concerning the competence exhibited under a commonly shared convention), it is important to stress that the reputation-making process also includes the communicational manufacture of a name, "renown" (referring to the public visibility obtained by the reputed entity) (Borges 2014). These two aspects are well condensed in Chauvin's definition of the concept: "Reputation can be defined as a shared, provisional and located social representation, associated with a name and resulting from more or less powerful and formalised social evaluations" (Chauvin 2013, 132).

Embedded in social relations, reputation-making processes thus involve evaluation, judgements and communication. Interestingly, the debate on this topic may benefit from some of the arguments proposed by pragmatic sociologists. Boltanski and Thévenot's approach to the way individuals justify their actions to others, considers several logics ("cités") as points of support for "justification regimes"; that is, grammars used by individuals both for

justification and for critical purposes (Boltanski and Thévenot 1991). Those grammars, connected to repertories of pertinent objects for each "cité", constitute different "worlds". One of these – the "world of fame" – maintains a close proximity to the phenomena of reputation. According to the authors, this is a "world" whose greatness (celebrity) depends on the opinions of others – that is to say, it depends on the *number of people* who award their value and esteem to a person, group, or organisation. However, beings in the "world of fame" are "big" insofar as they differ" (Boltanski and Thévenot 1991, 223). This is why communication is so important: in order to become renowned, you have to make yourself known, have a name or, in the case of products, a mark (Boltanski and Thévenot 1991, 225). In other words, beings only attain greatness if greatness is made visible, if it can be viewed and compared by others.

One important point must be underlined. With communication being a crucial dimension of reputations, unequal access to visibility may promote inclusion-exclusion dynamics. As Becker cautions, not all potential reputed entities (in his analysis, artistic works) have the same visibility conditions vis-à-vis potential audiences, which affects the (differential) possibility to access reputation (Becker 1982, 362-364). Therefore, "the larger problem has to do not with what the reputation-making process selects, but rather with what it leaves out" (Becker 1982, 367).

In sum, working on reputation in sociology means addressing a set of different but complementary issues. It means accepting the social and relational nature of reputations, that is, to refuse essentialist approaches. It means identifying the criteria (the organising principles) for evaluating the competence with which a given reputation is associated (Cardon 2013). Moreover, it requires unravelling the "reputational work" that individuals, groups, organisations or collectives develop to create, maintain and extend control over their reputation – which can be manipulated (Colonomos 2013; Goffman 1982). Last, but not least, this theoretical construct implies determining the time and the spaces/arenas of a given reputation's circulation, namely the transferability of reputation associated with a name to other entities/contexts (Chauvin 2013).

SCHOOLS AND THEIR REPUTATIONS

The leading role of education in contemporary societies makes it relevant to extend the analysis of reputational processes to the school world itself.

Portugal is a particularly interesting case: the educational system displays a quite significant liberalisation of selection and admission procedures (except at higher education level), and "school market"/competition between schools seems to be taking important steps (Lima and Melo 2016; Tavares and Cardoso 2013). Furthermore, the annual release of rankings – hierarchy of schools based on the students' performance in the national exams – produced contrasted images: "trendy schools", on the one hand; "junk schools", on the other; the vast majority of schools in intermediate positions would be relatively untouched as far as their image is concerned (Antunes and Sá 2010, 106). This hierarchy gives most schools a margin for image improvement, but may also provoke criticism and resistance reactions to this kind of evaluation criteria (accused of not being truly "objective") – and reputation making (Barrère 2006; Melo 2009; Zoia 2009).

As stated before, reputations are a collective activity enacted in relationships. Therefore, the reputation of a school is a social process in which a large community (school authorities, teachers, staff, students, families, educational experts, and media) participates. Although the reputation-making process involves several scales of action, in a complex network of social relations – from the macro level (e.g. public policies, education experts) to the micro level (namely, schools, parents and students) – the latter is the one that best illustrates these complex dynamics. Acting in an interconnected local network of schools in comparison with each other (Barroso and Viseu 2003), the demand (understood as the number and the social attributes of parents and students) exerts a clear influence on the reputation of each of them.

However, it is important to realise that this demand has a shared nature (between students and parents) and, in upper levels of the education system, parents and adolescents do not always agree in their assessments (van Zanten 2004).

If reputation is defined as the attractive differential of a school (Costa and Koslinski 2011), the criteria and principles on which it is based vary – namely, according to the parents' educational priorities. Therefore, those criteria are plural, complex and diverse; and ambivalent, as they often involve objective and subjective dimensions.

Although a school reputation is composed of more than one attribute, using "school choice" criteria as a proxy to reputation criteria is a way to identify the main attractive differential revealed by parents or students. Some contributions to this topic, privileging adults' perspectives, have been put forward in the

literature. The perception of a safe and pleasant learning environment appears to be a key quality (mark) parents recognise in a "good school" (OECD 2015). Academic excellence (based on objective criteria, such as school performance and students' results) is for many parents another crucial aspect in building a school's reputation (Antunes and Sá 2010). The educational values promoted – either religion-centred, or secular, non-denominational inspired – are another factor (Quaresma 2014). Besides, criteria for assessing the attractiveness of a school vary according to specific teaching cycles. In primary schools, the principle of expressivity (meaning an individualised pedagogy, an enriched curricular offer allowing students' exploitation of skills), may be an important factor in parents' judgement; whereas in secondary schools, academic results can be a more valued principle (van Zanten 2009). Yet, research also points out that not all parents assign priority or relevance to the reputational evaluation when choosing a given school for their children (Antunes and Sá 2010); other pragmatic criteria such as home/school distance or the existence of collective transportation to school take the lead (Cordeiro 2014).

The distinctive quality (mark) that makes a school reputation also varies according to the student's perspective. Less explored in academic literature, the criteria and principles mobilised by students for assessing a school's reputation may match parental criteria but also diverge in dimensions not even considered by adults. Recent research on highly academic achieving students attending a local well-known secondary state school, revealed that the main reasons for choosing that particular school matched those their parents would presumably advocate – "demanding and quality teaching", "school prepares well for higher education" and "good learning environment" (Torres 2014, 37). However, taking into account sociological literature on adolescents (Breviglieri and Cicchelli 2007; Cavalli, Cicchelli and Galland 2008; Pappámikail 2013), other kinds of reasons may also be envisaged. Friends moving to the same school, "youth tribes" present at a given school, or the degree of autonomy and freedom of circulation awarded may be important criteria for assessing a particular school's attractiveness.

In any case, closely linked to evaluation, reputation leads to classification – and thus, to a hierarchy of beings, objects or institutions. In the case of schools, differentiated reputations promote, simultaneously, integration and exclusion. In fact, the higher the school's attractiveness, the greater the ability to select and exclude candidates. Exclusion barriers at the entrance reinforce, for the elected ones, the sense of belonging to a privileged learning community.

This chapter discusses "school reputation", by exploring school actors' narratives about the subject. Contrasting the voices of students with those of parents, an in-depth analysis of the criteria for evaluating the competence a given reputation is associated with is carried out. What is the organising principle that underlies the identification of a school's "reputation"? What (informational) resources do individuals use to access the reputation of a school? Given the shared nature of demand, do adults (parents) and adolescents (students) choose the same criteria in establishing a school's reputation? Do the same reputational criteria mean the same for everyone? These are the theoretical questions guiding the empirical analysis undertaken in the next parts of the chapter.

METHODOLOGY

Considering the relational, contingent (in time and space) and largely subjective dimensions of reputation, an inductive approach and a qualitative methodology are the most appropriate ways to empirically approach the criteria and principles behind it.

Data presented in this chapter is drawn from interviews conducted with parents and from focus groups organised with students[1] of six Portuguese secondary schools. They are part of a larger research project commissioned by the Gulbenkian Foundation carried out by a team at the ICS/ULisboa (2014--2016) (Almeida et al. 2017). Against the backdrop of a serious financial crisis and the external intervention of the so-called Troika (a group formed by the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund), this study aimed at answering a question: how were non-higher education schools managed and who paid for them in Portugal?

This chapter is based on the qualitative phase of the project, giving parent and student voices a prominent place.

Six schools, publicly or privately run, offering secondary education were selected in the continental part of the country, illustrating distinct educational contemporary tendencies in the Portuguese system. It's worth mentioning that 3 types of school are available in Portugal: state, private and charter

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1   Focus group students were appointed by the school director. For ethical reasons, we do not indicate their school of origin to guarantee their absolute anonymity.

schools. State schools, ensuring free education from elementary school to upper secundary and more open to social diversity, are largely predominant: in 2016, they account for 88% in the elementary level and 72.8% in upper lower/secondary levels.

Two schools are located in the Lower Mondego region (the Mondego state School and the White private religious School), three in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area (the Tejo state School, the Blue private religious School and the Green private secular School), and one in the Central Alentejo area (the Montado state School). The first region is characterised by having an excessive supply of private education. Diversity in types of educational offers is at its maximum in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area, offering a complete "school market". In the Central Alentejo, a rural and depopulated area, the study case was carried out at the Montado state school, the only available upper secondary educational offer in the municipality. Although the parents interviewed were middle class and particularly active in educational issues (they are all members of Parents' Associations), social criteria were not decisive in the sample. School selection was based on the existence/absence of a local educational market. Yet, pupils access to the three private schools of the sample is restricted by family financial resources, even in the case of charter schools, since funded classes are increasingly smaller.

Although initially chosen due to their appropriateness for the above-mentioned research problems, these six schools are also particularly suitable for a study focused on school reputation issues. Using published school ranking lists as a proxy for an objective dimension of reputation, some of the six schools are placed in the top 10, the others being in intermediate scale positions (*Público* 2017). None of them is in the lower positions, commonly considered "junk schools" (Antunes and Sá 2010).

In each of these schools, individual interviews were conducted with parents appointed by the parents' associations or by the school director (8 parents interviewed). In parallel, focus groups were organised with students, boys and girls from 9th and 12th grade (24 students). Due to ethical requirements (protection and confidentiality of students, selected by school directors), pupils are not institutionally identified. General topics related to management and financing of schools were the core of the inquiry, but it also included other questions – the reasons for choosing the current school being one of them. The analytical exploration of this topic will be the focus of the next point.

IDENTIFYING REPUTATION CRITERIA: PARENT AND STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

What (informational) resources do individuals use to access the reputation of a school? Parents and students identify two main sources of information: objective (published school rankings) and subjective ones (word of mouth information obtained from family, friends and other social relations).

The publication of lists of schools according to their academic performance seems to have quite an impact on students. Considering themselves the "elected ones", they embody the idea of the transferability of a reputation (Strathdee 2009; Quaresma 2014) – in this case, from school as a reputation entity to themselves, as part of its community.

> This school is held in high regard. [Isabel, private school]

> It's because our school has always been at the top of the state rankings. [Joana, state school]
> We are always well placed in the rankings. [João M., private school]

In what probably seems to be a shared conversation issue in the family, parents also use ranking lists, and compare national results in order to assess the competence of a certain school. But this criterion is not the predominant one, as discussed later:

> We had another question … it was one of the issues that the parents spoke about: grades. (…) What happens is that parents compare (academic results). [Parents' association representative, Tejo (state) School]

> I can tell you that the standards here are very high (…) and it is proved by the results that the kids get in the examinations. [Parents' association representative, White (private) School]

But much more than lists, parents and students rely on other different sorts of information to obtain and to validate a school's reputation. Rumours, "this continuing flow of information, sometimes erroneous, disseminated by parents about the daily life of schools" (Barrère 2006, 100), as well as more experience-based information (e. g. the former experience of family members as students, peer advice or friends' recommendations) are the main sources used to access the reputation of a school:

> And my uncle attended (this school) a few years ago. And my cousins too … My dad attended until Y12. And my brothers also study here. [Sofia, private school]

> Yes, I came to this school because my brothers studied here. They said it was good, and I decided to come here as well. [Miguel, state school]

> Yes, I had very good references about [the school] … from friends who came from our former school, or from other schools, that we know and usually talk about this school with. They say good things … they say good things about the environment, the people, the teachers, the teaching methods… [Manuel, state school]

> I came to this school because they had already told me it was very good … It was my mother. A friend of hers said her daughter was studying here. So, she [said], "this school is very good" [Laura, state school]

Now the question is: what is considered as a "good school"? What is the organising principle that underlies the identification of a school's "reputation"? Given the shared nature of demand, do parents and students agree on the same criteria? Or, alternatively, due to the distinct social identity they hold (adult/adolescent), does reputation mean different things for each of them?

For families in the sample, the school's reputation is indeed one of the main elements presiding over school choice. However, that attribute is far from being based on a single aspect. It seems to be rather composed of various organising principles, despite acquiring different relevance according to the local context (urban/strong school market vs. rural/weak school market).

Even considering the constraints imposed by the available range of options and economic capacity, the brand of a school is crucial when opting for upper secondary education. And what contributes to that "name"? Regardless of the private-state nature of the school, parents and students agree that both scientific and pedagogical criteria, such as the type of courses the school offers, good results in national exams and the quality and stability of its teaching staff are key components in building attractiveness:

> Why do parents put their children here? Because of school quality. And why does the school have quality? Because of its teaching staff. And why is our teaching staff so esteemed? Because it's stable. This was the conclusion that we reached. [Parents' association representative, Tejo (state) School]

Why do parents come here? They come here for several reasons. They come here because of the results that the children achieve, they come here for the education given to the children. (…) This really is (…) a different type of education. [Parents' association representative, White (private) School]

In the case of this particular school, I believe (students) choose it because of the subject field they would like to pursue in upper secondary. I believe that when they go to (X, main city in the area), they go to areas that they do not have here. [Parents' association representative, Montado (state) School]

I came here in my 5th year. My parents put me here (…). They chose this school because – in rankings, in terms of grades – it is very successful. [Isabel, private school]

[Another reason] is the prestige that this school has in the city. Good things are always said about the school, the teaching methods, the school environment, the atmosphere among the students, among the teachers… [João, state school]
I came to this school because I was told that it was very good, which is great: "This school is very good. People are awesome, the teachers…" It has gone down a bit recently but, before that, our school was always at the top of the state school rankings.
[Laura, state school]

In fact, time seems to be a key factor in establishing a school's reputation. This is relational and, as such, time is required to build recognition for the teachers' scientific and affective work. Leadership, connected with communication ability, is also mentioned by parents:

And then there is another factor here – you will certainly agree with me, that is, who is in charge, who is the boss…The pyramid effect, right? We knock on that door (the door of the school director), and she receives us. And this says it all. The commitment is full. I'm glad we chose her. (…) She is clearly a winner regarding this. She listens, she is not a boss. She is a leader, however, and uncontested. All this impacts on choices. [Parents' association representative, Tejo (state) School]

The greatest feedback I get from this school is not from the parents, it's from the school director. She is a person that, when I'm working on some activity is the first to congratulate me or encourage me to do more: "when are you going to do another?" (…) I have no doubt that these organizations need strong leadership to work. Teachers may act collectively

through unions, they can do whatever they want, and have autonomy to decide on programmes. If they have a bad leader in charge, however, the school doesn't work. [Parents' association representative, White (private) School]

However, contrastingly, school leadership is clearly not an issue for students when talking about school reputation. Rather, much more valued than stability (meaning the possibility of developing coherent, long-term academic work with students, as the parents seem to favour), the relational, affective quality of (some) teachers (meaning recognition of each student's uniqueness and the capacity of acting as "significant others") takes over when adolescents assess the criteria of a school reputation:

Sometimes, if I don't want to talk to my parents, I can talk to my ballet teacher. And even with some other teachers. I have known them for several years and I have a close relationship with some of them. [Teresa, private school]

Ah, I think this (school) has a very good atmosphere. Most of the students always do well and try to integrate us (the newcomers) to the fullest. And in relation to the teachers, most of them, most of the teachers, we get along well with. There is a small minority with whom we cannot establish such a strong relationship, but, still… [Manuel, state school]

The relational asset indeed appears as a central dimension, from the students' point of view. Not only teachers, but peers (a typical asset in a youth population) are key to qualifying a school:

I do not have siblings, but I remember that, at that time, I wanted to come to this school, because my classmates and friends were also coming. So very … cool! [Maria, private school]

I have a school in front of my house – right in front – but I prefer to come here because I like this school, the way the school works, and my friends. [Serafim, state school]

If the director is the face of the school, the educational project also plays a role in developing a school's distinctiveness, in the sense that it signals ideological values that may or may not match the parental ethos. That is why parents refer to it frequently, and students don't:

> This school has a tutorial system, close relationships, and an individual approach to learning. That is something parents also appreciate. [Parents' association representative, Green (private) School]

> It's the same freedom that Jesus gives us, the one that we want to convey in this school. The school does not impose, it proposes…proposals that cannot be refused! … [Parents' association representative, Blue (private) School]

The educational project is used as a tool to support the school's character. But this is far more common in private schools than in state ones, which, following the central state mission of providing lay education to diverse children, are more limited in developing tailored projects. In fact, distinctiveness in private schools is their "mark", built on a singular, educational "niche", in contrast with state schools, which have long been dedicated to providing a universal, common public service. However, a strong defined character may sometimes cause conflict and lead to misunderstandings with families who chose that school for other purposes:

> Sometimes that happens here. There are some conflicts, some people come here for success and not for culture. I think such conflicts need to be solved by the families themselves. If there is a specific educational project, people sign a consent form, when enrolling, accepting the rules of this establishment. If they do so, they cannot then go against these rules. It's a bit like this: children have rituals, they have religious celebrations, and all the class attends. [Parents' association representative, White (private) School]

Hence, competing values may coexist in the same school project, and while success is a goal for all parents, the many different paths to achieve it are not all inclusive, without taking families with distinct values into account. The result is the homogenisation and closure of the school community: including some, excluding others.

Along with educational concerns, parents and youngsters also care for the way a school meets individual logistical needs, namely timetable and geographical convenience – the latter being particularly important in non-urban contexts:

> The timetables are good. It's true, classes are very concentrated [in the morning] at school, and afternoons are free. It has better timetables than the other school down there, it always has! [Parents' association representative, Mondego (state) School]

The school/home distance. There is transport, there are connections for this school [Parents' association representative, Montado (state) School]

I chose this school because it was close to my house. I live within fifteen minutes' walk from here. [João, state school]

Regarding timetables, one of the schools in our study even established special timetables to allow professional sports' practice, show a willingness to cater for particular student needs.

On the other hand, a growing cause of concern for families is their children's safety. The school is their main socialising space and all sorts of encounters are possible inside it. Therefore, the school environment must reassure parents:

Parents put their children here because they look for security. My personal interest is also the collective interest of the school, which is, to know who my children are with… [Parents' association representative, White (private) School]

We have children that come from private schools. They get out of those schools, some for economic reasons, and look for this school because it is clearly the most similar to what they are used to. They don't go to other schools, they want to come here. The social class that you see here is higher than in other schools, right? And that makes all the difference. [Parents' association representative, Tejo (state) School]

Regarding security, private schools (at least, those included in this research) seem to offer additional controlling rules positively evaluated by parents, as referred to by students

My parents put us here mainly for safety reasons. It has security systems, it has locks… they find a way to control us here. [João M., private school]

We are in a dome here…no, inside a bubble! [Manuel, private school]

The parental demand for security and safety is then constituted as an argument to exclude many others, considered "undesirable" in the school environment, due to their different socio-economic status, behaviour or values. Parents want to keep their children safe from a presumably dangerous

world. Not surprisingly, the security issue is not shared by pupils, who label it as "controlling" and even "imprisoning". In fact, young students show quite ambivalent feelings towards control: on the one hand, they agree that it is a legitimate parental concern; on the other hand, they feel that this aspect limits their willingness to explore outside spaces without adult control, as a legitimate adolescent aspiration:

> No, that's the way it is… I think that, for example, the youngest, the little ones (…) cannot go out alone, but we think we (the eldest) could have a little more freedom.
> [Tiago, private school]

> Anyway, it was a change of scenery (from private school to this state school) and it's important, because I was always in an environment that I think was a bit closed. We used to say we were in a bubble. And it was a bit true. We did not have much freedom, even at school, and sometimes we were a little disgusted by it. Because sometimes, in adolescence, we want … to be ourselves. [Tomás, state school]

Schools can be spaces for social vigilance and exclusion, as Foucault once advocated (Foucault 1975). However, as much as state schools are perceived as more inclusive, they can also exclude students by not paying attention to their particular educational needs – a key attribute in primary education for most parents. Reputation criteria can be thus identified in contrast to what a school should not be, as expressed by the following mother:

> [In his first year], my son went to a state school, but after three months, the result was terrible. He had a teacher that at Christmas still didn't know his name, didn't know his face, and there were good teachers in that school. And so, at the end of the first term, my son was characterized as someone having learning difficulties by not being able to count to ten, when he had left kindergarten knowing all the basic numbers. [Parents' association representative, White (private) School]

Although the state schools mission is to provide education for all, they cannot guarantee personal attention for every pupil and, in certain cases, private education appears as a more inclusive option. In rural environments, however, some small size state schools act similarly to private ones, in providing close attention to its population's individualised needs. From the parents' perspective, this capacity may well compensate for the lack of other

assets (e. g. good facilities, diversity of educational offer) related to the absence of a local school market:

> What defines success, nowadays, are results, unfortunately – or fortunately for some things (…) -, but of course, this school has a great advantage: it is a small school, compared to many others. As it is a small school, obviously, the teaching staff is stable; it has been here for many years (…). Of course, not everything is perfect, but there are many good teachers here in this school. [Parents' association representative, Montado (state) School]

Although parents and children identify mostly the same criteria as pieces of the school reputation puzzle (convenience, security, quality of content and values), they can take on different meanings, and/or provoke divergent intergenerational attitudes. As noticed before, a reputation has a relational dimension, in the sense that word of mouth and perception of peers counts a lot in the judgement students themselves make about their own choices. But reputation is also positional, an attribute that is more visible in rankings, which students interpret as solid evidence of the quality of a school, when compared to others. However, parents in our study endorse a more critical opinion on these results, even questioning the criteria used in data collection:

> Some schools have a renewed infrastructure and appear in rankings with great results, but we know that their students have a lot of private tutoring outside the school [Parents' association representative, Mondego (state) School]

> The rankings, you know, compare a student from one social background with a student from a different social background… They compare a school that has Maths, Portuguese and French with another school that has Maths, English and Japanese (…). Some include the seven disciplines that students attend, others just include the three specific ones that allow them to enter higher education…all newspapers grab the same data and use them applying totally different methodologies (…) but in the end, the message that comes out is the message that remains, do you understand? [Parents' association representative, White (private) School]

Although the Ministry of Education does not publish official league tables, the press produces rankings based on the results of school exams and other data (such as the socio-economic status of pupils and retention rates). They provide a quick overview of what a successful school is, as if the "quantification" of

such a subjective and shifting variable as reputation was the decisive element that appeals to students (and to the other audiences as well). Being at the top necessarily excludes those that are at the bottom, and rankings operationalise the hierarchy every evaluation process entails.

FINAL REMARKS

Universal education and longer schooling trajectories for all are main gains in Western societies. They are a right for all. Meanwhile, the democratic openness of the system at the entrance has been associated with an enlargement of the social or cultural range of children and young people now attending school. The inner diversity of pupils poses a new question for schools: how to deal with it?

Two tendencies have been favoured by national policies. Territorialisation, on the one hand, has transferred a number of areas and management authority from the central State to schools, embedded in certain social contexts and now benefiting from some degrees of autonomy. Placed at the centre of the system, schools face the injunction to become particular and unique, to discover and reveal their attractive differential, a shift indeed reinforced by the increasing importance of market values and the emergence of competitive scenarios. Against the backdrop of a severe fertility drop, under pressure to maintain or to enlarge their population, competition between them is critical. On the other hand, quality evaluation procedures (under public scrutiny) have been imposed as common routines. Building a reputation has turned out to be a priority. This concept, traditionally used by sociology in reference to the world of arts and cultural industries, can be an interesting tool to explore territorial and social dynamics in the school system. School choice is very often dependent on the reputation a school is able to gain in a territorial recruitment area.

With Becker (1982), we advocated that reputation, applied to schools, is a social and relational construct, engaging networks of actors such as families, peers and media embedded in local settings. More qualified and informed parents, the influence of peer groups and of word of mouth forms of communication allied to the annual display of national rankings by the media put pressure on schools to stand out from the whole. Following pragmatic sociologists (Boltanski and Thévenot 1991), we enter the "world of fame" in

full, as reputation mostly involves information and subjective judgements, expectations or ideals.

But families are not homogeneous. We can anticipate that their capacity to be informed and to engage successfully in the school game, closely associated with their social origins, is very different. Territorialisation, therefore, has certainly contributed to reinforce social inequalities between those who have and those who have not the needed informational resources and a wide range of educational offers to choose from. Meanwhile, even if school choice seems to proceed from a shared decision between parents and their children, they very often diverge in the prioritisation of criteria that define a "good school". Giving voice to students evidenced generational differences. Overall, complex and subtle inclusion/exclusion processes are deployed at the local level, between differently reputed private and state schools, and even between state schools themselves. The exclusion tendency is at its peak in densely populated urban centres where a school market truly exists (the cases of Lisbon and Coimbra in our sample). And it reaches its minimum in the depopulated ageing countryside (the case of the southern Central Alentejo).

The school reputation analysis in this chapter aimed at answering two main questions: how is relevant information gathered by parents and students? And which criteria makes a school's reputation?

Using school choice rationales as a proxy for reputation criteria led us to outline the standards that make schools visible for their audiences. For parents, it's the scientific and pedagogical quality, along with a stable and available teaching body, that founds a school's recognition. The identification of a differentiated school project is a criterion that is used to select, more than to attract, as private school cases have illustrated, in contrast to state schools that are constrained to follow widening participation values that suit a vast majority of social groups. For pupils, a specific educational project is not mentioned as a premise for reputation, although teaching quality is a must. Logistical concerns are also shared by parents and students, since they enable the performance of complementary educational and leisure activities that would otherwise be impossible. The greatest intergenerational cleavage emerges around the security issue, regarded as a priority for parents but considered as a constraint for young people, who feel deprived of their autonomy (patent in the daily liberty of leaving school unattended, for instance). Finally, while parents occasionally refer to rankings, but in a rather critical way, recalling that private tutoring and diverse methodologies make their results not so

trustworthy, rankings are perceived by young people as visible evidence of the quality of a school.

Universal school access would apparently depict an equalitarian landscape. However, even if social divides are not so sharp at the main entrance gate, fine cleavages are progressively introduced inside the system, with institutional differentiation operating as a segregation tool. As shown, "school choice" (certainly limited to certain territories and groups) based on school reputation serves as a strategic observatory to describe and explain inclusion/exclusion phenomena, which shape contemporary societies.

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