Summary – Ph.D. Thesis: School choice. An analysis of the enrollment mechanisms in primary and secondary school. Case study: the admission process for secondary school in Bucharest

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According to the Education and Training Monitor (2018), a document published annually by the European Commission[1], approximately one in four children from Romania doesn't continue mandatory education in the 9th grade or further high school studies after finishing the 10th grade. In this context, approximately 25% of students who finish the 8th grade in a cohort have an inferior qualification on the labor market or, if they didn't complete these eight grades, they can't have a qualification at all and they can't enroll to courses of professional training. Besides, these students can only access a diminished set of employment opportunities (and these are, generally speaking, position that are considered less prestigious and are less valued at the societal level). Furthermore, their prospective wages are rather low and they have an inferior capacity of negotiation and a correlative higher level of dependency in relation with their employer. There isn't a lot of information concerning these students' socio-economic characteristics, but if we assume that the educational outcomes are correlated with the family background of the students[2], we can deduce that these persons come from rather disadvantaged families and that, given this fact, they have diminished opportunities for social and economic upper mobility. In this context, the level of schooling[3] one enjoys becomes extremely relevant for her career path, being in a relation of direct proportionality with the level of individual welfare. The fact that a large number of individuals from a community have unequal opportunities also has macro-societal implications for this society's evolution and economic development, its stability and its levels of democratic consolidation and, of course, for its general welfare. This fact justifies the transfer of accountability from the individual level to the state, an actor that should ensure, through education and other policies (economic, social), that citizens are empowered to access a high level of welfare.

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[1] that presents the priority issues in the domain of education in the EU member states according to the Europe 2020 strategy

[2] This thesis is defended in Țoc (2018) for the situation of Romania.

[3] I understand by this both the formal level, quantified by the number of finished grades and obtained degrees, and the level of minimal knowledge that every participant in the system of mandatory schooling is supposed to obtain.

Considering the extremely important role played by the education system in the consolidation of the democratic and economic processes of a society, its analysis[4] represents one of the most popular interdisciplinary fields of study. To take the example of political science, Orr (2004) observes, in his study of articles on the topic of education that were published in the most important journals of this field, the fact that researchers in this area, although they've published a small number of papers, are more interested in the analysis of "the distribution of power in the decision-making process, the organization and governance of public school systems, and the outcomes and effects of education policy decision" (Orr 2004, 11), but also in the manner in which democratic values are translated into the school curricula in order to educate future citizens (Orr 2004).

Some of the specific topics that are relevant in the study of the education system, including the Romanian one, are the rules around which the system is organized, the mechanisms used in the distribution of students or in the allocation of teachers to schools, the principles that justify these elements and, also, the effects of these components as are experienced by the actors involved in the system. One of the most common topics is the analysis of the successive reforms of the Romanian education system. For example, Savu (2018) identified over 100 legislative modifications (from 1990 to the moment of his study): "55 modifications of the Education Law[5] 84/1995 and […] 45 modification of the National Education Law no. 1/2011" (Savu 2018, 38). When it comes to the issue of equal opportunities, the majority of educational policies that were implemented in Romania have focused on the on the improvement of school resources. These policies were criticized by studies such as the one conducted by Florian and Țoc (2018), who conclude that these public programs didn't have the expected results. The focus on improving school resources, either those directed at the schools' infrastructure or those targeting educational resources and the training of teachers, had a reduced impact on the educational results of students (measured by the scores obtained at national evaluations, early school abandonment, rural-urban gaps etc.). Besides the provision of necessary school resources (which are, nevertheless, very important in the educational process), other national policies and programs focused, for example, on the class composition haven't been implemented until now, the only exception being in the problem of the segregation of Roma students: a Ministerial Order (6158/12.12.2016) that intended

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[4] As an aggregate of all of its components: school system, policies, programs, curriculum, teachers, etc.
[5] Legea [nv[t[mantului in rom

the sanctioning of school segregation, an occurrence to which Roma students were/are exposed[6] (nevertheless, the Ministerial Order doesn't have a methodology of implementation). As such, the classroom composition has been rather ignored by the educational policies of the Romanian state. The importance of a classroom collective that is as balanced as possible in terms of its social and economic characteristics is undeniable if we consider the conclusions reached by researchers that the educational outcomes of socioeconomic disadvantaged students (SED) tend to improve if they study in the same class with students that have a higher level of socio-economic development.

The lack of a comprehensive vision and the refusal of formulating a long-term strategy, as well as the recurrent modifications (that were, in addition, rarely justified in a proper manner[7]) and the precarious budgeting of the system (3.7% from the GDP, which is well under the European average of 4.7% in 2017, according to the Education and Training Monitor (2018)) led to the following outcomes of the Romanian educational system[8]:

- At the PISA tests (2015), Romania managed to obtain poor results, under the average level of OECD with a high percentage (over 40%) of students who are aged 15 having a reduced capacity of comprehending and solving the respective exercises;

- A high percentage of the number of students from Romania who are aged 15 have poor results when it comes to reading (39%, while the European average is 19.7%), mathematics (40%, while the European average is 22.2%) and sciences (38.5%, while the European average is 20.6%) – these results are from the PISA tests (2015). Moreover, approximately 24% of students obtained poor results (under level 2) at all three evaluations;

- The parents social economic status represents an important explanatory factor for the variance of the test results of the students (according to PISA 2015);

- Over 18% of young people aged between 18 and 24 years old leave the educational system early, while the European average is considerably lower (10.6%). The rural-urban gap is significant: over 27% of them live in the rural area;

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[6] This category of students is particularly affected by the failure of the Romanian education system: according to the Education and Training Monitor (2018), over 77% of Roma students from rural areas don't complete the mandatory years of education, leaving the system earlier.

[7] See the argument concerning "the never-ending reform of education system of Romania" (Florian and Țoc 2018).

[8] These outcomes are synthetically presented by the Education and Training Monitor, a document assumed by the European Commission, published in 2018: https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/document-library-docs/et-monitor-report-2018-romania-2_en.pdf

Furthermore, if we look over the results obtained at the standardized evaluations that are held at the end of middle school, we can observe significant differences between the students that study in the rural areas and those from urban schools (see the report of the Institute of Education Sciences 2016)[9]. In this context, only the variable that measures the residence area of the school is available for understanding the general situation of the educational system. The Ministry of National Education[10] does not collect other relevant information in order to develop different policies and programs that are focused on identifying and "treating" the issues discussed above (such as the socioeconomic characteristics of the students)[11]. From here, I can only draw the conclusion that identifying the nature of these problems is not an objective of the Ministry. Ever more importantly, the Ministry chooses to put the responsibility for these outcomes on the parents, considering that they are "guilty" for the existing problems. For example, according to the declarations of the Minister of Education, a clear regulation such as the maximal number of students in a classroom (according to L.E.N[12] no. 1/2011, 25 is the recommended number for middle school, with 30 being the maximum that is accepted) is breached by the decision makers in schools and inspectorates because of the pressures that are exercised by parents[13]. This problem occurs because parents want to enroll their children at a specific school (one which they consider being more high-performing) that is different from the one found in their district. This fact is rarely documented and never sanctioned by the competent authorities.

These pressures are felt especially by so-called "good schools" (that are mentioned even by the Minister). To speak of schools in these terms is problematic for several reasons: a) there is no official methodology for distinguishing between schools in order to formulate such a hierarchy (by which to find the level of school performance); b) education should not be provided at different quality levels; c) the enrollment in primary school is performed according to the principle of proximity and, as such, parents shouldn't have – at least theoretically – the possibility of choosing a "good school", at least when it comes to public schools. Nevertheless, this term is frequently

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[9] In Romanian: *Institutul de Ştiinţe ale Educaţiei*.
[10] In Romanian: *Ministerul Educaţiei Naţionale*.
[11] And even if they are collected (see, for example, the study conducted by ARACIP that will be discussed in the first chapter of this thesis), they are not used for developing public policies and programs.
[12] L.E.N. stands for *Legea Educaţiei Naţionale* (in Romanian) – *The Law of National Education*.
[13] For details, an article in Romanian can be found here: https://www.edupedu.ro/dezbatere-aprinsa-ecaterina-andronescu-oana-moraru-ministrul-vrea-ca-profesorii-sa-treaca-din-nou-in-universitati-pentru-reimprospatarea-cunostintelor-moraru-inspectorii-scolari-metodistii-fac-p/

used in the public space, even if it actually indicates a serious problem of the system: in an informal manner, it recognizes the fact that there are big differences between schools, but without taking any measures towards solving this issue. Moreover, there are no attempts at identifying the causes that determine a school to be considered "good" or "bad". For example, studies carried out at the international level indicate that the performance of a school (measure by the educational results of the students) is correlated with the socio-economic composition of the respective school. To put it in another way, there is a higher probability that schools in which we find a higher proportion of students coming from a disadvantaged socio-economic background to have lower levels of performance and, as such, to be considered "bad schools" . Romania shouldn't be an exception from this fact (even more so if we assume the conclusions of the PISA tests in Romania that indicate the influence of the family's social background on the educational results of the children).

Nevertheless, the socioeconomic composition of schools and classes was never considered a relevant enough topic to be included in the debates concerning the educational reform. The main factor that has a direct influence on the composition of a class is *the school enrollment mechanism*, a part of the Romanian educational system that received an unjustified low attention, both from researchers that work in the educational sciences and from the main actors directly involved in the workings of the system. In the case of primary school, the enrollment process is determined by the principle of proximity[14], while at the high school level, educational results and the revealed preferences for a particular school unit are also considered[15]. Both the principle of proximity and the mechanisms that permit parents to choose the school are criticized by researchers that are interested in the effects that the composition of a class has on educational results. For example, one consequence of these mechanisms is segregation – both on racial/ethnic grounds and on socioeconomic differences. An enrollment system based on the principle of proximity, especially when it is implemented in an urban area where there are communities concentrated/segregated on socio-economic criteria, raises the probability for a school to be composed of students with very similar social, economic and racial characteristics. These studies also point to the fact that even in the case of educational systems that are not centrally regulated – those based on school choice, in which the parents can select the school units of their children – can also lead to a socioeconomic

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[14] The enrollment is realized according to the school district where the student is domiciled.
[15] A student has a higher chance of being admitted to a high school that is in the top of her preferences if she obtains a higher score at the national evaluation and during the four between 5th and 8th grade.

concentration of students. One possible explanation is that parents, when they choose a particular school, use arguments that are concerned at least in part with the composition of the class (either from a socio-economic standpoint or from an ethnical/racial one) and not only with the quality of the educational services provided by the school.

The high school admission system is particularly important given the fact that it is a stage of transition that establishes the educational trajectory of the students (and later their professional trajectory) at a rather low age (14-15 years old). OCDE considers the standardized evaluation at the end of 8th grade to be "a high stake exam" that has an important impact on the academic future of the students. As such, I believe that it is important to highlight the fact that the admission system is based on a meritocratic principle: the educational results (which from a meritocratic point of view should reflect the effort and learning capacity of the students) represent the main criteria by which a student has priority in enrolling at a high-school/specialization that is in the top of her preferences. As I've just mentioned, if the grades are good, then a student has higher chances of being admitted at a high-school and a specialization that sits at the top of her list of preferences. Conversely, lower grades limit her list of preferences with the student having a lower priority of being admitted at her preferred high-school when competing with her colleagues that managed to obtain higher grades. If we maintain in our sight the fact that educational results depend to a high degree on the social-economic background of the family, this process raises a problem with the extent in which equal opportunities in education are actually assured.

The main objective of this thesis is to analyze the effects of the interaction between the principle of proximity in the enrollment process to primary and secondary school and the high school admission mechanism. In order to do this, I carry out a case study in which I follow how the type of school completed by a student in Bucharest influences the type of high school at which she will be admitted given the present system of admission/allocation. As such, I am interested to identify the measure in which the school of a student (one which parents, at least in principle, cannot choose as it's dependent on the street where they reside) can represent an explanatory factor for the probability of a student to be admitted at a particular high school (a stage at which parents and students can manifest their preferences for a school/specialization). This is favored both by the types of mechanisms implemented at the primary/secondary school level and high-school and by the processes in which students and involved outside this formal environment (in the family).

Let's take as an example the following hypothetical case: a student named *Alexandra* is enrolled at the *Sofia Nădejde School* located in her neighborhood, together with others students from the same geographical area. If this school district is populated mainly by socio-economic disadvantaged persons, then there are very high chances that at the *Sofia Nădejde School* most of the students are coming from a low socio-economic background. If we accept the presupposition that the results of the students and, implicitly, of the school are dependent on the social-economic background of the student's families and the degree to which these students are enrolled at that school, then we can assume the fact that *Alexandra* has small chances of obtaining high results at the standardized tests held at the end of the 8th grade. Also, if this student, together with a high percentage of her colleagues, obtained low grades at these tests, then the score of the school is correspondingly low. This outcome has important implications both at the individual level (*Alexandra* will enroll – if she will finish her studies – at a high school that is considered to be low-performing and where the majority of the students obtained grades similar to hers) and at the school level (the school receives or maintains the title of "bad school" and this fact determines some parents to choose other public schools or even private schools). In addition, being enrolled at a high school in which the majority of her colleagues have similar educational performances (which are low, if we would evaluate after the results obtained at the standardized tests), Alexandra has small chances to graduate with a Baccalaureate degree at the end of the 12th grade and then to be admitted at a university. In this discussion, I didn't mention other factors that can have an important impact on the educational trajectory of a student, such as the level of social, economic and cultural capital to which she has access through her family. As such, my starting premise is that the principles and the specific ways in which the school admission systems are designed can represent powerful explanatory factors for analyzing differences in the educational outcomes and performances of students. It is in this context – one in which the mechanisms discussed above tend to increase the educational differences between schools - that the problem of assuring equal educational opportunities for all students arises. The discussion becomes even more relevant when considering the overall social and economic situation of Romania, a country with a high level of poverty and social inequality.

As such, in **the first chapter** of my thesis I discuss the meaning of assuring equal educational opportunities. The background assumption is that the state, through its institutions, should provide the required means for students to attain their educational potential and to obtain

good results that are not constrained by external factors (either by the social background of the family or by various components of the education system). In this chapter, I seek to present the main factors that have a direct impact on the way in which inequalities between students are maintained by reviewing the main debates of the literature on this subject, including those for Romania. The social background of the student's family represents a variable that includes a series of factors that leave their mark on the educational evolution of the students. For example, the material resources possessed by parents – which are correlated with the probability of participating at private courses[16] or tuitions, of possessing different items (materials and technological devices) that are necessary in the educational process, of going to camps[17] or to other extra-curricular activities that revolve around educational development – can represent something that makes a difference between the school performance of a student from a disadvantaged family and a student that comes from a family with a higher socioeconomic level (Chung 2015) (Chiu and Khoo 2005). Social and human capital represents another extremely relevant factor in this process: the relationship developed by the family with the different teachers (the active engagement of parents in specific school activities or the active monitoring of the educational trajectory of the children), but also inside the family itself (through the development of a powerful relationship with the child) indicate a higher probability that the students will obtain better school results. Simultaneously, the high human capital possessed by parents is more easily transmitted to their children if the social capital is highly developed. What this means is that students with parents that finished studies at the university level[18] tend to perform much better compared with students whose parents didn't complete this type of studies, either because the vocabulary utilized in the communication with their children is better developed or because they can help them with their homework or even because they just have higher expectations from their children to achieve good school results (Eccles 2005). When it comes to factors specific to the school system, I will concentrate in this chapter on school segregation and the socio-economic composition of classes as important elements in the evaluation of educational inequalities. Studies of school segregation, a problem analyzed in a diverse range of education systems, have achieved some generally accepted results

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[16] By this, I understand courses that come in addition to the education offered by the public system and that are payed out the pocket by parents.
[17] Thematic camps, in which they can, for example, exercise a foreign language – see https://www.britishcouncil.ro/engleza/copii/tabara .
[18] This holds if the level of human capital is operationalized by the level of education.

when it comes to the effects of this occurrence. One of the most important conclusions is that the students that are especially affected by school segregation are those from disadvantaged families (Benito, Alegre and Gonzàlez-Balletbò 2014) or from ethnic or racial minorities (Andersen and Thomsen 2011) (Jencks and Mayer 1990)[19]. Given these facts, it can be said that the results obtained by Coleman and his team in the 60s are still being confirmed today: the educational success of students is deeply influenced by the socio-economic composition of the class (Coleman et al. 166, 325).

      The second chapter of my thesis aims to offer an overview of the main characteristics and principles of the educational policies based on the system of school choice by parents. These policies aim to restructure the manner in which the educational system is conceived by the actors involved in it by offering a potential solution to the problem of school segregation caused by the principle of proximity: parents should have the freedom to select the school they consider the most appropriate for their children. Nevertheless, this principle, which at a first glance seems attractive and relatively easy to implement, also brings with itself some effects that a system which seeks to foster equal educational opportunities for all should be aware of. As such, this chapter presents the arguments put forward by those that support these policies (both the first and second generation types), but also discusses the different limits and problems that have appeared in the education systems which implemented these policies. For example: a free "market in education" in which parents can select the school of their children (an idea promoted by the theorists of the first generation) can also lead to segregation (an undesirable situation) if there are no restrictions imposed from the central authority. Solutions to this problem revolve around the idea of maintaining "control" over the manner in which parents choose the school (the second generation), which is motivated by an emphasis on assuring equal educational opportunities: for example, establishing a higher value for the vouchers of students that come from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds or offering them a more stringent priority in the process of school admission. One section of this chapter is dedicated to the studies of the actual manner in which parents choose the school for their children, the way in which they form their preferences for that school and their sources of information. I think this is an extremely important dimension of the

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[19] Nevertheless, it is important to mention the fact that in most of the cases the two characteristics of the students (the socio-economic level and the ethnical/racial belonging) tend to overlap: in schools in which the majority of students pertain to an ethnical or racial minority, the socio-economic level is low (Rumberger and Palardy 2005).

problem that should be well-documented especially when it comes to designing policies motivated by such principles. Also, I present the way in which these types of policies were implemented in other educational systems, but I will generally emphasize those policies that seek to assure equal educational opportunities. In addition, I believe that a literature review of this domain of study is particularly important if we take into consideration the manner in which the system of admission is designed in Romania for the pre-university school system: if at the level of primary school, the parent[20] cannot chose a particular public school, when the student passes to high school, the option for a particular school unit becomes extremely important (even if it is limited by the educational results of the students).

In the third chapter, I present (in non-formalized language) examples of theoretical solutions for resolving the problems of educational policies based on the principle of school choice by drawing on the research of scholars focused on allocation mechanisms. I emphasize mechanisms that are aimed at a controlled choice of schools by parents and I describe those mechanisms that are used in implementing affirmative policies (*e.g.* quotas for certain categories of students). Also, in this chapter I analyze the characteristics of the system through which students are allocated to high schools in Romania by drawing on the literature about repartition mechanisms. As such, from a theoretical standpoint, the mechanisms that are in existence at the present moment fulfill the main proprieties that are recommended for an efficient allocation: it determines parents to not engage in **strategic behavior** (the priorities of students in choosing schools are clear, so if they want to go to a certain school, they have to rank schools in order of their preferences and not judging by the chances they (believe) have to be admitted at a certain school), it offer **stable results** (students will not be allocated to a high school that wasn't on the list of options) or it **avoids justified envy** (students will not "lose" their place at a high school in favor of a student that has a lower level of priority), all these ideas being discussed in the third chapter of the thesis.

In chapter four, I analyze the results of the admission procedure at the level of Bucharest using, on the one hand, the grades of students that studied at a school in this city and, on the other hand, the high school where they've been admitted. My choice of focusing on Bucharest is motivated by the fact that I start from the premise that in the capital city there are areas inhabited

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[20] By this, I understand the majority of parents that do not fall in the exceptions mentioned by the existing methodologies.

by persons that share similar socio-economic characteristics. As such, using information collected by ARACIP[21] regarding the schools from Bucharest (if they are placed or not in an area that is disadvantaged from a socio-economic standpoint), my aim is to identify a) if there are differences in results (the score obtained by students at the admission to high school) between the two categories of schools; b) what is the probability of a student coming from a school located in an disadvantaged area to be admitted at a high school that is considered highly-performative. In a larger sense, my aim is to study the degree in which – at the level of Bucharest – there can be found inequalities in school results, explained by socio-economic factors (extrapolating the variable regarding the positioning of the school in areas that are considered socio-economic disadvantaged to the level of the student). The results of the statistical analysis indicate that there are differences between the admission scores of students that are SED and those that are $\neq$SED. The latter have a higher chance of attaining higher results, which in turn means that they have a higher priority when they choose the high school where they want to study. For example, $\neq$SED students have twice as many chances to obtain high school admission grades higher than 9, when compared with SED students. Even descriptive analysis supports these results: the average admission score of students from $\neq$SED schools is closer to the general average, when compared with that of students from SED schools, in the period between 2008 and 2016. The average difference between the two scores (of students from SED and $\neq$SED schools) is 0.68 points in favor of students that have studied at $\neq$SED schools. As such, it can be argued that at least for the city of Bucharest, the school from which students graduate in 8th grade can represent an important indicator for their educational results. If the geographical positioning of the school in a SED area has an impact on the scores obtained by students, it can be deduced that an element that has a high importance in this equation is the class composition that is determined by the principle of proximity as a mechanism of school enrollment.

At the moment when they are allocated to different high schools, the main criterion of ranking students is the one represented by their educational results, offering them a position of priority in studying at their preferred school/specialization. As a consequence of this, the grades obtained by a student represent a powerful predictor for the probability that she will be admitted to a particular high school. This is mainly determined by the repartition mechanism that is used in

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[21] In Romanian: *Agenția Română privind Asigurarea Calității în Învățământul Preuniversitar – The Romanian Agency for Quality Control in Pre-University Education*.

the present and that works after a meritocratic logic: if you find yourself among those at the top of list (you position being given by the score you've managed to obtain at admission), you have high chances to be allocated to the preferred high school and specialization. Nevertheless, those deciding in favor of this mechanism never asked themselves to which degree this system of repartition (exclusively based on the results and preferences of the students) respects the principles of fairness. This discussion is even more relevant when considering that we are talking about the enrollment of students under a mandatory system of education (at least until the end of the 10th grade). Academic performances limit the access in certain public school units: a student that manage to obtain a score near the median of grades from her city, has a lower chance of being admitted to a high school that is considered to be highly performing. This is also influenced by the competition between students that are interested to be admitted at this category of high schools. When looking at these high schools, we can deduce that the competition is very close by looking at the difference between the first and the last grade of admission: the lower the difference, the greater the competition. This competition feeds the positive image (of highly performing schools) of the high school, which in turn assures that in the future it will be able to maintain its place in the preferences of students with high scores. Yearly, particular high schools are able to attract students with high score, maintaining by this their competitive advantage. Additionally, the performance on the long term of these high schools is maintained exactly by this mechanism that permits the concentration of students with high educational results in the same school units. For example, when we look at the high schools from Bucharest (in 2016), there is a strong negative correlation among, the difference between the first and last admission score and the passing rate of the Baccalaureate exam[22]. To put it in other words, at those high schools where the admitted students have close scores (which are generally high), the rate of students that manage to obtain the Baccalaureate degree is higher. Also, the primary school can represent an indicator not only for the educational results of a student, but also for the probability that a student that graduated from a SED school to be admitted at a high school considered to be highly-performing[23]. Students that have studied at SED school have 9% chances of enrolling at high schools from the first category, when compared with students from ≠SED schools (who have 25% chances to study at high schools from the first category). In addition, students from SED schools have twice the chance

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[22] A detailed analysis can be found in chapter five.
[23] A detailed analysis can be found in chapter four.

of studying at high school from the third category (L3) or from the last category, when compared with students from ≠SED schools. As such, it can be said that students coming from ≠SED schools are concentrated in highly performing high schools, while students coming from SED schools are rather concentrated in high schools that are considered to be lower performing.

In chapter five, I mainly discuss the main possible changes of the Romanian high school admission mechanism in order for it to have a component that provides of equal educational opportunity. Although I will focus my analysis on the high school admission mechanisms, I also discuss possible modifications of the enrollment process to primary education, especially for urban areas. The mechanisms could offer a greater flexibility for parents in choosing their children's school – to be more specific, it can permit a type of controlled choice, as it is called by policy specialists of the second generation of school choice theory[24]. There can be a greater number of schools for the same geographical district and when it comes to the enrollment process, students would have priority to their preferred school according to some of their characteristics (not those related to academic performance). For example, if a student comes from a family that is vulnerable from a socio-economic standpoint, she would find herself on a higher position in the ranking of children enrolled at a particular school. If this process is not highly regulated (through a clear establishment of the characteristics that give priority to a student in a public school), the result will be a form of segregation, that can be even more pervasive that the one resulted as an effect of the principle of proximity. Judging from the experience of other states, only certain parents (generally, those with a high socio-economic status or a high educational level) will be tempted to opt for changing the neighborhood school with another one in which students will have shared traits with their own children[25]. Given this fact, experts recommend a strong control of the enrollment process in such a way as certain categories of students (especially those that are disadvantaged) to be protected from certain drawbacks of the process. In addition, it is recommended that their parents should receive the required support when it comes to the stage of choosing a school: offering them

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[24] As I've mentioned, even though the methodology specifies the fact that the student have to be enrolled at their district school, there is an occurrence (the magnitude of which is not known given the fact that it is not documented) in which parents modify their own residence address (through obtaining a change-of-address card) to areas in which there are the schools preferred by parents. Although the information regarding these practice is scarce, the Minister of Education Ecaterina Andronescu admits and publicly criticize this issue: https://www.edupedu.ro/inscrierea-la-clasa-pregatitoare-2019-scoala-de-circumscriptie-trebuie-respectata-si-intrerupta-ideea-de-rezidenta-la-un-prieten-ecaterina-andronescu/. It can be argued that this thing only accentuates the inequalities between schools as only certain categories of parent are arble to move their children in school units outside their neighborhood and these are generally those with a high social, economic and cultural capital.

[25] A detailed discussion can be found in the second chapter of the thesis.

complete information regarding a school, supporting them in completing the application or assuring free transport for these students.

When compared with a possible modification of the enrollment process to primary school, modifying the high school admission mechanisms can be achieved with lesser administrative efforts and resource consumption. I believe that a more fair redistribution of high school places can be achieved by maintaining the central characteristics of the current mechanisms, but modifying some other elements of it in such a way that certain categories of students will be prioritized in choosing their high school and that a more diverse composition of classes and schools will be attained. As such, I put forward two possible alternatives of this mechanism that could be implemented (starting from the suggestions discussed in the literature on distribution mechanisms):

a) **maintaining a certain numbers of places reserved for students that are vulnerable from a socio-economic standpoint:** each school unit will have a certain number of reserved places for students that come from disadvantaged groups (in a similar fashion to the special places reserved for students coming from the Roma minority). The exact number of places could be established every year in a proportional manner with the number of students who fulfill the conditions of eligibility for these positions, while taking account of the available places at each high school.

b) **awarding additional points (to the admission score) to students that come from a socially and economically disadvantaged background**: the additional points could be awarded to SED students and could be established annually by looking at the statistical differences between the group of SED and ≠SED students.

Additionally, the above mentioned principles (which are discussed in detail in the third chapter of the thesis) will be maintained even if the mechanisms will be modified as discussed. The crucial modification is the one that changes the way in which the priorities of a student are established: these will not be determined just by educational results any more.

To conclude, the enrollment process in the pre-university system of education in Romania can be modified in order for it to be adapted la the social and economic context that has a strong impact over the academic performance of the students. If the type of school in which one is enrolled represents an indicator for educational results (at least when it comes to Bucharest), then it can be argued that the principle of proximity, which currently applies to primary education in Romania, contributes to the strengthening of these inequalities (caused by the social background of the

student's family) as the concentration of students with shared social-economic characteristics in the same school unit is not recommended (especially when we are talking about SED students). When it comes to the high school admission process, these inequalities are further emphasized: the reparation is mainly realized by academic results. This mechanism offers an advantage to those that manage to achieve good results and this is deeply problematic as long as there is a relation between educational performance, the family's social background and the primary school of a student. This is even more problematic for the Romanian education system - as the assuring of fairness, equal opportunities and social inclusion stand as fundamental principles, inscribed in the legal framework that regulates education in Romania (L.E.N no. 1, art. 3, pct. a; j;).

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