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School segregation in the French Community of Belgium

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Abstract

After a brief description of the educational system context, showing that segregation in the French Community of Belgium is fostered by the school quasi-market, this chapter reviews what we know about segregation in the educational system of the French Community of Belgium. Whereas a major part of the research on segregation and political attention are focussed on socioeconomic segregation between schools in secondary education, several types of segregation occur according to social categories (school performance, socioeconomic status, language spoken at home, etc.) and types of separation (between schools, between curricula, within schools). Specific policy interventions aiming at tackling segregation are then described. These interventions focus mainly on socioeconomic segregation between schools in secondary education and follow two distinct ways: interventions on school enrolment procedures and interventions on school funding. Finally, these interventions are discussed in terms of feasibility and need of evaluation.

1. Introduction

In the French Community of Belgium, education is compulsory and free of charge for a period of twelve years starting at the age of 6 and ending at the age of 18. Pre-primary (not compulsory but free of charge and of a period of three years) and primary (between the ages of 6 and 12), are called fundamental education. Secondary education has three stages of two years each (Eurydice, 2009). For the first stage of two years, pupils have access to a common curriculum (Demeuse & Lafontaine, 2005). From the second stage on, secondary education is spread into different curricula¹ with different objectives and outlets, and each curriculum attracts distinct social and academic populations (Demeuse, Lafontaine et Straeten, 2005 ; Demeuse *et al.*, 2007). According to the curriculum followed, pupils will get access to higher education (after general or certain technical and vocational curricula), or a ‘vocational aptitude’ certificate (after vocational or certain technical curricula).

The Belgian education system is based on the principle of freedom of education, proclaimed in the Belgian Constitution. This principle of freedom is found at two levels. The first one concerns the freedom given to pupils and parents to choose the school that suits them (law of 1959). This freedom of choice was initially given in order to respect individual philosophical

¹ Secondary education is structured in three main curricula: general, technical or vocational education, artistic education being included either into technical or vocational one.

beliefs but nowadays this criterion is less and less important in families' choices. The second one regards the freedom of school management. This freedom in education led to a system spread into "réseaux" (networks), each having its own educational plan within which each school (and teachers) has its (his/her) own pedagogical freedom. In practice, education is structured in three main networks: Public schools run and financed by public authorities (the French Community); Public grant-aided schools run by the provinces or by municipalities and subsidised by the French Community, and Private grant-aided schools (denominational, non-denominational) run by private associations (non profit, diocese or congregation) or persons and subsidised by the French Community. The public financing is based on the same rules whatever the network except for school buildings.

The freedom of choice, combined with public financing of education - including private schools - and a method of calculating the financing of each institution according to the number of students registered, leads to a school quasi-market (Vandenberghe, 1998; Delvaux, Demeuse and Dupriez, 2005).

From the school's point of view, pupils have not only a "financial" value, because their numbers determine the subsidies awarded to each institution (first-order competition), but also a "pedagogical" value based on their more or less desirable personal traits (second-order competition) (Maroy, 2006). Schoolchildren that conform to school norms will be that much easier for the school to manage. Numerous authors have in addition demonstrated that peers play an important role in a pupil's learning (Slavin, 1990; Duru-Bellat & Mingat, 1997; Vandenberghe, 1998; Crahay, 2000; Ireson & Hallam, 2001; Dupriez & Draelants, 2003; Monseur and Crahay, 2008): while learning, a pupil is influenced by the characteristics of the other pupils in his class or school. In fact, teachers are also influenced by the composition of the group of pupils in their classroom and adapt the demands of the curriculum and the evaluation to these pupils (Thrupp, 1999; Thrupp, Lauder & Robinson, 2002; Dumay, 2004).

The school hopes to respond appropriately to parents' choices by providing quality education and in turn cultivate a certain demand from parents. A school that does not satisfy the most demanding parents will see them withdraw their children, taking with them the funds that allow the school to operate and thus reducing the resources available. In light of this, it is understandable that schools are not only in competition but also interdependent. This is what Delvaux and Joseph (2003) have called *competitive interdependence* between institutions: "the distribution of pupils, mainly determined by the free choice of parents but also by the relegation processes that exist between institutions, produces hierarchical positions among schools and these influence the strategies and actions that headmasters develop in their institutions and that are "formally" in their zone of autonomy. Schools located in the same local space are interdependent insofar as the workings of a school depend on its position in the local school hierarchy and indirectly on the workings of the other institutions in this space"².

These particularities of the educational system in French-speaking Belgium foster segregation of schools and create several "types" of schools on a continuum from "ghetto" schools to "sanctuary" schools. Different examples of segregation have been observed in numerous studies (Crahay, 2000; Demeuse et al., 2005; Baye, Demeuse, Monseur & Goffin, 2006; Delvaux & Joseph, 2003; Demeuse & Baye, 2007; 2008; Friant, Derobertmeasure & Demeuse, 2008). Not only are there great socio-economic disparities between schools, related to the type

² Our translation.

of programmes they offer, but also, when we look at the institutions on the extreme ends of this continuum, we see that the situation is worsening: the most privileged institutions dispose of their most underprivileged pupils, whereas the most underprivileged schools cannot keep their most privileged pupils (Friant et al., 2008).

Numerous studies (Dupriez & Dumay, 2006; Monseur & Crahay, 2008) have shown that the quasi-market of the Belgian education system results in significant inequalities in school results because of the related segregation. PISA 2000 and 2003 from OECD revealed a strong score discrepancy between the 25% of 15-year-old pupils with the most favourable socioeconomic background and the 25% of pupils with the least favourable one. These assessments also underlined the importance of the average socioeconomic level of schools themselves on differences on pupils' performances (Baye et al., 2006).

2. Types of segregation

With Delvaux (2005), we define segregation as *“the expression of social differences in space. It appears as soon as individuals classified by society into distinct social categories, endowed with a differentiated social value, are separated in space and thus do not mix with each other”*³. In the French Community of Belgium, as in other systems, several types of segregation occur. It is worth clarifying this, because there is not the same amount of information or political attention, which together lead to specific policy interventions, for each type of segregation.

From this definition, one can say that segregation can be characterized by two factors: the social categories and the type of spatial separation. Without the pretention of being exhaustive, we identify 3 possible social categories, and 3 possible types of separation. This gives us 9 types of segregation, about which we have varying amounts of information. Table 1 illustrates this with an example of research results for the French Community of Belgium and places the specific policy interventions on this grid.

Table 1 – Types of segregation and possible interventions

		Social categories					
		Socioeconomic		Academic		“Ethnic”	
		Research	Interventions	Research	Interventions	Research	Interventions
Separation	Between curricula	Friant, Demeuse and Derobertmeasure (2008)		Baye et al. (2006)		Jacobs & Rea (2007)	
	Between Schools	Demeuse and Baye (2007)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interventions on school enrolment procedures • Interventions on school funding 	Demeuse and Baye (2007)		Medhoune (1998)	
	Within schools			Demeuse (1996)		Demeuse (2002)	

³ Our translation.

A major part of the research is focussed on socioeconomic segregation in secondary education, that is to say the separation of pupils according to their socioeconomic status, measured by indicators such as answers to survey questions (as in the PISA studies) or a composite indicator characterizing their home district⁴. The latter indicator is used, among other things, in priority education policy: in the rest of this document, we will refer to it with the abbreviation "SES". Socioeconomic segregation between curricula and between schools (somewhat linked given the varying training programs offered by schools) is well documented. However, we know very little about segregation within schools, as the available data do not go to such detailed level (except for curricula).

Since the PISA studies and the acknowledgement of the huge differences in pupils' results, notably between schools, academic segregation is quite well documented. Again, there is not so much information regarding segregation within schools, as the available data does not go to such detailed level. However, some studies using external evaluations (e.g. Demeuse, 1996), have explored this dimension.

Finally, there is a lack of data about "ethnic" segregation in the French Community of Belgium (Jacobs et al., 2009). One source of information is the PISA dataset, using the birthplace of the pupils' parents (Demeuse & Baye, 2007, 2008; Jacobs, Rea & Hanquinet, 2007; Jacobs et al., 2009). Another consists in local studies using indirect indicators such as the pupils' first name (Demeuse, 2002), or the feeling of being a person with immigrant background (Jacobs & Rea, 2007). However, we do not have much information about the segregation of Belgian pupils with an immigrant background (grandparents born in another country). This situation is certainly due to the lack of data resulting from the philosophical position of the government of the French Community of Belgium that "ethnic" and immigration categorization is not desirable (Friant, Demeuse, Aubert-Lotarski & Nicaise, 2008; Jacobs et al., 2009).

The following sections will present what we know about segregation and the specific policy intervention aimed at tackling it. We will keep in mind that, given the available data, this picture is not complete and shall mainly focus on socioeconomic and academic segregation between schools in secondary education, with a brief mention of ethnic segregation.

2.1. Segregation between schools

An empirical approach to the mechanisms fostering segregation requires that researchers work on empirical data. Unfortunately, this type of data is almost inexistent in the French Community of Belgium. Thus researchers tend to use information coming mainly from international studies, in order to build segregation indicators. Certain authors who have used this method reviewed several calculation modes (Baye et al., 2006; Demeuse & Baye, 2007). One of the chosen segregation indicators is the proportion of pupils from the target group (for

⁴ The socio-economic index is based on the student's district of origin (the notion of district is a statistical division of the territory (Demeuse, 2002, p. 219). A synthetic socio-economic index score is assigned to each district in Belgium, on the basis of 11 variables within the framework of 6 domains (income per inhabitant, level of the certificates, unemployment rate, employment rate and proportion of people receiving welfare, professions, comfort of housing). Thus each student is assigned the socio-economic index score of the district where he lives and somehow brings this index score to the level of the institution. From a statistical point of view, this is a normal distribution metric variable that varies between -3.5 and 3.5. It is recalculated every three years on the basis of the latest statistics available

example, pupils whose parents were born outside of Belgium) that should change schools in order to constitute an equivalent proportion of these pupils in each school (Gorard & Taylor, 2002).

Table 2, computed with the PISA 2003 dataset (Baye et al., 2006, p.42; Demeuse & Baye, 2007, 2008), shows several segregation rates according to specific target groups and makes it possible to compare the French Community of Belgium with other countries.

Table 2 – Indices of segregation between schools (adapted from Demeuse and Baye, 2007)

Country*	literacy (10% weakest)	literacy (under level 2)	math (10% weakest)	math (under level 2)	parents' occupational status	gender	linguistic origin	parents' country of birth
Finland	25	32,9	27,7	33,7	30,8	7,5	65,4	45,3
Island	26,2	19,3	26,1	21,5	**	8,4	65,3	30,7
Sweden	31,4	26,8	32,3	24,5	29,3	8,5	57,9	31,6
Norway	31,8	24,1	29,9	21,1	**	8,4	51	35,7
Poland	34,5	27,7	31,8	23,3	42,5	7,8	95,5	93,9
Denmark	38,3	30,5	36,5	29,7	29,2	9,4	60,9	34,1
UK	38,4	33,7	40,7	32,8	33,9	14,9	64,5	32,4
Latvia	39	30,2	40,9	28,5	28,8	9,1	86,7	37
Luxemburg	39,6	32,7	39,3	32,9	21,2	13	26,2	14,2
Ireland	40,8	39,8	37,4	30,5	30,9	28,3	83,1	21,6
Spain	42,6	30,5	43,7	30,3	30,9	11,4	74,7	38,6
Greece	50,3	36,2	51	28,2	31,1	10,5	70,2	37,7
Turkey	50,8	30,6	49,5	22,9	**	13	85	67,5
Slovak Republic	52	37	52,4	40,8	35,9	17,4	81,3	32,4
Belgium (German Community)	52,1	46,5	56,2	46,4	27,4	15,3	44,6	21,2
Portugal	54,3	41,5	52,5	34	29,4	9,2	71,5	35
Czech Republic	55,3	42,6	55	46,1	40	18,8	83,7	36,8
Netherlands	56,2	54,2	56,6	55,9	33,9	10,8	55,8	33,9
France	56,3	48,3	57,5	50,4	30,8	15	57	31
Italy	56,5	43,6	57,6	38,1	33,6	23,5	72,2	38
Belgium (Flemish Community)	57,6	54,2	59	56,5	39,4	20,5	60,2	33,6
Austria	59,9	50,4	55,9	47,7	31,5	28,3	47	34,6
Belgium (French Community)	60,2	44,2	58,9	42	35,9	14,7	49	22,8
Hungary	60,2	47	60,6	44,9	36	18,5	84,2	33,9
Belgium (As a country)	61,1	49,9	59,2	50,4	38,4	17,9	55,8	34,7
Liechtenstein	63	62,9	63,6	61,8	**	5,9	17,6	16,2
Germany	64,7	48,7	62,9	49,8	36,8	12,4	52,3	37,9

* No data available for Cyprus, Lithuania, Malta, Slovenia, Estonia, Bulgaria and Romania.

** No data available

Columns 1 to 4 of this Table illustrate the academic segregation between schools. For example, we can read from column 3 that in the French Community of Belgium, about six pupils out of ten from the group of the 10% of the weakest pupils in mathematics should change schools in order to attain an equivalent share of this group of pupils in each school,

that is to say 10% in each school (segregation indicator of 58.9%, column 3). This indicator is only of about 28% in Finland. Columns 1 and 2, regarding literacy, show very similar results.

Columns 5 to 8 show indexes of segregation between schools according to the pupils' personal characteristics: socioeconomic segregation (column 5), segregation according to linguistic origin (column 7) and to parents' country of birth (column 8). The socioeconomic segregation index according to parents' profession is one of the highest in Europe (36%, versus 30% in France or 21% in Luxembourg). Given the different patterns of language origin and immigration in European countries, indexes of segregation regarding linguistic origin (49%) and the parents' place of birth (23%) are difficult to interpret.

Regarding "ethnic" segregation, from a more local point of view, Medhoun (1998) showed that in Brussels, where 40% of pupils came from an immigrant background, one primary school out of three enrolled 70% of pupils with an immigrant background. Furthermore, at the secondary education level, pupils with an immigrant background were overrepresented in the relegation curricula and schools, and underrepresented in the curricula and schools with a good reputation.

2.2. Segregation within schools

In the French Community of Belgium, as a tradition, there is a trend to put pupils with similar performances in the same classes (Rey, 2003). As a result, there is a sort of "ability-grouping" within schools. According to the IEA Reading-Literacy (1991), the aggregation effect linked to the class is of about 20% in primary education, and 45% in the first stage of secondary education [versus 10% in Finland, but 60% in the Netherlands (Monseur & Demeuse, 2001)]. In the French Community of Belgium, this aggregation effect increases when passing from the primary to the secondary level, whereas in other educational systems, such as in Finland, it decreases. Moreover, the practice of grade repetition, which is highly present in the French Community of Belgium, fills the role of managing heterogeneity: it contributes to the constitution of homogeneous classes (Delvaux, 2000; Monseur & Demeuse, 2001).

Other mechanisms can only be studied at a very local level. For example, Demeuse (2002) observed the characteristics, in terms of birthdate and first names, of pupils from two classes of a primary school during two years. We can see in Table 3 that, in school year 1, all the pupils of the class A are "on time", whereas only half of those in the class B are. In school year 2, the composition of the class A stay unchanged, but the class B has lost 4 of its pupils, who are replaced by 4 newcomers, of whom 3 are grade repeaters. Moreover, the analysis of the pupils' first names, a method used by Felouzis (2003) in France, shows ethnic segregation between these two classes (the majority of the first names in the class A are common in French Speaking Belgium, while the majority of the first names in the class B show an immigrant background).

Table 3 – Evolution of the composition of two classes during two school years (adapted from Demeuse, 2002)

	School year 1			School year 2		
	on time	"Belgian" first name	quitting	on time	"Belgian" first name	newcomers
Class A	9/9	8/9	0/9	9/9	8/9	0/9
Class B	5/9	3/9	4/9	3/8	2/8	4/8

2.3. Segregation between curricula

Options and school curricula in the secondary education play a major role in the mechanisms of segregation. At 14-15 years old, pupils who have just completed a common core curriculum, have to choose or are oriented to a specific curriculum in their third year of secondary school. In reality, we observe that pupils are oriented negatively, less successful pupils being directed to less and less valued curricula (Demeuse & Lafontaine, 2005, Discry-Theate, 1998).

Focusing on the curricula only, Figure 1 shows that the average socioeconomic index (SES) is significantly different from one curriculum to another (Demeuse, Lafontaine & Straeten, 2005; Friant, Derobertmeasure & Demeuse, 2008). Academic curricula have a higher average SES than others. Inversely, technical and, above all, vocational curricula, have a lower SES. There is thus a divide between academic curricula, with privileged pupils, and vocational ones, with underprivileged pupils.

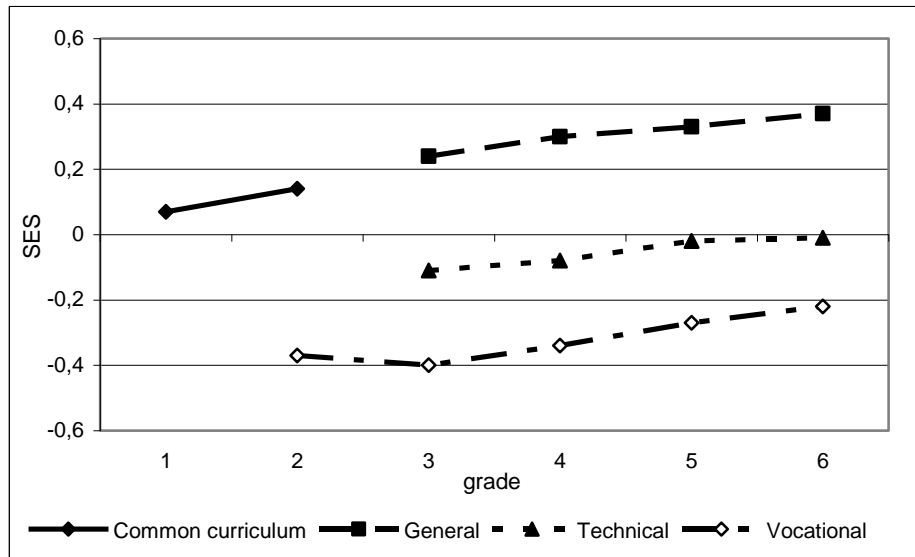


Figure 1: Average SES by curriculum and grade in the school year 2005-2006 (Friant et al., 2008)

The SES seems to increase during secondary education, in all curricula. This surprising evolution actually translates the mechanisms that come into play between curricula: pupils from the academic curricula with non satisfactory school results tend to switch to technical or vocational curricula. These pupils are at the same time among the less privileged from their original curriculum, but also among the more privileged from their arrival curriculum. That is how a certain hierarchy of curricula is established, according to a social status that is linked with school success for some and school failure for the others.

Such a mechanism is also observed at the level of schools: those offering technical or vocational education draw pupils that have been pushed out from general education, with a lower socioeconomic status (Delvaux et Joseph, 2003 ; Friant, Derobertmeasure & Demeuse, 2008; Friant, Dandoy, Demeuse, Franquet & Hourez, 2010.).

Table 4 – Average SES according to the type of secondary school (school year 2005-2006) (Friant et al., 2008)

	General	Mixed (academic + technical-vocational)	Technical - vocational
Average SES	0.38	-0.04	-0.23
% of pupils	27.3%	60.1%	12.6%

Some segregation according to immigrant background is also observed between curricula. In a survey led in secondary schools of the municipality of Brussels, Jacobs & Rea (2007) observed that 40% of the pupils in General education had a mother or father born abroad, compared with 80% in technical and vocational education.

3. Specific policy interventions tackling segregation between schools

Acknowledging the major segregation in the educational system, the Government of the French Community of Belgium⁵ set out to encourage social mixing within schools, in particular through the "Contrat pour l'Ecole" (2005). To do this, two complementary lines of action were proposed: regulating enrolment in the secondary education and differentiating financing. In the first case, the motivation is to ensure that all parents receive truly identical treatment (setting up an enrolment record in all schools, managing enrolment according to common and identical rules avoiding favouritism). In the second case, by balancing the recruitment of more "difficult" schoolchildren with a larger school staff, the legislator aims to compensate for these difficulties by increasing funding and manpower.

3.1. Interventions affecting school enrolment procedures

In 2007, on the initiative of the Minister of Education Marie Arena, the government set up a simple system of enrolment regulation, known as the "enrolment law" (French Community of Belgium, 2007). The idea was to apply a "first-come, first-served" principle. The secondary schools had to keep a register of the available spots and the requests for enrolment, by keeping a track of each request in order of arrival starting from a date known to everyone. Every pupil requesting enrolment was accepted, until there were no more spots available. Pupils arriving later were placed on a waiting list. The purpose of this procedure, set up for the school year 2007-2008, was to tackle possible discrimination at enrolment, such as unjustified rejection, or the use of legally unacceptable criteria for rejection (such as former school results). Changing of schools during the same cycle as well as the expulsion of pupils were also made more difficult.

Even though these measures were modest and somehow only reinforced the possibility of monitoring the application of existing rules, this law was very badly received by a part of the public. According to Galand (2007), there are two reasons for this. First, the application of the law brought to light problems that have always existed, but that stayed hidden in the past: divergences between parents about the role of school, and differences between schools according to their popularity with students and parents (with queues before envy-inspiring,

⁵ The French Community of Belgium has been governed during the considered period by a centre-left coalition, providing several ministers of education.

high SES schools). Second, these measures were received with a certain anxiety by some parents who made multiple registrations, which then undoubtedly increased competition for the most envied spots. This “enrolment law”, whose aim was simply to make transparent the enrolment process for secondary education, thus had modest objectives in terms of social mixing. It nonetheless produced spectacular effects in the media, fuelled by some school principals and groups of parents denouncing a situation that had previously been favourable for them. An in-depth analysis of the media effects of enrolment regulation can be found in Delvaux & Maroy (2009).

Following these negative reactions, a new law was prepared by Christian Dupont, the Minister of Education who succeeded Marie Arena, and replaced the old one in the school year 2008-2009 (Communauté française de Belgique, 2008). At the same time more ambitious (it is called the “social mixing law”) and *a priori* more acceptable in public opinion (no more queues), the measures were also much more complex. The social mixing law kept some ingredients of the enrolment law (enrolment from a given date and accounting for available spots) but the principle of “first-come, first-served” was abandoned. Instead, priority rules were instituted and a random factor was applied when the demand still surpassed the supply. In practical terms, in some very desirable schools where the demand surpassed the number of available spots, a number of rules were to be applied, in order to manage the surplus of demand and to encourage social mixing within these schools. Without going into the details, the pupils living near the school and those with a lower SES than the average of the school had more a greater chance of being enrolled. For the other pupils, independently from their order of arrival, the process had the characteristics of a random drawing.

The social mixing law was applied in November and December 2008 for the start of the school year 2009-2010 and, just like the previous one, made the headlines. As a result, the Minister of Education announced already in December 2008 that it had to be changed (Christian Dupont on the RTBF, December 10, 2008). One of the reasons is once again to be found in the criticisms of some of the parents for whom this law unacceptably undermined their freedom of choice. But above all, multiple registrations caused major problems and dramatically reduced the chances of satisfying parents’ preferences.

After the June 2009 elections, the new Minister of Education, Marie-Dominique Simonet, prepared the changes and implemented the new law (French Community of Belgium, 2010). In order to correct the issues of the previous version, the random drawing is abandoned. Parents’ preferences are maximised by asking them to rank several schools, and the management of enrolment is centralized by a commission in order to avoid multiple registrations⁶. It is still contested by some parents, but its application at the start of the school year 2010-2011 went without major problems.

Have these interventions on school enrolment procedures had an effect of desegregation? It is too soon to say, but this should be the case in the near future. There is little doubt, however, that if a desegregation effect is observed, it will not be spectacular.

3.2. Interventions on school funding

⁶ Such a system of collective treatment of preferences in choosing schools had first be mentioned in a research report commissioned by the Government (Delvaux., Demeuse, Dupriez, Fagnant, Guisset, Lafontaine, Marissal, & Maroy, 2005), on the basis of a description of school choice systems in several countries.

While actions aimed at greater social mixing by regulating school enrolment have been implemented and greatly criticised, the idea of instating differentiated financing is following another path, initially inspired by a compensatory approach. The "Contrat pour l'École" (Contract for School) initiated this project by studying the efficiency and feasibility of directly linking the calculation of the number of teaching hours to the socio-economic background of each pupil in the school (Government of the French Community of Belgium, 2005, p. 46). An interuniversity research project commissioned by the Government to be performed by the universities of Mons and Liège had the goal of setting up new measures to fight school segregation thanks to a modulation of the financing of primary and secondary schools (Demeuse et al., 2007). The Government received the research report in March 2007 and pursued its reflections in this way.

This study envisages the setting up of a general school funding formula that encompasses all the components determining school funding (currently the numbers of pupils, their grade and curriculum), plus other parameters, particularly the socioeconomic composition of the school. The interuniversity team tested several scenarios linking the schools' SES with extra staff by a continuous function.

The idea was the following (Demeuse, Derobertmeasure & Friant, 2010): if we accept that any school, personified by its head, tries to maximise its teaching staff, we can assume that rational choices will be made in order to attain this goal. The means that the school head can use to this end will depend upon the implementation of a policy of social mixing among schoolchildren in view of obtaining optimal financing from the public authorities if the compensatory mechanisms are sufficient with respect to the supposed difficulty that this social mixing may engender. Accordingly, the dissemination of information related to financing measures must be guaranteed at least for schools.

However, in the workings of the French-speaking Belgian school quasi-market, the maximisation of the "quality" of the public recruited also plays an important role, so that schools do not get any "profit" in having an underprivileged public. Because it is easier, for school workforces of the same size, to educate a certain type of public, institutions in a high position in the local school hierarchy (Delvaux & Joseph, 2003) select pupils with a privileged background. In this sense, the use of a formula that weights school staff funding according to the social status of pupils could make it possible to favour the recruiting of underprivileged pupils, as long as the supplementary means are considered sufficient and the supposed results (because they are not measured effectively via national examinations, for example) remain acceptable in terms of client expectations - parents who wish to entrust their children to institutions that take the risk of modifying their recruitment policy.

The financing measures implemented in the French Community of Belgium at the beginning of the 2009 school year abandoned this idea of incentive for social mixing, and focussed only on a compensatory approach. They are characterised by an increase in the budget (from €22 million - 0.45% of the total budget - it goes to €62 million - 1.35% of the total budget - for all levels of education) and a desire to concentrate supplementary funds in schools with an underprivileged population. The distribution of these funds is illustrated in Figure 2 drawn from a Government press release.

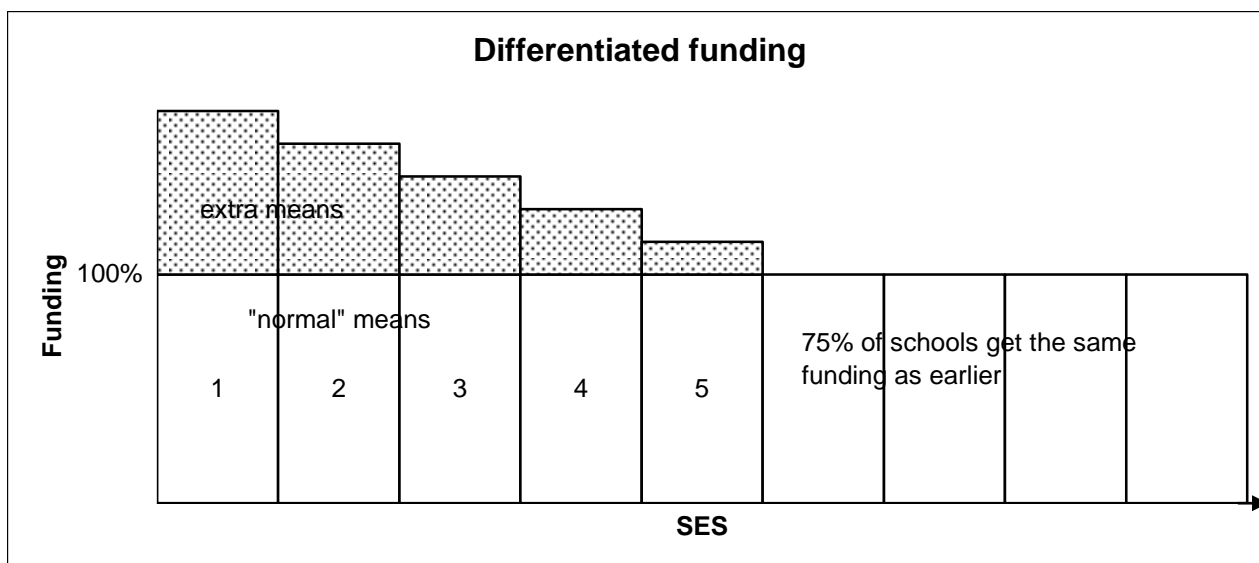


Figure 2 - illustration of the school workforce and financing according to the Government of the French Community (French Community, 2009)

After the election in June 2009, the new government had to implement this law for the start of the 2010-2011 school year with a lower budget than was foreseen at the time of its adoption. This was done by proposing a reallocation of funds from the most privileged schools to the most underprivileged ones. This idea was probably inspired from a scenario described in the research report, but neglected the underlying principle of the scenario, which was to add an effect of incentive redistribution by penalising schools whose pupils are on average privileged and that have little socio-economic mixing. The reactions that ensued demonstrated the political impossibility of such a reallocation of funds.

4. Conclusions and reflection

Segregation, particularly socioeconomic segregation between schools, is a major issue in the French Community of Belgium. The functioning of the quasi-market tends to foster this. Acknowledging this phenomenon, the government is trying to tackle the problem. However, in the context of this Community, it is very difficult to set up specific interventions that have a desegregation effect.

Interventions on enrolment procedures in the French Community of Belgium generally cause great turbulence. The freedom of school choice is indeed considered a basic right that is difficult to question. However, the last law regulating enrolment procedures was implemented without major problems. The key is that it tries to maximise parents' preferences by asking them to rank several schools, and that these preferences are treated by a centralized commission. Moreover, a great effort has been made to provide information by creating a website where parents can find specific details and useful tools⁷.

Interventions on school funding are less unpopular. However, in order to have an effect of desegregation, these interventions must be broad enough, and include an incentive effect that

⁷ <http://www.inscription.cfwb.be>

penalizes schools that will not play the desegregation game. Such a mechanism has been politically impossible to implement, at least as it has been presented so far.

Another possibility that has been studied but not applied is worth noting. In a research project commissioned by the government, Delvaux *et al.* (2005) studied the feasibility of creating “school catchment areas” in which the schools could work together no matter what network they belong to, especially from the point of view of courses offered. It also proposed a system of collective treatment of preferences in choosing schools, in order to regulate the quasi-market even more while still respecting parents' freedom of choice. The authors believed that such actions could limit the phenomenon of segregation between schools. The various tensions arising from these proposals did, however, make it difficult to continue along this path.

There is no evaluation of the effectiveness of policy interventions yet but it should come in the near future. Indicators making it possible to evaluate the potential social mixing resulting from these new measures should be built at the micro level, i.e. at the level of each school (average socio-economic index score, evolution of this score, standard deviation of the score, etc) and/or at the system level (Demeuse and Baye, 2007; 2008) in order to evaluate the attainment of the goals and, if necessary, to end these measures once the goal of social mixing is reached. However, there is little doubt that the desegregation effects of the policy interventions will not be spectacular in a near future.

Finally, the production of such indicators could be a means of promoting schools' autonomy, by making them able to know their situation in terms of segregation and relegation. In this case, the schools would be regarded as real units, and not simply operators undergoing a certain number of educational policies (Ross & Levacic, 1999). Each school could therefore be characterized by a set of indicators that could be used by the school principals in their pursuit of quality. Indicators such as grade repetition treatment (Demeuse *et al.*, 2010; Friant *et al.*, 2008; 2010) could inform the school principals about the school level mechanisms that have a systemic impact and create academic and socioeconomic segregation between schools. Therefore, they could help them to determine and to implement actions. However, it is not advisable that this autonomy of the schools prevent the public authority's right to oversee them, especially by the means of external evaluations of the pupil's outcomes, which give full meaning to indicators such as grade repetition rates.

5. References

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