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To cite this article: Anne Schippling & Pedro Abrantes (2022): Analysing biographies in transnational educational spaces: transitions to higher education of alumni from an IB school in Lisbon, *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, DOI: [10.1080/14767724.2022.2049710](https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2022.2049710)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2022.2049710>



Published online: 07 Mar 2022.



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# Analysing biographies in transnational educational spaces: transitions to higher education of alumni from an IB school in Lisbon

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## ABSTRACT

Taking the example of educational biographies of alumni of an IB World School in the Lisbon region, the article aims to explore the potential of the concept of transnational educational spaces for biographical research. We focus on the biographical stage of transition to higher education as a crucial phase of students' biographies where we can observe constructions, reconfigurations and passages between (transnational) spaces. Our results show a bias to the British system at the transition to higher education, which also has implications for regarding the IB schools as transnational educational spaces.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 20 October 2021  
Accepted 1 March 2022

## KEYWORDS

Biographical research;  
transition; transnational  
educational space;  
international education;  
Portugal

## Introduction

The analysis of biographies embedded in transnational contexts challenges research approaches and instruments that are oriented towards methodological nationalism. For researching transnational biographies, the concept of 'transnational social space' as a relativist concept of space (Pries 1999, 2008) was already used as theoretical instrument based on a link of approaches of transmigration and a theory of biography (e.g., Apitzsch 2003, 2009; Siouti 2013; Apitzsch and Siouti 2014). This link is based on a critique of methodological nationalism and oriented in a research programme of transnationalisation (e.g., Khagram and Levitt 2007; Pries 2010; Keßler and Szakács-Behling 2020; Schippling and Keßler 2021).

This article proposes a reflection on the concept of 'transnational educational space', which was developed on the basis of the concept of 'transnational social space' concerning its fecundity for researching young people's biographies in the contemporary world. In this regard we take the example of educational biographies of alumni of an IB World School; these are part of a qualitative empirical research project on international schools in the Lisbon region, which were being investigated for the first time. The same students were interviewed in form of group discussions at upper-secondary level in international schools and up to two years after their transition to higher education, based on biographical narrative interviews. We focus on the transition from secondary to higher education as a biographical stage with a special potential for constructions, reconfigurations and passages between (transnational) spaces. We respond here to a research deficit in transitions in biographies of actors of international schools, where hitherto very little research exists (e.g., McLachlan 2007; Hayden 2012; Pollock, Van Reken, and Pollock 2017; Keßler and Schippling 2019; Krüger et al. 2019; Poole and Bunnell 2021).

Firstly, the concept of ‘transnational educational space’ is discussed theoretically, exploring the case of the transnational educational organisation International Baccalaureate® and the IB World Schools. In the following, it is considered in its relation with biographical research. Thirdly, it is used to analyse educational biographies of alumni from an IB World School in Lisbon, focusing on their transition to the higher education sector. Finally, we provide some concluding remarks on IB schools as transnational educational spaces from the perspective of national power relations and world inequalities.

## International schools as transnational educational spaces?

In the context of research in transmigration, especially on the example of work migration between Mexico and the United States, Lugder Pries (1998, 136) established the concept of ‘transnational social space’, which he defines as ‘a hybrid product of identificational and social-structural elements of the region of origin and the region of arrival, between which they span plurilocally and permanently’. That means that these social spaces are not identical to geographic spaces; in one geographical space, for example the territory of a nation state, more transnational social spaces can exist, and, at the same time, a transnational social space can embrace multiple geographic spaces. This concept of space is a relativist concept (see also Löw 2001) which differs from an absolutist concept of space, which is based on an idea of space as ‘coherent and contiguous geographical “containers”’ (Pries 2008, 5). Khagram and Levitt (2004, 26) observe against this background that the categories of local, regional, national and global cannot be considered as ‘automatic, taken-for-granted social arenas’ but ‘as constructed and contested social facts’. Pries (2010, 29–30) differentiates transnational phenomena, depending on their density, steadiness and importance in transnational ‘social relations’, ‘social networks’ and ‘social spaces’. Transnational social spaces, such as the life context of a transnational family, have the highest degree of duration and density. In a family, where the relations of its members located in different places have reached such a degree of intensity that they constitute the principal reference point of the everyday life of the family members – manifesting in social practices, symbol systems and the use of artefacts – they constitute a transnational social space.

Focusing on socialisation processes in ‘transnational social spaces’, Adick (2005) proposed an elaborate definition of the concept of transnational educational space for the first time, which was later developed by herself (Adick 2018) and other researchers (e.g., Waters and Brooks 2011; Brooks, Fuller, and Waters 2012; Hornberg 2014, 2018; Schippling 2018). Adick (2005, 264) defines a ‘transnational educational space’ as a ‘generic term for three aspects of transnationalisation in the education sector’: (1) a transnational educational space is based on and, at the same time, reinforces transnational convergences that are manifesting in worldwide isomorphic structures in education (e.g., Meyer et al. 1977; Meyer, Kamens, and Benavot 1992; Hornberg 2014), often supported by a regional or global ‘agenda’ for education (Dale 2000; Teodoro 2003); (2) a transnational educational space can emerge from cross-border educational processes of mobile social actors in transnational social spaces (Adick 2005; Hornberg 2014) and (3) these spaces can be constituted by educational offers from transnational organisations such as international curricula and a diploma (Adick 2005, 2018; Hornberg 2018). We understand the transnational educational space as a specific transnational social space determined by cross-border educational phenomena. Following the definition developed by Adick (2005, 2018), Hornberg (2018) and Keßler (2020) we assume that these transnational spaces can be constituted through transnational organisations and their educational offers, social actors and also practices, symbols and artefacts.

A prominent example for an organisation that provides transnational educational offers – and for that reason could constitute transnational educational spaces – is the International Baccalaureate®. This non-profit foundation was founded in 1968 with its headquarters in Geneva and offers internationally compatible curricula and university entrance qualifications (the IB) which are recognised by a growing number of educational establishments in the higher education sector

worldwide. The IB can be understood as an organisation that is ‘uniquely transnational’ because the curricula and diploma ‘do not represent any specific national education system’ (Adick 2018, 130; see also Doherty 2018). Its mission is clearly oriented towards fostering attitudes and values such as international mindedness, global citizenship and intercultural understanding (IB 2022).

IB schools are usually attended by students of many different nationalities and the diversity in culture and language of the student population has grown over time (Hayden and Thompson 2008; Hayden 2011, 2012). To deal with this diversity, it is expected that teachers in international schools develop global competencies such as intercultural sensitivity and open-mindedness (Cushner and Mahon 2009; Hayden and Thompson 2011; Van Werven 2015; Levy and Fox 2015). There is a general orientation towards hiring teachers with ‘transnational biographies’ who are fluent in multiple languages, and to promote the circulation of staff among countries (Cushner 2007; Hayden and Thompson 2008, 2011; Van Werven 2015; Rey, Bolay, and Gez 2020).

To introduce a biographical perspective and, especially, to observe the transition to higher education of IB graduate students is important to such a discussion, since it enables an examination of how concrete experiences in transnational educational spaces forge (and also constrain) life pathways and projects, and how such spaces are related (or not) to each other and to local and national institutions. Powerful trends towards internationalisation in higher education institutions during recent decades will be taken into account, to the point that some of them may also be considered ‘transnational educational spaces’, according to the previous definitions. Still, they are not part of the IB system and many of them are rooted in specific national sociohistorical and institutional systems. Further, their proximity to labour markets also entails some national bias, especially in certain fields (for instance, medicine, law, etc.). Since one of the key assumptions of the IB system is to provide an educational experience that facilitates mobility around the world, a vital issue is to observe the ability of its graduate students to actually embrace different higher education institutions worldwide and succeed in them.

## Transnational educational spaces and biographical research

Life histories are a powerful means to explore social contexts and changes, stressing how structural patterns forge (and are forged by) human experience (e.g., Bertaux and Kohli 1984; Chamberlayne, Bornat, and Wengraf 2000; Goodson 2001; Nurse and O’Neill 2018), and yet this approach remains seldom used in the analysis of aspects related to transnational education. Acknowledging a large spectrum of theoretical and methodological orientations linked to biographical research, we find Lahire’s (2003, 2011) theoretical framework particularly useful, enabling analysis of the individual’s ability to develop plural dispositions in distinct life fields, vis-à-vis the risks of crisis and ruptures in their socialisation process.

In the context of biographical research, the concept of ‘transnational education spaces’ can be understood as a heuristic analytical concept for analysing biographies embedded in transnational schooling contexts (e.g., Siouti 2013; Kessler and Schippling 2019; Kessler 2020). The research of transnational biographies challenges traditional migration approaches (e.g., Gordon 1964; Esser 1980) and requires a critical perspective on methodological nationalism which assumes that the nation or the state is the ‘natural’ and primary reference unit of research (e.g., Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003; Beck 2007; Pries 2008). The biography of persons who are participating in transnational spaces, and therefore being plurilocal in different contexts, and related simultaneously to more than one society, cannot be adequately analysed with a research design that is based on the idea of migration as a linear movement between nation states as geographical containers.

The analysis of biographies in transnational educational spaces, for example international schools, can be considered as a challenge for biographical research. In order to analyse transnational biographies, there is a need to connect approaches of transnationalisation with a theory of

biography (e.g., Apitzsch 2003, 2009; Siouti 2013; Apitzsch and Siouti 2014). It can be assumed that the transnational social space materialises in a migration biography ‘which, simultaneously, is produced through the biographical work of migration subjects and always reconstructed’ (Apitzsch 2003, 65; see also Siouti 2018). Apitzsch and Siouti (2014, 20) understand biographies as ‘sites of transnational social spaces’ – underlining a topographical dimension of biographies – in which the transnational biographical knowledge (Alheit and Hoerning 1989; Hanses 2018; Dausien and Hanses 2017) is piled up. In this way, the biographical approaches can be linked to sociology of knowledge, which allows biographies to be understood less as an ‘authentic’ expression of the subjects and more as a ‘socialised subjectivity’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Apitzsch and Siouti (2014, 20) understand biography in this context as ‘a point of intersection between collective constitution and individual construction’. A reconstructive empirical access to biographical knowledge – understanding knowledge as a central object of biographical research – allows the ambiguity to be grasped which results from the manifestation of structural dimensions in biographies and its specific subjective processing (Hanses 2018, 253). Transnational experiences are stored as transnational biographical knowledge which is used for the continued construction of a transnational biography and, at the same time, enables the capacity to position oneself in transnational spaces (Apitzsch and Siouti 2013, 103).

With reference to these approaches that aim to link approaches of transmigration with theory of biography, we focus on biographies in educational contexts – in this case biographies of alumni from IB World Schools – applying the concept of ‘transnational educational spaces’ to biography analysis (Keßler 2020). Understanding international schools as transnational educational spaces (see also Adick 2005, 2018; Hornberg 2018) in which people move, have experiences and interact with others, Keßler (2020, 191) implies understanding a transnational educational space as a ‘conjunctive experience space’ in the sense of Mannheim (1982). The biography of students from international schools, as a ‘concrete “document” of a general – in the sense of a collectively shared – social-historic history’ (Alheit 2010, 227), can be a site of constitution and reconfiguration of transnational educational spaces.

## **Biographies as sites of transnational educational spaces: examples of alumni from an IB World School in Lisbon**

### ***Research field and methodology***

In the following section we present some results of an analysis of educational biographies of seven internationally mobile students. We interviewed them up to two years after their transition from an IB World School in the Lisbon region to higher education (or VET), aged between 19 and 21. The analysis of these interviews is part of a broader postdoctoral research project that also comprises students from other schools with different international profiles in the Lisbon region.<sup>1</sup> In general, the students have a high socio-economic family background as this IB school, which is private, charges school fees between 17,000 and 21,000 euros per year (not supported by the state) which represent the highest fees for schools with an international profile in the Lisbon region (Schippling, Abrantes, and Lopes 2020, 123) and above the total income of two-thirds of the households in the country ([www.pordata.pt](http://www.pordata.pt)).

There is a growing trend of IB schools in Portugal, especially since 2000, both in the number of schools and of students. Currently, there are 13 IB World Schools – accredited by the International Baccalaureate® – all of them belonging to the private educational sector, not financed by the state, with ten of them located in the Lisbon region. The IB diploma is recognised by the Portuguese Ministry of Education since 1998, but there are national entrance examinations at the universities that have only partial equivalence with the IB diploma depending on the university and the study discipline. The IB World School that we researched in our study has been a member of IB since 1994 and has English as teaching language. It offers primary and

secondary education (Primary Years Programme, Middle Years Programme, Diploma Programme) and during the school year 2019/2020 was attended by 660 students from over 50 different nationalities.

The article aims to analyse the constitution of transnational educational spaces within biographies of the alumni from an IB school in Lisbon – focusing on the phase of transition to higher education – and on the question of how these spaces are materialised in their biographical knowledge. We focus on the transition to higher education – for these students also in many cases a moving to another country – because it is a crucial phase in their (educational) biography, where the interrelations between educational institutions and the adaptability and transformation of the social actors become more visible. Such transitions often provide critical moments (turning points) in a life course, stimulating actors' reflexivity on the relations (and gaps) between different contexts and institutions.

The biographical knowledge of these students – as a site of transnational spaces where transnational experiences can be stored – will be analysed on the grounds of a reconstructive empirical design using the narrative-biographical interviews as method of data collection (Schütze 1983) and documentary interpretation for the interview analysis (Bohnsack 2010; Nohl 2017). This method is influenced by the sociology of knowledge of Karl Mannheim and his concept of 'conjunctive experience space' (Mannheim 1982).

In the context of biographical research, the documentary method allows a reconstruction of knowledge on two levels: (1) 'communicative knowledge', which consists of 'opinions, valuations, theories of the everyday life and statements of those interviewed' and (2) 'conjunctive knowledge', which represents an implicit or tacit knowledge comprising 'personal experiences founded in the practice of action' (Nohl 2017, 16; see also Bohnsack 2010; Keßler 2020). The theoretical constructions and also the implicit experience knowledge of the interviewed students are constitutive elements of their biographical knowledge.

## **Empirical results**

### ***Transition to higher education: the orientation of St. Benedict's International School in the eyes of its alumni***

Among the alumni of the St. Benedict's International School,<sup>2</sup> there is an apparent conviction that IB prepares them well for their university studies. Thalia (Greek, first year of economics, politics and international relations, UK) considers the IB as 'a pre-university thing' that focuses on developing competencies of analysis and reflection that are important for further studies. Nesreen (Libyan, first year of medicine, Portugal) thinks that other schools prepare students less for university as they do not focus on acquiring these competencies for autonomous study. She observes: 'It teaches you to be, tea- teaches you to erm analyse, to reflect a lot, like, it teaches you to do things that most //hmm// private schools don't, you know'.

In the eyes of some students, the IB's emphasis on autonomy and holistic education is more valuable in UK universities than in Portuguese ones. Luísa (Portuguese, second year of medicine, UK), for example, points out: 'I felt like applying to Portugal would almost be not valuing all those other things that I had learned to do when I was in St. Benedict's'. In her opinion, Portuguese universities are oriented exclusively to the academic dimension ('just look at your grades'), and do not value other aspects of her activities at school such as 'lots of extracurricular activities'.

Some alumni from St. Benedict's International School consider that school oriented them towards UK universities and relate this orientation to the IB programme. Thalia from Greece observes:

Most of us, because we were doing the IB, we were kind of geared towards studying in the UK, so that's why, that's why I particularly looked at the UK and also 'cause the universities are quite well known and they're quite good.

Besides the school's orientation, for Thalia, the good reputation of the universities in the UK was also crucial in their academic choices. Some students also stressed the higher position held by the chosen university in international rankings as a key factor.

Related to the orientation of St. Benedict's International School, Lauryn (South African, second year of sociology, Portugal) points out: 'They want to put us in British universities'. As a reason for this orientation towards the UK, she presumes that the school does not have information about other educational systems than the British system: 'I don't think they know anything about other countries, like other countries systems //humhum// applications and that I think they don't wanna learn how to do that, so it's just easier for them to send everyone to England'. This observation manifests a severe critique on the school and its orientations that they remain closed to systems other than the British and orientate all students towards the UK.

### ***'A smoother transition': from St. Benedict's International School to British universities***

Many students felt oriented by the school to opt for a university in the Anglo-Saxon space, especially in the UK, and the majority of the interviewed students followed this educational circuit and currently study at a British university.

Thalia from Greece, whose parents are diplomats, was also influenced by the expectations of her parents when she decided to study at a university in the UK. While she was considering the option to study in Greece 'my parents decided not to go for that option because of the quality of education', which they consider much better in the UK than in Greece. Thalia didn't find the transition to the university and the adaption at the new place difficult, since it was an experience of transition from one transnational educational space to another:

Lancaster has a lot of international students, //ok// it's very varied, in my, in my accommodation in the first year there were people from lots of different, lots of different countries and I think we got on along really well. My having gone to school with people from lots of different places really helped, because it was not a shock.

Because of the geographical mobility of her family and also her attendance at the IB school in Lisbon, Thalia is used to living in transnational social and educational spaces. For that reason, the transition from Portugal to a British university is not 'a shock' for her; it is familiar for her to live in transnational contexts that can be understood as a normality construction in regard to her biography. For her, the negative horizon of comparison is to 'stick' with people of her own culture and language: a situation that she observes at her university: 'I know a lot of people, when they go to university, they tend to stick with people from their own countries mostly', and from which she differentiates herself: 'that's quite common at university, but I didn't feel I needed to do that, ever'.

Language reasons are another important factor for choosing a university in the Anglo-Saxon space for the transition to higher education. Maria (Portuguese/Belgian, second year of English and American literature, UK), for example, has chosen to study literature in an English-speaking country as the teaching language at St. Benedict's was English and she did not consider her level of Portuguese language as sufficient for studying literature at a Portuguese university:

So, and because when I was in high school, I didn't have the level of Portuguese that people in Portuguese high schools would have to go into university and I would be wanting to study literature anyways, I would have to have a very high level of Portuguese to be able to do it //yeah, yeah, humhum// and because my English level was better at the time I chose to do English instead //humhum// and the UK had the most accessible prices.

For Maria as well as for other students, the lower study fees of British universities in comparison to American universities, for example, are crucial in the process of their choice of higher education.

In general, the alumni of St. Benedict's International School in Lisbon characterise the transition to a university in the UK as 'smoother' than passing into a Portuguese university. Luísa, who is from a Portuguese geographical mobile family and is studying medicine at a university in London, points out:

When I compared the two, my education in Lisbon, I felt like the UK would be a, a smoother transition academically, so obviously personally it's a much bigger transition //humhum// it's a different country, you're on your own, but academically I would be going from a very international system to another very international system. I would be progressing, like from an English education to an English education, rather than change, you know, from English to Portuguese and, and a lot less international.

For Luísa, an 'international' educational system means an 'English education' and she considers the transition from one English educational system, even located in Portugal, to another English system as 'a smoother transition academically' than the transition from the IB school to a Portuguese university. She associates the Portuguese educational system with an idea of being 'a lot less international'. In this case, we identify an educational circuit from the IB school in Lisbon to a university in the UK, which is perceived by the alumni as a movement between transnational spaces, requiring particular dispositions – including not only linguistic codes, but a whole habitus framed for transnational (privileged) contexts – they already developed during primary and secondary education, and many of them also in their mobile, high-class family life. A transition to a Portuguese university would represent an interruption of this circuit.

### ***'My story is a bit complicated': from St. Benedict's International School to a Portuguese university***

There are other cases of students that had planned to study in the UK or in other countries but for external reasons, for example visa problems, they stayed in Portugal.

Nesreen from Libya, who moved to Portugal because her father started to work at the embassy after having lived also in the United Arab Emirates and in Morocco, is used to a frequent mobility experience – 'what's been normal for me' – and 'being surrounded by an international community'. After having finished her studies at St. Benedict's International School in Lisbon, she planned to study in the UK. At this point she found herself in a difficult situation:

Right, my story is a bit complicated, I guess, because I wanted to go to the UK. That was the initial plan, but then, because I'm Libyan, they didn't give me the visa. It was a very complicated process. Er, because of Brexit and everything now, mmm, I didn't get the visa, so I ended up taking a gap year //mmm// and during my gap year I learned Portuguese and I worked, did an internship.

In the case of Nesreen a 'complicated' situation in her biography arose when she could not realise her initial plan to study medicine in the UK and was obliged to change her plans and take a gap year first. The most difficult problem was the Portuguese language when she entered a Portuguese university after the gap year, in which she tried to learn the language: 'Portuguese is not my first language, it's not my second, it's not my third, it's my fourth language. It's, it's hard'. She describes a difficult situation in their seminars at university as she had problems understanding, speaking and thinking in Portuguese. At the same time, Nesreen related that she made 'very very close' friends at the university with students from other international schools dealing with similar difficulties. Such friendship ties suggest dispositional affinities and generate social capital to support these students while developing plural dispositions to cope with a new (more national-based) educational institution, not losing their capabilities for international contexts.

Similar difficulties were expressed by Lauryn from South Africa. Her parents decided to leave the country because of its 'unstable political situation' and moved to Portugal. Lauryn wanted to study psychology, initially in the Netherlands, but she changed her plans and stayed in Portugal as she didn't want to lose her residency visa for Portugal. Like Nesreen she was also confronted with language problems as she had not mastered the Portuguese language:

And then I thought about doing psychology here in Portugal, but I was worried 'cause I didn't have any Portuguese, didn't have any Portuguese //humhum// and I was worried I wouldn't be able to cope with the language and sociology was always something that I really enjoyed.



Lauryn opted to study sociology instead of psychology also for language reasons as she assumed that studying sociology in terms of language ‘would be a little bit easier’ and would allow her to study and simultaneously learn the Portuguese language.

Furthermore, Lauryn did not feel that she had any support from the school when she applied for a university in Portugal, a situation that she characterises as ‘tough’ and that would have been different if she had applied for a British university as she points out: ‘I mean had I ever had applied to England I would have a lot more help [...] so it was difficult, that’s all’.

Also Nesreen is confronted with further problems in her studies of medicine at a Portuguese university beyond the language difficulties. The IB school in Lisbon didn’t orientate her to choose the discipline of physics at the secondary level and she opted for science disciplines other than physics with no possibility to choose it as a third science in her IB programme. This situation caused serious problems with her later studies at a Portuguese university as in Portugal the discipline of physics is a necessary condition for studying medicine:

For me, for example, I did not do physics, because I couldn’t. I couldn’t choose, I couldn’t choose a third science //mmm//, and now we’re studying physiology and I don’t have the basics //you have a problem// of physics //mmm// so, I’m like struggling a little bit. My colleagues, they’ve done physics in high school and they’re not facing the same problem.

In comparison to her colleagues from Portuguese public schools, Nesreen feels disadvantaged due to their difficulties resulting from a lack of ‘the basics’ for studying medicine in Portugal which, as in the case of Lauryn, results from a missing orientation and preparation of her school for studying at universities in Portugal.

## Concluding remarks

During the last centuries, schooling was conceived as a socialisation experience, mostly driven by nation states and reinforcing them, although elites had always alternative paths, especially in peripheral countries, to place their children in schools integrated into other (more powerful) national systems. The IB has challenged these principles, aiming to provide a transnational education released from nation states’ curriculum guidelines, and is especially attractive for business people and professionals with privileged positions associated with global circuits. Still, such a framework may also generate an alienation of students from national roots, relations and identities, impacting their future experiences, identities and prospects. Besides, its concentration in the private sector, and especially in its elite segment, may also be a step further in the process of global elites’ reproduction and accumulation, increasingly detached from nation states’ (democratic) institutions.

Our research has explored how an IB environment in Portugal may be conceived as a transnational educational space, providing a socialisation experience that cannot be directly linked to any national system or geographical reference. However, the transition to higher education processes also evidenced that IB schooling is mostly conceived as a preparation for university, in close relation to the British education system, including some gaps and constraints to integration in universities located in other countries, including Portugal. Language is obviously a major element of this ‘British bias’, but it goes beyond that, including a broad set of skills and expectations that generates a ‘natural/continuity path’ towards British universities, and a ‘disruptive/hard path’ to others, in biographical terms, demanding the development of new skills and dispositions.

One may wonder if this challenges the ‘transnational educational spaces’ concept, not so de-embedded from national references after all, but actually reflecting power relations in the global arena, in economic, cultural and political terms, imposing the British option as ‘global’. This sheds light on the IB as a global educational actor that is involved in the (re-)production of power relations based on a Eurocentric understanding of the world, as Gardner-McTaggart (2016, 15) designates the IB as ‘a “Western” to be more precise: an English Anglo-Saxon success story’ that ‘raise[s] doubts as to the true intercultural nature of the system’.

So, to conceive IB schools as ‘transnational educational spaces’ also implies addressing how schools – as well as their staff and students – deal with national heritage, standards and policies. For instance, if English is taken as the hegemonic language and the curriculum is more linked to some (national) cultures and institutional frames than others, this also generates privilege for certain teachers and students, as well as setting the stage for some kind of primacy of educational circuits (for Anglo-Saxon universities, for example), and in broader terms for the reinforcement of cultural dominance. IB school boards could benefit from a wider knowledge on this topic, in order to develop a strategy to improve opportunities for their students to attend higher education in other countries, including the country where the school is located.

In a more structural scope, the notion of transnational space – as well as the whole critique of the methodological nationalism – must not avoid the world’s inequalities, including the effect of nation states’ strategies today. In the case of education, some authors underline how a global agenda for education has been developed during recent decades by powerful capitalist interests and national governments, often through transnational organisations such as UNESCO, OECD, European Union, etc. (e.g., Dale 2000; Teodoro 2003; Ball 2012). Although such policies and networks surpass national frameworks, nation states are still key players, both in material and symbolic terms. And while international schools are mostly driven by global market rules, nation states appear to be decisive in the establishment of such rules. Actually, any international school is located in a specific nation state, so it has to comply with the national authorities to be allowed to provide education, and its effect relies on the fact that many nation states worldwide recognise their credentials.

Further research in other IB schools and in other countries would be important to explore if this is a common trend in this kind of schools worldwide or if there are variations and what they might be. In addition, the biographical analysis may be extended in order to understand the impact of schooling in a transnational space during the life course, particularly regarding employment and mobility paths, as an important path of the reconfiguration of inequality structures in contemporary societies.

## Notes

1. In the first phase of the research project (2016–2018), titled ‘The internationalisation of elite education in Portugal. A qualitative study on international schools in Greater Lisbon’ (financed by the Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia [FCT], research grant number: SFRH/BPD/112406/2015), we carried out case studies in three international schools with a different profile (interviews with school principals, group discussions with students and teachers, participated observation of school cultural events, document analysis, etc.) in order to reconstruct elements of the school’s identity. During the second phase (2019–2022), biographical interviews with some of alumni ( $n = 16$ ) who participated in the first one, seven of them from the IB World School, were conducted, to provide an in-depth exploration of their life narratives after they completed upper-secondary education. Since in the present article we analyse the specific case of IB schools, we focused our empirical analysis on these seven biographical interviews.
2. The names of institutions and persons used in the study are fictitious.

## Acknowledgements

The authors wish to express their gratitude to the students for their availability for the biographical interviews and also the Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (FCT) for financing this postdoctoral research. We also thank David Tucker for proofreading this paper.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Funding

This work was supported by the Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (FCT) under grant number SFRH/BPD/112406/2015. The proofreading of this paper was also provided by the Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (FCT) through the funding of the R&D Unit UIDB/03126/2020.

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