

School competition and social stratification in the deregulated upper secondary school market in Stockholm

Håkan Forsberg

To cite this article: Håkan Forsberg (2018) School competition and social stratification in the deregulated upper secondary school market in Stockholm, British Journal of Sociology of Education, 39:6, 891-907, DOI: [10.1080/01425692.2018.1426441](https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2018.1426441)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2018.1426441>



© 2018 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 01 Feb 2018.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 1492



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

School competition and social stratification in the deregulated upper secondary school market in Stockholm

Håkan Forsberg^{a,b} 

^aDepartment of Education, Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden; ^bSociology of Education and Culture (SEC), Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden

ABSTRACT

Drawing on the case of upper secondary education in Stockholm, this article analyses school-based responses to a superimposed market and how this is related to social stratification. Furthermore, schools' and pupils' encounters with the market are analysed in relation to Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital and strategy. Methodologically, the quantitative method of correspondence analysis is combined with semi-structured interviews with senior administrative officers and principals. Analysis shows how the overarching structure of this particular field – a historically pre-existing social order of upper secondary education in Stockholm – is related to the complex set of strategies that schools develop in the school market. Schools located at the elite pole of the field, serving the educational needs of a small minority of either the wealthy or the culturally rich upper middle class, are less affected by marketization. In the most populous social mid-tier of the field, schools are more likely to turn education into a mass-produced commodity, while schools at the socially dominated pole, without a competitive product, are more exposed to the market's stratifying impact.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 4 January 2017
Accepted 8 January 2018

KEYWORDS

School choice; school market; stratification; upper secondary education; social class

Introduction

Over the last two decades Swedish education has gone through an extensive transformation from being one of the world's most egalitarian education systems into a decentralized and deregulated market in both primary and secondary education characterized by a publicly funded voucher system, free school choice and the right to run schools as commercial enterprises (Wiborg 2015). These policies offered particularly favourable conditions for a previously non-existent educational market to emerge in Stockholm, a densely populated region with an already socially stratified school system related to increasing housing segregation. As a result, a massive expansion of independent schools, managed primarily by large companies, took place along with the extensive marketing of profiled study programmes and the importation of management models from the private sector (cf. Forsberg 2015; Lundahl 2011; Wiborg 2015). In 2015 alone, schools competed for 70,000 pupils representing an

CONTACT Håkan Forsberg  hakan.forsberg@edu.uu.se

© 2018 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

annual economic value of approximately €900 million in the county of Stockholm. Within this setting of a superimposed market, schools become producers while pupils and their families are consumers (see Gewirtz, Ball, and Bowe 1995).

School choice policy and marketization is a global phenomenon best understood in relation to local contexts since the particularity of policy varies between national education systems with different histories (Ball 2012; Green 2013, 35–36). While these contextual histories diverge, they unite by the fact that over time they establish a particular social order of relations between, on the one hand, educational institutions and, on the other, the social groups and families using them (Bourdieu 1996, 188). This web of relations between institutions with a relative autonomy of their own and of social groups with different assets and life trajectories – or symbolic capital and habitus, to use Bourdieusian terminology – constitutes the social space of education, which potentially, depending on its degree of autonomy, also constitutes a social field of its own (see Bourdieu 1984, 169–175).

Departing from Bourdieu's concept of social field, a mixed-method approach is applied to analyse schools' responses to the superimposed market mechanisms in Sweden. This original contribution to research on school response enables explanations of how a competitive school market is embedded in a broader social context of families' educational strategies as well as schools' institutional strategies.

The article is divided into two parts. The first part discusses previous research on marketization, school choice and school response, followed by a brief explanation of how the Bourdieusian concepts of social field and strategy are operationalized in the study. The second part begins by outlining the social structure of upper secondary education in Stockholm in 2006–2008 based on a correspondence analysis (CA) of all pupils attending upper secondary education there. Thereafter, schools' positions and strategies on the market are analysed, drawing on interviews with principals and senior administrative officers from local education agencies (LEAs) of different municipalities, for-profit companies and foundations.

Research on marketization, school choice and school response

In the extensive field of research on marketization and school choice, a common approach is to apply the notion of Bourdieu's theoretical framework to analyse mechanisms of social stratification and reproduction. In this regard, the concepts of capital and habitus offer a way of thinking about family's educational strategies which also reflect the market strategies of the institutions they populate (cf. Börjesson 2008; Bosetti 2004; Bourdieu 2010; Gewirtz, Ball, and Bowe 1995; Poupeau, François, and Couratier 2007; Raveaud and van Zanten 2007). An important study in this tradition is *Markets, Choice and Equity in Education* by Gewirtz, Ball, and Bowe (1995); the study provides a relational analysis of inequalities related to the school markets' supply and demand sides, drawing on case studies and interviews with principals, teachers and families. The authors reveal a value drift from schools' comprehensive values to market values which obscures the market, and works in the interest of privileged middle-class families who are best skilled to decode the real content (Gewirtz, Ball, and Bowe 1995, 149–151).

In recent years, researchers have broadened the analysis of both school response and families educational strategies by exploring how race, class and gender are mediated through schools' institutional habitus (Reay 1998a, 1998b). Other important studies have analysed how material conditions influence schools' response to the market (Isling Poromaa 2017) or

how the academic climate (Smyth and Banks 2012) is shaping schools' institutional habitus by being closely linked to the schools' recruitment.

Institutional and organizational theory is another stream of research on marketization and school response that focuses on institutional behaviour as situated in and influenced by other organizations, and by wider social and mental structures (Lubienski 2003; Powell and DiMaggio 1991; Traver 2006). Such research shows that schools optimize their marketing strategies to attract desirable students rather than providing a more horizontally diversified supply of education which would contradict the intention of the school market/ing policy (Lubienski 2006; Lubienski, Gulosino, and Weitzel 2009).

In the research discussed, explanations regarding the socially stratifying outcomes of both families' educational strategies and schools' responses to market incentives often refer to how the logic of the market reinforces more general diversity in society, which in turn reflects a neoliberal and market-oriented policy production environment. Furthermore, studies tend to focus either on institutional behaviour or on families' encounters with the market. This partly disregards the social complexity embedded in the schools' relations to each other which is an overarching social structure that both institutions and individuals constitute. Within this research field there are some important exceptions (Börjesson et al. 2016; Felouzis, Henriot-Van Zanten, and Maroy 2013; Gewirtz, Ball, and Bowe 1995; Lynch and Moran 2006; Poupeau, François, and Couratier 2007) which analytically take into account that neither the institutional strategies nor families' school choices can be understood in isolation, but rather as a phenomenon structured by a system of relationships between all relevant characteristics of institutions and individuals. However, there is to date no study that has explicitly combined both quantitative and qualitative data and methods to relate the objective conditions of social space to the subjective dispositions of agents who occupy different positions in social space and on the market.

Market and social field

In the present study, Swedish secondary schools are understood as being diverse; they have different types of study programmes¹ and a diversity of social and merit-related recruitment of both teachers and pupils. They are also housed in different architecturally pleasing buildings with a range of geographical locations and, perhaps most importantly, they possess various traditions and histories. Overall, these preceding elements give the schools different profiles that, to a varying degree, represent a symbolic capital by being recognized, or mis-recognized, by the families who apply to the schools. Whether something is recognized as constituting symbolic capital is difficult to ascertain. The following analyses will therefore focus on assets of different kinds as indicators of capital. Furthermore, the recognition of a school's capital is linked to families' social, cultural and educational assets and their position in society. Schools, their supply of study programmes and their audiences are based here on the notion of a field, or, more generally put, a social space in which educational institutions occupy different positions. This field is structured by the distribution of assets that generates polarities of dominance where schools with similar assets are close together and far from schools that are characterized by different types of assets. Hence, analysis of the processes of marketization which is intertwined in schools' market strategies cannot be separated from social space. Drawing further on this reasoning, institutions – in this case schools managed by different organizations (municipalities, private companies, foundations etc.)

– also develop strategies to defend or strengthen their positions in the field (cf. Bourdieu 1984, 99–101; 2005, 89–90; 1996, 129–133).

Furthermore, the school market should not be seen as a phenomenon isolated to different stages of the educational system. It must rather be understood in relation to a wider market where primary schools, upper secondary schools and universities are included, but also in relation to other educational institutions outside the school system and higher education. In this way, families' educational strategies as a whole can be related to a wider and interconnected educational market; for example, secondary schools prepare for Higher Education that in turn constitutes a market of its own, which in turn is strongly related to secondary education, and so forth (Börjesson et al. 2016).

Data and methodology

To analyse schools' strategies and their positions in the field of upper secondary education in Stockholm, this study combines both quantitative and qualitative data and methods. The quantitative element of the following analysis is conducted with the CA statistical method. CA is a method within the paradigm of geometric data analysis, which is a multivariate statistical approach that, without any a priori assumption about the data, represents multivariate data-sets (individuals \times variables) as clouds of points, and bases the interpretation of data on these clouds (see Le Roux and Rouanet 2004). This approach enables large data-sets to be summed up and sociologically interpretable through synoptic presentations of the data material's structure which is suitable for mapping out different social spaces (cf. Thomsen 2012).

In research it is well established that gender and class are two important factors in explaining choice of upper secondary education (cf. Burgess et al. 2007; Dustmann 2004). Class relates to parents' education, occupation and income, while the labour markets' gender structure is reflected in the supply of study programmes. Hence, the CA applied here explores the social space of upper secondary education in Stockholm by analysing the relation between school and study programmes, on the one hand, and pupil's gender and the highest occupation of their parents on the other.

The statistical analysis draws on macro-sociological data from Statistics Sweden for the total pupil population of all pupils in second grade in upper secondary education in Stockholm county between 2006 and 2008, representing a total of 71,000 individuals. Out of these, 62,000 were included in the analysis since information on their social origin was available.² Each pupil is characterized by information on their choice of school and study programme, as well as gender and social origin, the latter classified into 27 categories. The 27 social groups in the social classification were divided according to gender, creating in total 54 categories (daughters and sons of physicians, of secondary teachers, of small entrepreneurs, etc.). Additionally, other statistics on pupils were included as supplementary variables in the analysis: for example, grades received at the end of compulsory education, parents' educational level, the income and type of residential area of the household of origin, and whether the pupil or parents had a migratory background. Supplementary variables improve interpretation and are used to further explain and illustrate the polarities of the constructed space.

The statistical analyses provide an important sociological contextualization to make use of in the selection of respondents among principals and senior administrative officers. Thus,

interviews were conducted at independent and municipal upper secondary schools, and organizations that occupied different positions in the statistically generated multidimensional space of upper secondary education in Stockholm. Drawing on five topics – rules of the school market, collaboration with external agents, education and pedagogy, marketing and recruitment of pupils and teachers – altogether 26 semi-structured interviews were conducted during 2010–2012. The analysis focused on the richness of the material and looked for similarities, variances and contradictions in and between the respondents' accounts. Furthermore, this qualitative analysis was related to schools' social position on the market which at the same time deepened the understanding of the statistical findings. The respondents and their schools are not representative of the whole upper secondary field, but since they are strategically selected they have a general relevance as examples of more universal social and cultural dynamics of schools' response to the market.

With the preceding methodological approach, Bourdieu's relational perspective will be operationalized by connecting the institutional strategies of schools regarding their market response with the position they occupy in the field based on the distribution of assets among both schools and families.

Having addressed the methodological approach and theoretical underpinnings for the article, next follows a summary of the primary results of the statistical analysis.

The social space of upper secondary education in Stockholm 2006–2008

To analyse the social space of upper secondary education in Stockholm or, expressed more precisely, the empirical relationship between pupils' gender and social origin on the one hand and their choice of school and study programmes on the other, a bivariate table was constructed. Based on this table the CA generates two multidimensional rooms that simultaneously can be visualized graphically with mean points of all variables in the table. One room displays the distribution of categories in columns, consisting of sons and daughters combined with their household's highest occupation (Figure 1), and one room displays the distribution of categories in rows that display their study programmes (Figure 2). Next, the statistics of these rooms will be explained, followed by a sociological interpretation of the statistical results.

In CA the total variance in the data-set (inertia) can be split up into different dimensions that are structured hierarchically by polarities along axes. Each dimension's axis is expressed by the eigenvalue (λ) that sums up its contribution to the overall inertia. Usually, the first three axes depict the central structures in the data (Le Roux and Rouanet 2004, 49). As a rule of thumb, the categories of the variable that exceed the average contribution (in this case 2.0) are used to interpret the axis (Le Roux and Rouanet 2004). In the present analysis the polarities along the two first axes, which also have been investigated with the chi-square test, are objects for further sociological interpretation.

In Figure 1 mean points of the distance between pupils' gender and social origin are displayed as hollow triangles (Δ). The first and most significant polarity ($\lambda = 25.6\%$) differentiates horizontally between study programmes primarily chosen by girls and study programmes almost solely consisting of boys. The second polarity ($\lambda = 17.2\%$) distinguished vertically between pupils whose combined assets were greater than pupils with smaller assets, thereby establishing a class-related division, based on the social background of the pupils. At the pole where the pupils' combined assets are at their largest, the gender-differentiated

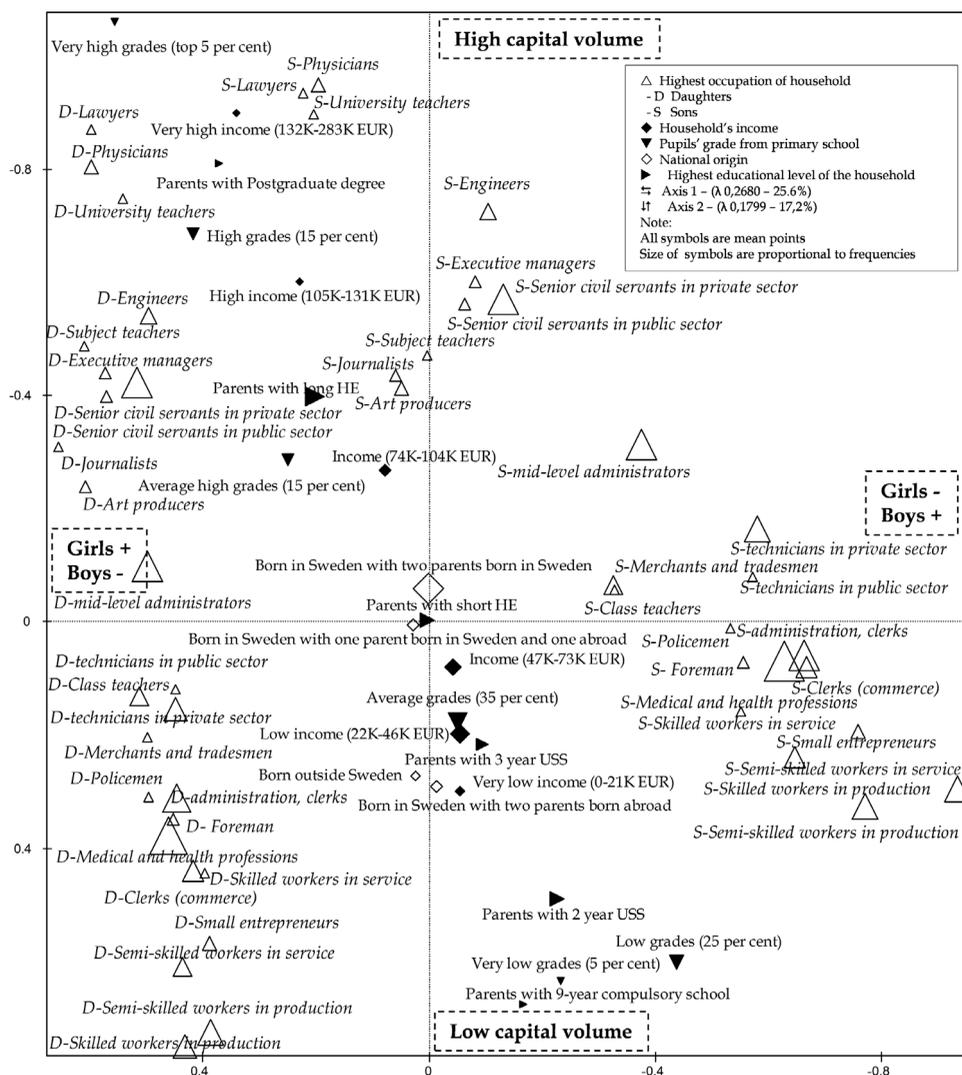


Figure 1. Social space of upper secondary education in Stockholm 2006–2008. Active columns, gender and social origin; supplementary columns, households' income and education, pupils' grade and national origin. Plane of axes 1 and 2.

effect (the first polarity of the analysis) is at its smallest, thus constituting the primary area where boys and girls meet each other on study programmes.

If one imagines these two polarities – one gender-distinctive and the other socially distinctive – in the space generated by the CA, the polarities create a triangular structure. At the base of the triangle, the pupils' combined assets are small, and boys and girls are separated into preparatory vocational programmes with very different specializations. The further up towards the peak of the triangle one moves, the more evenly distributed boys and girls become, at the same time as the purely higher education preparatory programmes dominate and the importance of the social origin of pupils increases.

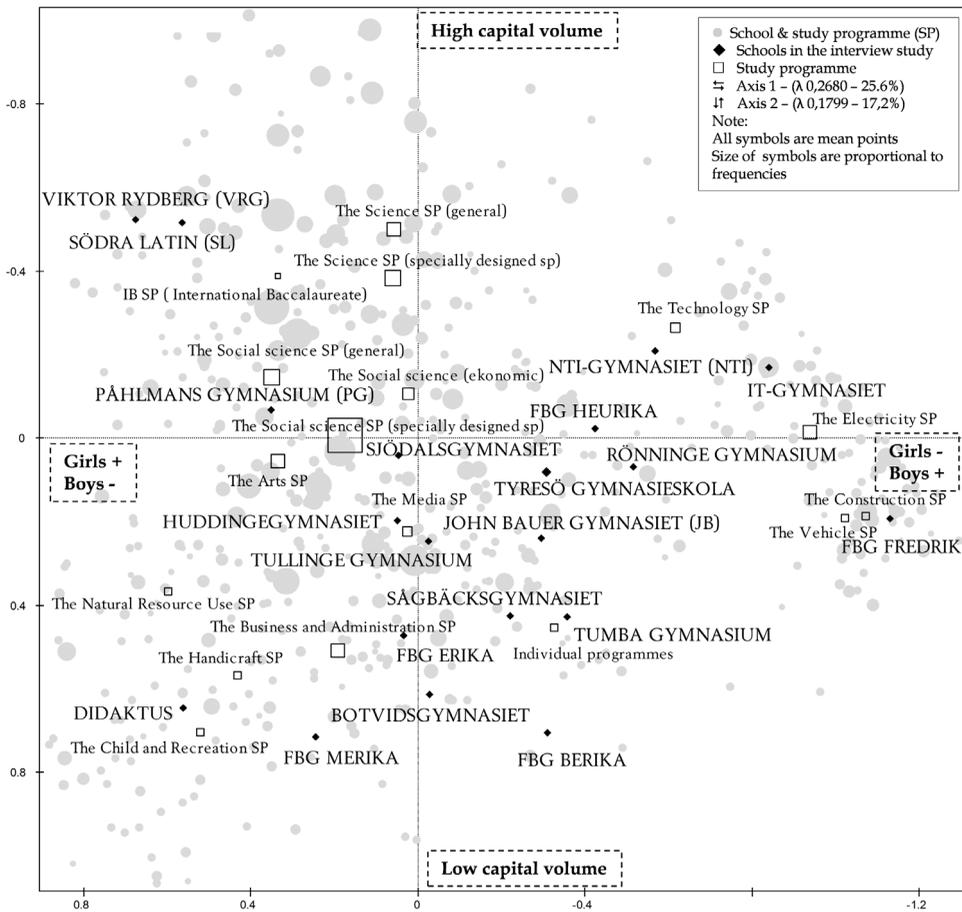


Figure 2. Social space of upper secondary education in Stockholm 2006–2008. Active rows, school and study programme; supplementary rows, schools in the interview study and study programme. Plane of axes 1 and 2.

Figure 2 displays the polarities between schools/study programme (the light-grey circles in the background) and their relation to each other based on their social recruitment, which has the same triangular structure found in Figure 1.

The boys' study programmes occupy a more extreme position to the right, while girls' study programmes are more scattered. Study programmes more equally populated by both genders are located in the upper-left corner, which is also the second axis pole that gathers pupils from families with high social origin. The opposite pole along the second axis is found in the lower left and right corners, characterized by pupils' low social origin. Compared with previous studies of upper secondary education in Stockholm (see Palme 2008), the following analysis shows that the overarching structure has been surprisingly stable over time and that these two main polarities affect the social relation between schools/study programmes in Stockholm county.

The positions of the schools chosen for the interview study are highlighted in Figure 2 together with the mean points of preparatory and vocational study programmes. In this way the schools' position in social space can be located and referred to in the following analysis.

With this social map at hand, it is possible to further explore how the school market operates in a more local context by shifting focus to the institutional strategies of schools located in various settings in the educational landscape.

Drawing on the interview analysis, the following section reveals how schools' response to the market is linked to their location in the field.

Elite schools' responses to marketization

On the social map regarding upper secondary education in Stockholm, a small concentration of schools, located in the upper-left corner of Figure 2, are characterized by a very selective social and meritocratic recruitment practice (Figure 1). To enter these schools top grades from primary school were required and almost all of the pupils' parents possessed substantial cultural and economic capital. Two examples of such schools located in the inner city of Stockholm were Södra Latins Gymnasium (SL) and Viktor Rydbergs Gymnasium (VRG). SL is one of the oldest and most prestigious gymnasiums (in Sweden, secondary schools are referred to as gymnasiums) in Stockholm with an ancestry from the sixteenth century and has for the last 100 years fostered a substantial part of the cultural elite in Sweden. VRG, on the other hand, was founded in the mid-1990s as a non-profit independent school on the initiative of people in the Swedish business elite.

The resources spent annually on marketing at these schools were relatively limited. At both SL and VRG the interviewed principals argued that marketing mainly had to be about presenting the schools' traditional *Bildung* values and core activity (i.e. high quality of the study programmes) and that these should be communicated externally in a way that was consistent with what those associated values represented. Tacitly these traditional educational ideals would be superior to a commercial marketing approach. Hence, utilizing advertising campaigns was ruled out as a recruitment tool or to strengthen market positions. Instead, money and resources were primarily spent on the school's core activity which was in line with traditional *Bildung* values that they wanted to communicate to their potential audience. An explicit advertising campaign would conversely have negative consequences on the school's reputation and status.

Concurrently, the increased competition made the principals aware 'that relying on old merits could be a dangerous strategy', as the principal of SL put it. Although, according to the principals, the schools' core activities were not affected much by competition with other schools, there was an awareness prompted by the rising competition and surplus of study programmes in the county. This awareness entailed the principals adapting their marketing approaches. For example, VRG, the only newly established independent school that managed to seize a dominating position in the field, changed its approach to open-house events to be more generous and accessible for potential pupils. This decision was articulated by the principal:

Before, we thought that open house events must not interfere with our daily operation but there have been a reduced number of pupils in the county due to demographic changes and we may have to be a bit more generous with displaying our everyday activity when people come here. (School principal of the independent non-profit VRG)

In marketing the school, VRG had, since it was established, focused on public relations rather than advertising. A similar marketing approach appeared in the interview with the principal of SL. This public relations-oriented approach required cautious methods that

could exploit the special nature of the kind of assets that these elite schools possessed. Examples of such methods include endeavours to be recognized for their pupils' and teachers' achievements (e.g. theatres, musicals, concerts of classical music, visits from Nobel laureates). Highlighting these types of events displayed the schools' already recognized music education in a subtle way since their particular recruitment is very selective. Another very important feature of school marketing was the open-house activities where pupils and parents had the opportunity to 'feel the atmosphere', as the principal of SL put it.

To sum up, the heritage of these so-called elite schools' study programmes and the trajectories associated with their former pupils made them almost immune to the kind of competition that schools with a broader social and meritocratic recruitment process were exposed to. The elite schools' strategies to consolidate a dominant position in the field was directed to take advantage of the 'return' that their existing assets generated, especially the symbolic capital associated with being known for putting the quality of education first and not to confuse educational values with economic values (cf. Palme 2008, 282–284; Raveaud and van Zanten 2007; Van Zanten 2005). The marketing of these schools were also very subtle. In the case of SL it referred to the school's seniority and its traditions which generations of pupils and parents had benefited from. Turning this kind of symbolic capital into an advertising campaign would likely mean a significant risk of devaluation. VRG did not have a similar history at its disposal and was therefore more eager to get publicity for pupils' achievements. However, the public relations-orientated marketing, combined with high minimum entry qualifications, a large range of aesthetic courses and features, constituted a very strong symbolic capital in the battle for the high achievers from the upper social strata.

Commercially oriented schools' market responses

A more explicit market approach emerged most clearly among principals of independent commercially oriented schools located in central parts of Stockholm. On the social map, these schools' study programmes were concentrated in the centre and in the lower part of the field, and consisted mainly of different niches of both social science and a range of vocational study programmes. These schools were characterized by a broad social recruitment of pupils with a large variety of previous school achievements. Two exemplifying schools of this area are NTI-gymnasiet (NTI) and Påhlmans Gymnasium (PG). Both schools are independent but owned by organizations of different character which encourage various incentives to engage in the market. NTI is a concept-based school with activity in 13 Swedish cities and is managed by the corporate group Academedia, which in turn is owned by the venture capital company EQT. PG is owned and managed by the Medborgarskolan foundation, an adult educational association with humanistic values affiliated with the political right. Mutual to both schools was that they had entered highly competitive niches on the school market. NTI had focused on information technology (IT) and media, and this attracted mostly male pupils. PG focused on social science study programmes oriented towards economics and entrepreneurship with a more mixed gender recruitment profile. The social science programme together with other attractive education packages directed towards IT and media have been competitive products to 'sell' on the school market since they have, by means of the school choice policy, a large number of different branches and profiles. The majority of these so-called niche study programmes are also located in the centre of the social map, recruiting from the broad social mid-tier of pupils but tend to be more gender distinctive.

The principals had in-depth knowledge of who their competitors were and how large a share of the school market they controlled. In the following quote the principal of NTI elaborates on the school's market shares with regard to study programmes and profiled branches:

When we established our technology programmes with a focus on media, we got 8.9 per cent of all applicants in the entire Stockholm County for the Technology Study programme and if we only look at independent schools with that programme, we have 25 per cent of the market. (School principal of NTI, a school managed by the for-profit company Academedia)

A similar awareness of the competition was expressed by the principal of PG, who stressed that there was a tough competitive situation regarding the economics branch of the social science study programme.

Creating a strong brand was crucial to both of these schools in the struggle for enrolling pupils. Branding was highly dependent on the schools' geographic location, but also on their recruitment practices and school management. The latter was reflected by the market language that the principal of NTI used when talking about their 'product' and 'market shares', while PG's principal was more focused on branding in line with the foundation's more humanistic values.

At the time of the interview with PG in 2011, they had already carried out a comprehensive rebranding of the school. Located in the very centre of Stockholm's business district, the school had an attractive location and quickly became a popular destination for high-achieving pupils in the mid-1990s. But when the competition for high-performing pupils increased between inner-city schools they got left behind – which the previously presented statistical analysis also verifies by locating the school's study programmes in the centre of the field. PG's market solution was to rebrand the school by giving it a more business-oriented approach while simultaneously trying to preserve some of the owning foundation's humanistic character. The rebranding included giving the school a new name, Pålhmans, linking to an already existing commercial institute within the foundation that has provided business education for adults since the late seventeenth century. With the school's new name, the foundation marketed it as a business school based on humanism. Changing the school's brand also affected their supply of study programmes. The natural science programme, which is the most prestigious study programme in Swedish upper secondary education, became an incompatible element with the school's new profile and was therefore abandoned. According to the school principal, promoting a coherent school concept that had credibility by connecting to a history that legitimized the concept played a key role in rebranding the school. NTI had a similar marketing approach by also giving its brand an historical context connected to Nordiska Tekniska Institutet, an adult education institution established in the 1960s, but which in fact has little to do with the concept of 'NTI-schools' that emerged in the wake of Academedia's takeover in 2007.

Another interesting example of an independent school that changed and adjusted its brand several times was John Bauer gymnasiet (JB).³ In an early stage of the company's branding strategy they used imagery taken from the Swedish painter and illustrator John Bauer and his themes of Swedish folklore and fairy tales to promote the school's educational core of IT and media. In 2008, the fairy-tale theme was removed and the school promoted a more business-oriented and individual-centred conceptual approach. Finally, in 2012, the terms IT and media were not mentioned whatsoever in the description of the schools' core activity. Instead, 'leadership' and 'entrepreneurship' were the new catchwords.

It is difficult to assess what impact these kinds of brand metamorphoses had on the social mid-tier schools' competition for pupils and to what extent they transformed the actual content of their educational programmes. However, the tension that appears in the principal interviews between the schools' internal operations and their external image indicates how important it was for these commercially oriented schools to 'read' the market when rebranding. A prominent strategy, both on the market and in a broader sociological perspective of a social field, was to accumulate different kinds of credibility, such as historical basis or logotypes that signal particular values, which in turn are related to the educational strategies of families in the broad social mid-tier with average economic and cultural assets (cf. Palme 2008, 282–284).

In summary, secondary schools owned by international venture companies with centralized market divisions and explicit strategies for economic growth developed flexible market strategies to change the school's brand image in order to adjust the description and functioning of its internal operations in line with the expected demand of their potential audience. Flexibility was essential in the strategy for schools/companies who wanted to claim a particular niche of the school market, which only seems to be possible in the part of the field that gathers the children of the working class and the lower middle class in Stockholm.

Socially exposed schools' market responses

Schools dominated by the market forces were particularly located in the southern suburban municipalities of Stockholm. Previous studies show that this area of the county had been exposed to increased competition from both the newly established independent schools, concentrated in central Stockholm, and from schools of other neighbouring municipalities. Just after the voucher system and free school choice was introduced in the mid-1990s, an extensive pupil flight followed from the southern suburban areas towards the inner city (see Forsberg 2015, 106–122) which strongly reflected the existing housing segregation pattern (Kährik and Andersson 2014; cf. Andersson and Turner 2014), and thus reinforced school segregation (Söderström and Uusitalo 2010; Andersson, Östh, and Malmberg 2010).

Principals in this southern part of Stockholm county were unanimous on most issues regarding their competitive situation and described it as a struggle for the survival of upper secondary schools managed by the municipalities. To compensate for the massive pupil flight in these more market-exposed areas, schools (mainly concentrated in the lower part of Figure 2) used marketing strategies aimed at both getting pupils to stay in their home municipality and to attract pupils from neighbouring municipalities. The principals' opinions were that their schools did not provide lower quality education than the more popular inner-city schools, but that they often lacked a stable pupil recruitment stream that was a competitive necessity to convey a sense of being at the 'right place'. They also stressed that the new competition, as a result of the free school choice, did not significantly increase the quality of the study programmes. But, at the same time, their strategic market adjustments prioritized the idea of offering a 'product of good quality' since pupils from other municipalities could easily select alternate schools (see Bunar 2010). Regardless of this ambiguity, it emerged that the school marketing strategies were heavily localized as a result of the competition.

Similar arguments for marketing strategies related to the municipality's geographical location and the general flow of pupils were also expressed by principals and senior

administrative officers in schools of LEAs in other southern suburban municipalities. Assessments of these marketing strategies were mainly based upon pupil–teacher ratios which were often utilized to explain the local pre-conditions among the respondents. Senior administrative officers and principals of LEAs in the southern suburbs consistently stressed that ‘high quality’ was an essential factor in marketing schools managed by the municipality. To achieve this they emphasized their substantial resources such as experienced teachers, suitable premises and a wide range of both preparatory and vocational study programmes. All respondents of the LEAs also stressed that the municipality had an overriding civic responsibility to meet the demand for adequate upper secondary education. However, the high quality of their schools was hard to market since they were exposed to the logic of the market which called for short, concise and attractive slogans. Hence, the leadership of LEAs expressed a direct concern regarding an increased divergence between the schools’ actual core activity and the marketing of their external image.

An example of a school whose pupil base nearly halved in the wake of the school choice reforms is Sägbacksgymnasiet, one of four municipal schools in Huddinge municipality. Its position and study programmes are found in the lower right part of Figure 2. Centrally located in urban Huddinge the school has offered vocational training since the 1960s but in recent times has been associated with a bad reputation. However, the school’s principal opined that the negative reputation emerged largely from unfounded rumours and that the primary cause of the reputational damage was largely a result of vocational training being downgraded in upper secondary education as a whole. He directly addresses the challenge of marketing these resources in the following quote:

We’re very good at working with the pupils who failed in primary school, but we can’t go boasting in our marketing with that, can we? – ‘we have very good activities for those pupils who did not succeed in primary school’ – you can’t market a school with that slogan. (School principal of Sägbacksgymnasiet in Huddinge)

Instead of benefiting from their own described assets as a school, Sägbacksgymnasiet tried to escape the bad reputation by creating a new brand. In 2012 an advertising agency who offered ‘marketing packages’ for a fixed rate was hired. The most crucial part of the agency’s work was to shorten the long name of the school to ‘SGY’, which would be easier to use in advertisements. This strategy of rebranding was problematic since there was a municipal superstructure with regulations on public procurement, a central marketing budget and the need for the LEA to prioritize their school above others in the municipality. In this respect, according to the principal, the independent schools have a major advantage since they can more easily adapt to the market, even with profit margins to reach.

The paradox of not being able to market the school’s actual competencies was also found among the for-profit independent schools in central Stockholm. In this regard Didaktus Gymnasium, owned and managed by the for-profit company Academedia, is an interesting example. The school offers both preparatory and vocational study programmes, which are both located in the lower left part of Figure 2, and to a large extent were populated by the daughters of the immigrant working class. The school was situated just outside the inner city of Stockholm at Liljeholmen whose geographical location was extremely exposed to competition from other for-profit independent schools. In the fall of 2012, 16 similar schools, owned by Academedia and by other companies, were located within an area of one square kilometre. The area of Liljeholmen is characterized by an evolving trade and commercial centre with particular good communication links that enable schools, such as Didaktus, to

recruit pupils from a vast catchment area, especially from the more socially exposed areas in southern and western Stockholm.

From the point of view of the principal of Didaktus the school had an excellent reputation among pupils with immigrant backgrounds since they offered attractive curriculums for these groups, such as home language instruction in 11 different languages. Similar to Sågbacksgymnasiet, Didaktus also recruited a great deal of pupils with special needs. Regarding recruitment the principal thought it difficult to determine the significance of the usual marketing channels, such as the yearly school fair in the county and open house events. Instead Didaktus targeted study advisers in primary schools through an annual meeting, organized by their owner Academedia. In this way the study advisers formed a type of informal channel for conveying information about what the school perceived as their strongest assets – that is, taking care of pupils with immigrant backgrounds in need of special support. However, in line with the marketing issues of Sågbacksgymnasiet, the principal of Didaktus expressed a concern about making the recruitment of this demanding group of pupils their primary target:

We are good at helping pupils with study difficulties, but we can't market that because then we would drown in those pupils. And our resources will become so diminished that we can no longer manage our operation. (School principal of Didaktus, a school managed by the for-profit company Academedia)

At the same time, educationally disadvantaged groups were an important audience for the school and Didaktus had strengthened their approaches to reach families with immigrant backgrounds by developing marketing materials in languages other than Swedish.

The two cases highlighted here are examples of secondary schools that developed various survival strategies, either by struggling for their existence as a result of a diminishing pupil base following the introduction of free school choice or aspiring to change their recruitment focus regarding resource-intensive pupils. Schools managed by municipalities, such as Sågbacksgymnasiet, made efforts to change their brand in a way that was similar to the commercially oriented independent schools even though they had a comprehensive civic responsibility towards their citizens regarding education. In that sense they tried to adapt to a part of the market with a restricted ability to engage in it compared to independent schools. Exposed for-profit independent schools without this kind of civic responsibility but with a business mission, such as Didaktus, were able to calibrate their marketing tools in line with its target group using study advisers as a back channel and, perhaps most importantly, chose attractive locations with a vast catchment area. Targeting study advisers, as both kinds of schools did, can be seen as a strategy aimed at balancing between the target group that the school believed they had (resource-demanding pupils) without too explicitly being forced to accentuate their assets to a wider audience of pupils which could be seen as negative. On the school market, assets such as having good resources to help pupils in need of special support could be a sign of misrecognition revealing the school's position in social space and a crucial diminishing of their symbolic capital.

Conclusion

The study presented in this article contributes to the body of research on marketization, school choice and school response with an original relational approach that empirically explores how a superimposed market unfolds in the social field that both schools and

families constitute. This was done by analysing how school competition and marketization is related to a historically pre-existing social order which reveals how schools' response to market incentives reflects social stratification based on school choice.

In the present case of upper secondary education in Stockholm, the fundamental social polarities of a broader social field prevail over time and are to a great extent reflected in the strategies of schools; including their marketing, which indicates that the value of their study programmes on the market is determined by the balance of forces in the field. Hence, the educational market is subjected to, or rather incorporated by, the tension inherent in the field. When viewing the structure of the field of upper secondary education in relation to the educational market it becomes clear how different schools and operators with various positions in the field and with different audiences adhere to what can be described as the market's more distinct commercial pole. The stronger the cultural capital of schools and families, the more they rely on the same kind of capital in their approach to the school market.

The new market mechanisms, introduced through the Swedish school choice policy of the 1990s, have contributed to further obscuring a lingering social hegemony in upper secondary education. The increased complexity which marketization has created through profiled schools and tailored study programmes is most prominent in the parts of the field where children from social groups with fewer assets are gathered. This marketization is simultaneously essentially absent from the dominating areas of the field, characterized by the pupils' with large combined assets. The result of the study indicates that upper secondary schools with the highest social and merit-based recruitment become more sought after on the educational market due to their freedom from having to follow the rules of engagement in the marketplace. Such an approach to the market is only possible due to the dominating position of the elite schools in the educational field, positions that often were held by these schools long before the emergence of the deregulated school market in Sweden. For the upper secondary schools – which, on the basis of either commercial motivation or care for pupils with additional and/or special needs, attempt to fill their programme quotas in order to prevail in the competition for potential pupils – advertisements, marketing campaigns and customer indexing have become integral and challenging aspects of their everyday operations.

Notes

1. Up until 2011, Swedish upper secondary education had 17 national study programmes, 14 with vocational orientation. All programmes could be adapted locally.
2. Including categories with missing data in the CA has no considerable effect on the statistical outcome (eigenvalue), and neither does it affect the structure that later on is interpreted sociologically. There is 12.6% of the total population that is missing data on social class background, and this is mainly explained by individuals with a migration background who comprise 8.8% of this figure. In general, individuals with a migration background are relatedly over-represented regarding low grades and low income (household).
3. At the time of this study JB Education, owned by the Danish investment fund Axcel, was one of the nation's largest educational companies with 23 upper secondary schools, 1600 teachers and 10,500 pupils' nationwide and had a turnover close to €100 million. Today, perhaps, the company is most famous for its bankruptcy in 2013 with large-scale economic debts.

Acknowledgements

The article draws on the dissertation by Håkan Forsberg (2015) and is written within the context of the research programme ‘Families in the New Educational Landscape. Paths, Assets and Strategies 1985 to 2016’, funded by the Swedish Research Council.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

This work was supported by Vetenskapsrådet [grant number 7208].

ORCID

Håkan Forsberg  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0277-4440>

References

- Andersson, Roger, and Lena Magnusson Turner. 2014. “Segregation, Gentrification, and Residualisation: From Public Housing to Market-Driven Housing Allocation in Inner City Stockholm.” *International Journal of Housing Policy* 14 (1): 3–29. doi:10.1080/14616718.2013.872949.
- Andersson, Eva, John Östh, and Bo Malmberg. 2010. “Ethnic Segregation and Performance Inequality in the Swedish School System: A Regional Perspective.” *Environment and Planning A* 42 (11): 2674–2686. doi:10.1068/a43120.
- Ball, Stephen J. 2012. *Global Education Inc.: New Policy Networks and the Neo-Liberal Imaginary*. New York: Routledge.
- Börjesson, Mikael. 2008. “Location and Education. Transnational Strategies among Swedish Students in New York in the Late 1990s.” *American Studies in Scandinavia* 40 (1–2): 90–109.
- Börjesson, Mikael, Donald Broady, Brigitte Le Roux, Ida Lidegran, and Mikael Palme. 2016. “Cultural Capital in the Elite Subfield of Swedish Higher Education.” *Poetics* 56 (June): 15–34. doi:10.1016/j.poetic.2016.02.004.
- Bosetti, Lynn. 2004. “Determinants of School Choice: Understanding How Parents Choose Elementary Schools in Alberta.” *Journal of Education Policy* 19 (4): 387–405. doi:10.1080/0268093042000227465.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London: Routledge.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1996. *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 2005. *The Social Structures of the Economy*. Oxford: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 2010. *Outline of a Theory of Practice. Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology* 16. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.
- Bunar, Nihad. 2010. “Choosing for Quality or Inequality: Current Perspectives on the Implementation of School Choice Policy in Sweden.” *Journal of Education Policy* 25 (1): 1–18. doi:10.1080/02680930903377415.
- Burgess, Simon, Brendon McConnell, Carol Propper, and Deborah Wilson. 2007. “The Impact of School Choice on Sorting by Ability and Socioeconomic Factors in English Secondary Education.” In *Schools and the Equal Opportunity Problem*, edited by Ludger Woessmann and Paul E. Peterson, 273–292. Massachusetts, USA: MIT Press.
- Dustmann, C. 2004. “Parental Background, Secondary School Track Choice, and Wages.” *Oxford Economic Papers* 56 (2): 209–230. doi:10.1093/oep/gpf048.

- Felouzis, Georges, Agnès Henriot-Van Zanten, and Christian Maroy. 2013. *Les marchés scolaires: sociologie d'une politique publique d'éducation* [School Markets: Sociology of a Public Education Policy]. Education & société. Paris: Presses Univ. de France.
- Forsberg, Håkan. 2015. "Kampen om eleverna: Gymnasiefältet och skolmarknadens framväxt i Stockholm, 1987–2011 [The Battle Over Pupils. The Field of Upper Secondary Education and the Emergence of The School Market in Stockholm, 1987–2011]." *Studier i utbildnings- och kultursociologi 7 och Södertörn Doctoral Dissertations 112*, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Uppsala.
- Gewirtz, Sharon, Stephen J. Ball, and Richard Bowe. 1995. *Markets, Choice, and Equity in Education*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Green, Andy. 2013. *Education and State Formation: Europe, East Asia and the USA*. 2nd ed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Isling Poromaa ,Pär. 2017, October 13. "The Significance of Materiality in Shaping Institutional Habitus: Exploring Dynamics Preceding School Effects." *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 1–19. doi: [10.1080/01425692.2015.1093406](https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2015.1093406).
- Kährik ,Anneli, and R. Andersson. 2014. "Widening Gaps: Segregation Dynamics during Two Decades of Economic and Institutional Change in Stockholm." In *East Meets West: New Perspectives on Socio-Economic Segregation in European Capital Cities*, edited by Tiit Tammaru, Szymon Marcińczak, Maarten van Ham, and Sako Musterd, 110–131. London: Routledge.
- Le Roux, Brigitte, and Henry Rouanet. 2004. *Geometric Data Analysis: From Correspondence Analysis to Structured Data Analysis*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic.
- Lubienski, Christopher. 2003. "Innovation in Education Markets: Theory and Evidence on the Impact of Competition and Choice in Charter Schools." *American Educational Research Journal* 40 (2): 395–443.
- Lubienski, Christopher. 2006. "Incentives for School Diversification: Competition and Promotional Patterns in Local Education Markets." *Journal of School Choice* 1 (2): 1–31. doi:[10.1300/J467v01n02_01](https://doi.org/10.1300/J467v01n02_01).
- Lubienski, Christopher, Charisse Gulosino, and Peter Weitzel. 2009. "School Choice and Competitive Incentives: Mapping the Distribution of Educational Opportunities across Local Education Markets." *American Journal of Education* 115 (4): 601–647. doi:[10.1086/599778](https://doi.org/10.1086/599778).
- Lundahl, Lisbeth. 2011. "The Emergence of a Swedish School Market." In *No Country for the Young: Education from New Labour to the Coalition*, edited by Richard Hatcher and Ken Jones, s. 37–50. London: Tufnell Press.
- Lynch, Kathleen, and Marie Moran. 2006. "Markets, Schools and the Convertibility of Economic Capital: The Complex Dynamics of Class Choice." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 27 (2): 221–235. doi:[10.1080/01425690600556362](https://doi.org/10.1080/01425690600556362).
- Palme, Mikael. 2008. *Det kulturella kapitalet: Studier av symboliska tillgångar i det svenska utbildningssystemet 1988–2008* [Cultural Capital. Symbolic Assets in the Swedish Education System 1988–2008]. Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis.
- Poupeau, Franck, Jean-Christophe François, and Elodie Couratier. 2007. "Making the Right Move: How Families Are Using Transfers to Adapt to Socio-Spatial Differentiation of Schools in the Greater Paris Region." *Journal of Education Policy* 22 (1): 31–47. doi:[10.1080/02680930601065858](https://doi.org/10.1080/02680930601065858).
- Powell, Walter W., and Paul DiMaggio, eds. 1991. *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Raveaud, Maroussia, and Agnes van Zanten. 2007. "Choosing the Local School: Middle Class Parents' Values and Social and Ethnic Mix in London and Paris." *Journal of Education Policy* 22 (1): 107–124. doi:[10.1080/02680930601065817](https://doi.org/10.1080/02680930601065817).
- Reay, Diane. 1998a. *Class Work: Mothers' Involvement in Their Children's Primary Schooling*. Women & Social Class. London, Bristol, Pa: UCL Press.
- Reay, Diane. 1998b. "'Always Knowing' and 'Never Being Sure': Familial and Institutional Habitus and Higher Education Choice." *Journal of Education Policy* 13 (4): 519–529. doi:[10.1080/0268093980130405](https://doi.org/10.1080/0268093980130405).

- Smyth, Emer, and Joanne Banks. 2012. "“There Was Never Really Any Question of Anything Else’: Young People’s Agency, Institutional Habitus and the Transition to Higher Education.” *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 33 (2): 263–281. doi:10.1080/01425692.2012.632867.
- Söderström, Martin, and Roope Uusitalo. 2010. "School Choice and Segregation: Evidence from an Admission Reform*." *Scandinavian Journal of Economics* 112 (1): 55–76. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9442.2009.01594.x.
- Thomsen, Jens Peter. 2012. "Exploring the Heterogeneity of Class in Higher Education: Social and Cultural Differentiation in Danish University Programmes." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 33 (4): 565–585. doi:10.1080/01425692.2012.659458.
- Traver, Amy. 2006. "Institutions and Organizational Change: Reforming New York City’s Public School System." *Journal of Education Policy* 21 (5): 497–514. doi:10.1080/02680930600866090.
- Van Zanten, Agnè S. 2005. "New Modes of Reproducing Social Inequality in Education: The Changing Role of Parents, Teachers, Schools and Educational Policies." *European Educational Research Journal* 4 (3): 155–169. doi:10.2304/eej.2005.4.3.1.
- Wiborg, Susanne. 2015. "Privatizing Education: Free School Policy in Sweden and England." *Comparative Education Review* 59 (3): 473–497. doi:10.1086/681928.