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**EDUCATIONAL PATHWAYS
AND TRAJECTORIES OF RURAL STUDENTS.
I. LOCAL EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS**

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Educational Pathways and Trajectories of Rural Students.

I. Local Educational Systems

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ABSTRACT

The paper presents first report on the study of rural schools and students in one educational district of Leningrad region. The district comprises 12 small rural municipalities and 2 townships with 18 schools. The study employed both qualitative and quantitative methods and focuses on sorting between schools and educational choice after the 9th grade when students can either stay in their schools or transfer to vocational schools and technical colleges in the urban area of St. Petersburg. In the paper the educational choices and resulting trajectories are viewed in local social context. Researchers introduce a notion of "local educational system", defined a set of local social (and geographical) opportunities and existing educational pathways which determine educational choice of parents and students. Higher education is a preferred goal after the school for the majority of students, but the trajectories to this goal are different depending on both family resources and local circumstances, including school differentiation and student flows between schools. The paper makes a case for studying educational choice by surveying all schools in the context of local educational systems rather than in surveying schools randomly taken from different local contexts.

Keywords: educational choice, local educational system, sorting, rural education, educational pathways and trajectories, school climate

This is the first paper in the series of SESL working papers dedicated to educational choice of rural students. Next papers in the series will deal with more focused studies of educational pathways and trajectories in the context of sorting and tracking systems in rural area. The significance of sociopsychological factors for individual educational choices will be discussed according to the results of structural equation modeling.

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“Educational Pathways and Trajectories of Rural Students” Project Framework.

This article describes in detail local educational systems in the rural areas. We base our conclusions on the results of a large-scale study conducted by the Sociology of Education and Science Laboratory at the HSE in 2007-2010 in the Priozersky district of the Leningrad region, exploring two areas: (1) organization of the educational system and movements of students between schools within the system; (2) impact of socioeconomic and sociopsychological characteristics of structures of educational choices. Our work was generously supported by the National Research University – Higher School of Economics¹.

The collection of empirical data for this project combined fieldwork and quantitative surveys. Every summer from 2007 to 2010 the Laboratory organized practicum (fieldwork) for university students. We spent a lot of time in the field, and together with our interns we interviewed students, teachers, local residents, heads of enterprises and local administration. We had an opportunity to visit the villages several times, several for consecutive years. This work yielded a large body of qualitative data – more than 100 interviews concerning educational choices with students who just finished the 9th grade and their parents, as well as interviews with senior administrators of all 18 schools in the district. For 2011, we have chosen the Greater Moscow area as the site for the university students’ practicum; therefore, with this publication we start a series of articles summarizing our work in the Leningrad region.

In 2009, the Laboratory conducted a blanket survey of the students who recently completed the 9th grade in all of the district’s schools (students completing 9th grade are choosing educational pathways) with the goal of providing a quantitative insight. To this end, we developed an original survey instrument using our previously collected qualitative data. As was agreed with the school directors, the students filled out the questionnaires in their classroom; therefore, this survey covered about 90% of the district’s ninth-graders (496 people). The students were asked to supply their parent or guardian’s contact information, which provided adult respondents. 397 adults were surveyed overall – 80% of the entire sample. In 2010, we conducted a survey of students and teachers in all of the district’s schools, and the new questionnaire included questions to measure the social climate (students’ sense of belonging as well as students’ and teachers’ overall satisfaction with the school)². This article presents the first report, analyzing the results of this long-term project.

Thanks to a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, we can provide an all-inclusive picture of educational choices made after the 9th grade and to explain, on several levels, many mechanisms affecting choices of particular educational pathways.

As it developed, the laboratory’s research surfaced three main topics for scholars’ research: (1) local contexts; (2) educational choices and educational trajectories; (3) selection and tracking. We are planning future articles devoted to each of these topics. As the first in the series, this publication analyzes a local educational system using as an example the Priozersky District.

¹ Research was funded by the Basic Research Program of the National Research University – Higher School of Economics (FRP projects in 2007 – 2010).

² We express our gratitude to all employees of the schools, teachers, students and their parents who participated in this research. We also thank the administration of the Priozersky district, especially the Committee for Education, which was helping us in our work for several years.

The concept of local educational systems allows analysis of relatively closed systems of interaction between educational establishments (schools, vocational schools, colleges, universities) taking into account structural and geographical features. We start by exploring structural limitations determining district-wide educational pathways and interactions between educational establishments, and natural flow of students. Then we focus on a specific case to explain the mechanism of educational decision making at micro-level. Finally, we conclude by demonstrating how the local context and existing structural limitations determine educational trajectories and pathways.

Here, we differentiate conceptions of educational strategies, trajectories and pathways. In line with A.M.Pallas and G.H.Elder we conceptualize the trajectory as a sequence of transitions, “interlinked states” of a particular individual within an educational system – that is, pathways, as typical trajectories, i.e. possible routes to achieve one or another educational goal³. The pathways are determined not only by social but also by geographical circumstances, which, overlap to produce a local educational system (hereafter – LES). Analysis of the Priozersky District of the Leningrad region allows description of the LES at meso- and microlevels.

Modern LESes are very varied due to quasi-free market mechanisms and competition. The relatively liberal opportunity to choose among educational establishments allows flow of students moving from one school to another. The recently introduced system of per capita financing largely accounts for this situation. It puts educational institutions against each other in competition for students. The competition between schools continues to rise rapidly; seeking to attract students, for instance, schools have begun marketing to families when the child is still in kindergarten. The parents have also become active players in the recently emerged market. Having a full freedom of choice, they seek the best school for their children.

The rural LESes have certain distinguishing features; for example, they offer much poorer opportunities for choice of educational establishments because of the settlement patterns and the consequential geographical remoteness of the schools. The system reviewed in this article is affected in many ways by the proximity of a metropolis which influences people’s ideas about educational pathways. In addition, the attractiveness of a rural school is often determined by factors different from those in urban areas. Academic characteristics important to parents in urban areas are usually irrelevant to parents in this particular district. In the rural settings, the most essential considerations include comfort of study at a particular school, personal relations between students and teachers, and so on.

Literature review

Conceptualizing LES, we draw on F.-O.Radtke’s study on “local educational spaces”⁴. Not identical to geographical spaces, these spaces, rather, set boundaries within which certain opportunities of choice and action form. Bringing together geographical boundaries and social contexts, these boundaries emerge as the result of the interaction between structure and action⁵.

³ Elder G.H., Jr. Life trajectories in changing societies. In A.Bandura (Ed.), *Self-efficacy in changing societies*. Cambridge University Press, 1997. P. 46-69; Pallas, A. M. Educational transitions, trajectories, and pathways. In J. T. Mortimer & M. J. Shanahan (Eds.), *Handbook of the Life Course*. New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2003. P. 165-184.

⁴ Radtke F.-O., Stošić P. Lokale Bildungsräume: Ansatzpunkte für eine integrative Schulentwicklung // *Geographische Revue*. 2009. V.1. P.34-51.

⁵ Ibid P.46.

As for Russian scholarship, we explore the avenues substantially similar to those investigated by T.V.Abankina and I.V.Abankina⁶. Their approach to study of the spatial aspect of the existence of educational institutions is predicated on an analysis of sociocultural and historical contexts of the formation of networks of educational establishments. They applied their findings to social policy contributing to the project of restructuring the network of rural schools.

Rural and urban life styles differ greatly in many respects, including resources and structural conditions. School as one of the pivotal social institutions has long been the subject of numerous research projects, many of which concentrated on differences between rural and urban schools⁷. Next we shall review those differences discovered by the researchers which we consider essential.

In many countries rural schools receive much poorer financing than urban schools⁸, which leads to smaller wages for teachers, less competent teaching professionals, lack of necessary equipment at the schools and large differences in the curricula⁹. Teachers at rural schools, therefore, often have bigger workloads¹⁰. Many believe that on account of these differences students at rural schools receive a poorer education¹¹.

Differences in size between rural and urban schools do not have the same effect as the differences in financing: most recent studies, mostly American, show that the much smaller size of rural schools is conducive to healthier social and emotional development of students¹². In rural areas, relations between students and teachers are closer and students from all social classes take the same academic courses¹³. Children from families of low socioeconomic status (SES), usually the most vulnerable group, perform quite well academically in smaller schools, whereas children from families of high SES study equally well both in large urban and in small rural schools¹⁴.

⁶ Abankina T.: Assessing the results of implementation of various models of rural schools' networks restructuring in experimental regions // *Voprosy Obrazovania*. 2007. V.1. P.175-202 (in Russian); Abankina T. Models of integration and cooperation of educational resources in rural society // *Voprosy Obrazovania*. 2008. V.3. P.61-76 (in Russian); Abankina I. Spatial organization of educational institutions' networks in contemporary Russia // *Voprosy Obrazovania*. 2007. V.1. P.166-174 (in Russian).

⁷ Lee V. E., Bryk A. S. Curriculum tracking as mediating the social distribution of high school achievement // *Sociology of Education*. 1988. V. 61. No. 2. P. 78-94; Khattri N., Riley K.W., Kane M. B. Students at risk in poor, rural areas: A review of the research // *Journal of Research in Rural Education*. 1997. V.13. No. 2. P. 79-100; Dowling J. Changes and challenges: Key issues for Scottish rural schools and communities // *International Journal of Educational Research*. 2009. V. 48. P.129-139; Hargreaves L., Kvalsund R., Galton M. Reviews of research on rural schools and their communities in British and Nordic countries: Analytical perspectives and cultural meaning // *International Journal of Educational Research*. 2009. V. 48. P.80-88; Hargreaves L.M. Respect and responsibility: Review of research on small rural schools in England // *International Journal of Educational Research*. 2009. V. 48. P.117-128; Kvalsund R. Centralized decentralization or decentralized centralization? A review of newer Norwegian research on schools and their communities // *International Journal of Educational Research*. 2009. V. 48. P. 89-99.

⁸ Khattri et.al. 1997. P.90; Gándara P., Gutiérrez D., O'Hara S. Planning for the Future in Rural and Urban High Schools // *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*. 2001. V.6:1-2. P.73-93; Hardré P. L., Sullivan D.W. Student differences and environment perceptions: How they contribute to student motivation in rural high schools // *Learning and Individual Differences*. 2008. V.18. P.471-485.

⁹ Khattri et.al. 1997. P.90-91; Gándara et.al. 2001. P.77; Hardré et.al. 2008; Stearns E., Glennie E. J. Opportunities to participate: Extracurricular activities' distribution across and academic correlates in high schools // *Social Science Research*. 2010. V. 39. No. 2. P. 303.

¹⁰ Fowler W. J., Jr., Walberg H. J. School size, characteristics, and outcomes // *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*. 1991. V.13. P. 199.

¹¹ Gándara et.al. 2001.

¹² Fowler et.al. 1991; Lee V., Smerdon B.A., Alfeld-Liro C., Brown C.L. Inside Large and Small High Schools: Curriculum and Social Relations // *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*. 2000. V. 22. No. 2. P. 147-171; Gándara et.al. 2001; Leithwood K., Jantzi D. A Review of Empirical Evidence About School Size Effects: A Policy Perspective // *Review of Educational Research*. 2009. V. 79. No. 1. P. 464-490.

¹³ Lee, Bryk. 1988; Lee et.al. 2000. P.148; Leithwood et.al. 2009.

¹⁴ Lee et.al. 2000; Leithwood et.al. 2009.

Teachers in small schools on average are more satisfied with their academic curriculum and relations with colleagues and students¹⁵.

Numerous researchers studying connections between schools and their local communities conclude that rural schools are more closely connected with their local communities: these connections include close contacts with local authorities, social organizations, local firms / business persons, other schools, and students' families¹⁶. Often a school in a small settlement is a social hub with numerous functions: such school can include clubs, educational offerings for adults, a public library, and a voting station¹⁷. Such ties with a local community become an important resource for rural schools¹⁸. A local community can provide its school students with additional opportunities for hands-on learning¹⁹. A small size of a school and close contacts between members of its local community encourage parent involvement with different aspects of their children's lives, including education²⁰.

Some recent studies have highlighted that rural schools are too expensive for federal budgets²¹. A state spends more money on one student in a rural school than on one student in an urban school. Depopulation of rural areas raises maintenance costs of rural schools and, therefore, increases risks of shutting down such schools²². Many researchers note that when a rural school is closed, such considerations as close ties between this rural school and its local community or its "non-educational" functions are ignored²³. Conversely, because a rural school is a kind of arena of social and cultural interactions in small settlements, its shutdown can lead to serious conflicts between local residents and local authorities²⁴.

Students at rural schools have much lower educational expectations than their urban counterparts²⁵. It has yet to be decided which of the factors - the lower socioeconomic status of rural families or certain features of rural schools - is more prominent of these differences in aspirations. Some researchers argue that both factors are at play²⁶.

The introduction of per capita financing in Russia has created a semblance of free market: schools need to actively compete for students; therefore, families have a real opportunity to choose an educational institution for their children.

¹⁵ Eberts R. W., Schwartz E. K., Stone J. A. School reform, school size and student achievement // *Economic Review*. 1990. V. 26. No. 2; Lee et.al. 2000. P.158-162; Hargreaves. 2009. P.120; Leithwood et.al. 2009. P.483.

¹⁶ Khattri et.al. 1997. P.92.

¹⁷ Stern J. The condition of education in rural schools. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement. 1994. P.22; Lee et.al. 2000. P.167; Hargreaves et.al. 2009. P.85; Hargreaves. 2009. P.123.

¹⁸ Sunf Y. The Contextual Effects of Community Social Capital on Academic Performance // *Social Science Research*. 1999. V. 28. No. 4. P. 403-426.

¹⁹ Stern. 1994. P.23; Khattri et.al. 1997. P.92.

²⁰ Khattri et.al. 1997. P.92.

²¹ Hargreaves et.al. 2009; Aberg-Bengtsson L. The smaller the better? A review of research on small rural schools in Sweden // *International Journal of Educational Research*. 2009. V.48. P.100-108; Kvalsund. 2009; Levinson A., Stuchevskaya O. School and its restructuring // *Voprosy Obrazovania*. 2006. V.3. P. 254-267 (in Russian); Abankina T. 2007; Abankina T. 2008.

²² Aberg-Bengtsson. 2009.

²³ Aberg-Bengtsson. 2009. P.107; Hargreaves et.al. 2009. P.81; Kvalsund. 2009. P.95.

²⁴ Aberg-Bengtsson. 2009. P.107.

²⁵ Haller E., Virkler S. Another look at rural-nonrural differences in students' educational aspirations // *Journal of Research in Rural Education*. 1993. V. 9. P. 170-178; Khattri et.al. 1997. P.85; Strayhorn T.L. Different Folks, Different Hopes: The Educational Aspirations of Black Males in Urban, Suburban, and Rural High Schools // *Urban Education*. 2009. V.44. No.6. P.723.

²⁶ Khattri et.al. 1997; Strayhorn. 2009.

Approaching educational system as a marketplace appears very promising since it implies that “choice will satisfy both individual families and the nation”²⁷. Such logic, however, practically equates needs, both individual and collective, with individual wishes of families. But it is perfectly clear that, for instance, in Britain, where the state acts as an agent making decisions about children’s higher education, needs do not nearly coincide with wishes.

A free-market approach enables the middle classes to regain privileged access to their desired education – the advantages lost due to application of social policy. The market-based selection and sorting increase ethnic, religious and gender-based segregation, noted Moore & Davenport (1988)²⁸. “Thus, the market provides a mechanism for the reinvention and legitimation of hierarchy and differentiation via the ideology of diversity, competition and choice”²⁹.

As in England, in Russia educational market reproduces and nurtures inequality – a matter to be discussed in our forthcoming publications. This problem has been highlighted by Russian researchers as well. Thus, Constantinovsky et al.³⁰ and Cherednichenko et al.³¹ note that among graduates of rural schools the share of children enrolling at universities is much smaller than among graduates of urban schools. Whereas graduates of rural schools are more successful in realizing their educational plans than their urban counterparts (75% applying for admission to universities, against 57% in the urban group). In other words, in rural areas, higher education is the option chosen primarily by families confident in their capital (both economic and cultural), enabling them to realize their plans. Levinson and Stuchevskaya³² describe how a LES forms in rural areas. Families eager for higher education but lacking sufficient resources enter into various contracts with unpopular universities willing to provide students with education they want. This situation gives rise to a certain “social selection” in rural schools, with children from more affluent families placed in a class that has ties with a certain university.

This article reviews “local educational markets” formed within LESes. LESes become an analytical instrument to study flow of students, trajectories and pathways. Reviewing specific cases of local educational systems, we pay special attention to connections between the characteristics of schools described in this article and the educational strategies of students at these schools, both at a district level and at the LES level.

The concept of local educational system

During a child’s education, (s)he and his/her parents face several crossroads: which school to choose; should the child change schools; and what educational track to pursue after the 9th (or 11th) grade. Educational choices are made in specific circumstances which in many ways

²⁷ Ball S. Education Markets, Choice and Social Class: The Market as a Class Strategy in the UK and the USA // *British Journal of Sociology of Education*. 1993. V. 14, No. 1. P.15.

²⁸ Moore D., Davenport S. The new improved sorting machine. Report. National Center on Effective Secondary Schools: Madison, 1988.

²⁹ Ball S. Education Markets, Choice and Social Class: The Market as a Class Strategy in the UK and the USA // *British Journal of Sociology of Education*. 1993. V. 14, No. 1. P.16.

³⁰ Constantinovsky D., Vahstain V., Kurakin D., Roschina Y. Availability of qualitative education in Russia: Opportunities and limits // *Voprosy Obrazovaniya*. 2006. V.2. P.186-202 (in Russian).

³¹ Cherednichenko (Ed.) When comes the time to choose (Youth aspirations and first steps after graduation from educational institutions). SPb: Izdatel'stvo RCHA. 2001 (in Russian).

³² Levinson et.al. 2006.

condition and limit the choices. The concept of “local educational system” is used for analysis of educational choices and educational trajectories of students.

Application of the notion of “local educational system” enables us to employ sociological analysis of the structure of an educational system, as distinct from the official administrative logic. In some cases elements of a LES can coincide with administrative division – for instance, in cases when settlements are far apart from each other, communication between them is difficult and official lines of demarcation become de-facto borders. But normally a LES is not a result of planning by state or some other agent – it is caused by different social factors: quantity and diversity of educational institutions; density of population; development of transportation infrastructure; and local politics, etc. All these characteristics combine to create a semblance of natural landscape determining the rules of local living and thereby conditioning certain patterns of action of individuals in a situation of choice. Researcher can explore interconnections of the local systems at different levels, in the same ways geologists explore interconnections of geography.

In this article we analyze an LES at two levels: mesolevel (using as an example, the Priozeskiy District of the Leningrad region) and microlevel (certain settlements inside this district). We mostly focus on educational choices made after the 9th grade which is an important milestone when many school children, especially in the rural areas, decide to enroll at an institution of primary or secondary vocational education.

Our case is specific because the district under consideration is located close to a large metropolitan area, which influences people’s ideas about educational pathways and affects the post-9th-grade educational choices.

Local educational system: mesolevel

In this study we used the Priozersky District of the Leningrad region for analysis. The case of the Priozersky District is a perfect illustration of the significance of local context. The district can be approached as a fairly self-contained system within which special socioeconomic conditions take shape and settlements with their educational establishments are differentiated.

Before proceeding to describe the LES, we briefly characterize the district. It is located on a long stretch of land by Lake Ladoga between St.Petersburg and Karelia; its southernmost settlements, accordingly, are only a 1.5-hour ride from the city, while a ride to the district’s northern edge from the city takes more than 3 hours. The district, as a result, has two centers: the administrative center – the city of Priozersk, in the north, and the unofficial center, the district’s southernmost community called Selezniovo³³, which is the transportation hub on the route from St.Petersburg to most of the district’s communities. In terms of its socioeconomic standing compared with the rest of the region, the district is of average standing. Rapidly growing economic sectors in the district include holiday housing and tourism; many projects of construction and renovation of recreation camps and mountain skiing facilities (for instance, “Igora”) are underway. As in many other districts of the Leningrad region after Gorbachev’s perestroika, agriculture dwindled. According to Petrostat (St.Petersburg’s official statistics agency), as of January 1, 2009 the Priozersky District’s population numbered 58,500. 21,400 among them lived in the district’s urban areas, and 37,100 – in rural areas.

³³ Hereafter all the settlements’ names are fictitious, except for Priozersk.

The case under review is a perfect example of the impact of geographical location on a district's socioeconomic development. Residents of communities close to the thoroughfare have visibly more opportunities than people living in remote villages. Communities close to the thoroughfare have a more developed manufacturing sector, the proximity of the road or the railroad enables people to work in St.Petersburg, the settlements are larger and local schools are quite big. From the very start of their education, students from the bigger schools have better opportunities than students at small schools in remote settlements.

The district's LES includes more than 50 educational institutions of every level with the exception of university. The district has 2 institutions of primary vocational education: one in Priozersk which has quite a good reputation; and one on the southern border which is unpopular. Therefore, a child can receive an elementary vocational education without leaving the district. However, if a person wants to receive a secondary vocational education or higher education, (s)he must either commute to the city daily which is practical only for residents of the southern communities or move to the city which is very expensive.

The system of secondary education features 6 basic secondary schools (grades 1-9) and 12 full-cycle secondary schools (grades 1-11). The total student body of the basic and full-cycle schools of the Priozersky District in 2008 numbered 5,033 (according to the Priozersky Committee for Education).

Most of the basic schools are small and located in small villages and settlements far from the thoroughfare. The full-cycle schools are a more diverse group. 3 of the larger schools are located in the district's center, one of the largest rural full-cycle secondary schools is located in the southernmost community called Selezniovo, which is a traffic hub and the district's second, unofficial economic center.

Educational institutions in particular enjoy a strong support from the head of the district. This includes, first of all, close observance of the schools' efficiency. Headmasters of poorly performing schools are replaced, efficient directors and teachers are rewarded, and many contests are held. The Committee for Education compiles rankings of the district's schools based on victories in contests, the students' performance (scores received at the Unified State Examination and the State Final Attestation) and other indicators.

Functioning in different circumstances, the district's schools choose different strategies to maintain themselves. Only a handful of schools – those that have a sufficient quantity of students – value performance in academic disciplines. Most schools choose to prepare students for blue-collar jobs. Some educational establishments feed into other state institutions: one school teaches orphans in the adjacent boarding house; another encourages its students to enroll at a primary vocational institution in the same settlement. In some cases schools located in neighboring communities form microsystems of student exchange. Parents with cars have a wider range of opportunities as they are able to drive their children to a school they consider the most attractive. However, most rural residents are limited in their choice of school.

Flow of students between schools within the LES at mesolevel

The most common instance of transferring schools is graduates of a basic secondary school after the completion of the 9th grade choosing the nearest full-cycle (1-11 grades) school. The LES is largely designed so that full-cycle schools catch up graduates of basic schools. However,

this LES also creates more complex and interesting interconnections among schools. Further in this article we review networks of schools where student transfer prior to the 9th grade.

The Figure 1 features “networks” of schools interconnected by student exchange (such “networks” can be viewed as micro-LESes). The receiving school – the one where students enroll after the 9th grade – enjoys a better reputation among the locals. For instance, many children from the village of Ilyichevo commute to a school in Pesochnoe. Although Ilyichevo has a school, the school in Pesochnoe is considered better for many reasons. Since it is located close to a military base, it accumulates different resources: competent teachers (the school’s own graduates teach here after finishing a college); and ties to the military base. Therefore, the school is believed to be one of the best performers among the district’s rural schools.

In the case of student exchange between Lipovka and Gavrilovo, the established relations are in many ways due to sudden changes of school financing and the introduction of the policy of rural school restructuring. The introduction of per capita financing of schools (“the financing follows the student”) created a situation where the financing of a school depends on enrollment. Since the local school was deteriorating, many children moved to the neighboring one (in the Gavrilovo community). At first, they transferred to the basic school in the 5th grade, but later began to enroll from there from 1st grade. The school in Lipovka realized the rapid disenrollment, but lacked funding to make changes. This situation grew worse as the school was slated for shutdown during restructuring. However, a young energetic teacher from the Pesochnoe school near the military base was appointed as the failing school’s headmaster. With the help of the director of a local cooperative farm (which survived and prospered, unlike many other agricultural enterprises) the school made a remarkable turnaround within 2 years. Among the improvements, repairs were made to the school cafeteria which became one of the best in the district, and arrangements for full-time instruction were introduced. Most importantly, the teachers set in place a system of pre-school education:

“With our own money, we bought copybooks, a set of the “World Around”, visited the kindergarten, held parents and teachers meetings, and now every Thursday a teacher takes children from the kindergarten and brings them here, free of charge. In other schools this service is provided for a fee – it may be only 30 rubles, but a fee is charged. The teacher teaches them to read and to write and plays with them – for free. After that the parents come to pick up their children” (Headmaster, Lipovka school).

Figure 1 Students’ flow on mesolevel



This technique proved effective: all families with pre-school children enrolled them in the 1st grade at the reformed school. In this way, a small basic school competed for students with a larger school – 4.5 times bigger in size – from the military settlement. This example shows how student flow within a LES change under the impact of social and economic transformations.

The network currently evolving around Priozersk is the most intricate of the networks. Priozersk, the center of the district, has 3 schools. The reputation of being successful big schools in the district's center ensures an inflow of students from three neighboring communities, although each has its own school. The map clearly shows that the most "beneficial" position is enjoyed by residents of the Kamennogorsk community, located somewhere halfway between Priozersk and Selezniovo: they can send their children to the good school on the military base in Gavrilovo, to one of the three schools in Priozersk, or to the school located in the community itself. This example shows the LES in action: the situation of a real choice – which in this case is the result of several schools being accessible by transport – occasions a significant redistribution of students among the schools.

Local Education System: Microlevel

Now we examine the microlevel of the local education system, with a few settlements in close proximity as an example. The Selezniovo rural settlement is located at the southern border of the district. Of all the settlements in the district, it is the closest to St. Petersburg, and it is located at a crossing between two main traffic arteries: a railroad and a highway with several bus routes. The settlement is composed of nine villages. Compared to many other district settlements, the local infrastructure is developed well enough, with a local industry and a milk farm. The central village provides a hospital, a recreation centre, a youth centre and a library.

Travelling to Selezniovo from St. Petersburg takes about 1.5 hours, by train or bus. This proximity to the city determines, to some extent, the preference in job location for the local population since many villagers commute to the city. As a result, this creates a specific channel between the city and the settlement, with a constant flow of commuters, creating more prospects for the local youth as compared to the prospects of the youth from other settlements.

The local education system in the Selezniovo settlement is presented by several institutions: two kindergartens and a full-cycle school (grades 1-11) in Selezniovo proper, and two elementary schools in satellite villages of Perovo and Pushnoe. Other villages lack any educational institutions, and most children commute to Selezniovo. Therefore, in this particular case, the borders of the LES landscape correspond to the administrative borders of the settlement.

The Selezniovo school is one of the most populated in the district; every year, it has collected enough students to fill 3 or 4 first-year classes. There is a strong emphasis on student achievement which on the one hand increases chances of students' academic success; however, on the other hand this deprives the students with lower abilities. The students and their parents both agree that the atmosphere of the school is demanding. The children are evaluated purely on their academic progress, and there is frequent conflict between students and teachers. The main goal of the school is to ensure a good academic progress of the students, and moreover, to show

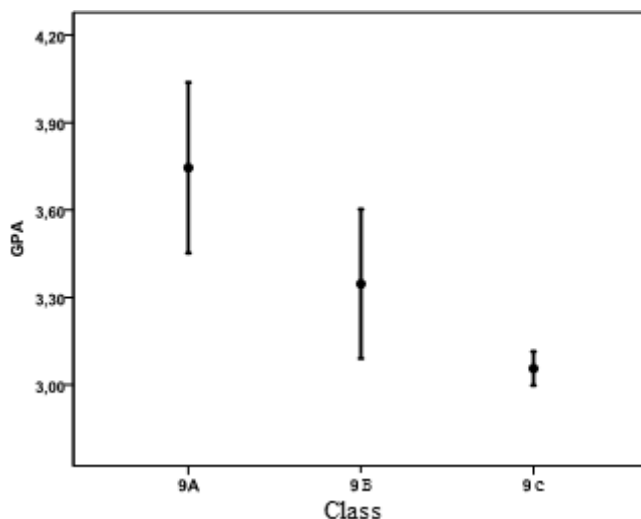
good results at the Unified State Examination (USE) and GIA (the State final attestation)³⁴, which are the main criteria in evaluation of educational institutions. The school's high enrollment (unlike most of other schools in the district) frees it from competition for students.

The school's enrollment also allows it to sort the students into different classes according to specific parameters. These sorting parameters may vary depending on the age of students. For example, in 1999 (graduation in 2007) the first grade classes were sorted based on student's preparedness for school and parents' ability to pay for study materials. The curriculum in class A was more complicated and experimental; therefore, parents were required to purchase additional materials. The curriculum in Class B was less complex, and classes C and D were taught using a standard curriculum. Consequently, the distribution of children by classes was almost identical to their distribution in kindergartens: Class A was composed mostly of the children from one Selezniovo kindergarten; Class B, of the children from the second kindergarten; and classes C and D mostly of children from the nearby villages. Eventually, this division had led to a distinct difference in the academic progress and student motivation: teachers considered classes A and B to be more advanced than the other two classes.

This kind of sorting makes work with children easier for the school, since this approach allows early differentiation of children based on their various levels. This also guarantees success of a higher performing class. However, it should be emphasized that if children become divided into different classes depending on the ability of their parents to buy extra textbooks, or based on their kindergarten, this may create unequal educational conditions, infringing the rights of families of a lower socioeconomic status.

In 2001 (graduating class of 2009) the sorting was conducted after the 4th grade, and was based on the academic success, which had led to a considerable difference in the children's academic success by the end of the 9th grade. The average score in Class A is 0.6 pts higher than that in Class C, with Class B in between. The same difference between classes has been observed from their GIA results.

Figure 2 Difference between average scores in the same year classes (Selezniovo School)



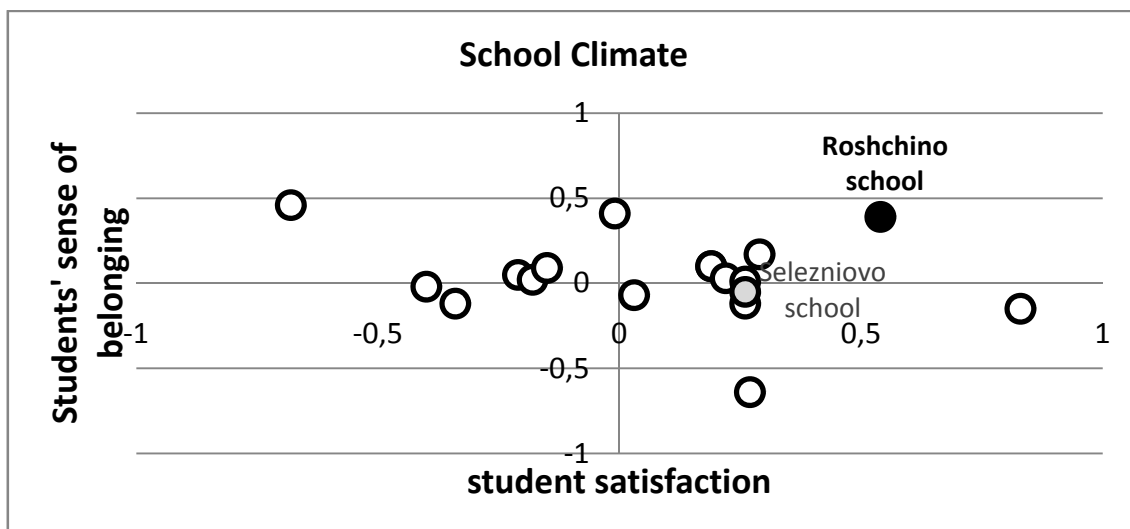
³⁴ USE – Unified State Examination, centralized exam necessary to graduate from the 11th grade and enter the university; GIA – State Final Attestation, centralized exam necessary to graduate from the 9th grade and to enter a technical college or high school (10th grade)

In addition to sorting within the school, the Selezniovo School has also taken initiative to re-distribute students between schools. For many years, students with poor academic performance or poor behavior have been sent to a full-cycle school in the nearby settlement, Roshchino. Therefore, the school in Roshchino has been accumulating "problem students" from ten villages nearby.

The Roshchino school has a good reputation; though not considered to be too advanced academically, it is well known for care of students and attention to their special needs. Some students decide to transfer to this school after hearing about the easier curriculum and warmer environment from their former classmates.

Our research in the organizational culture in the schools of the Leningrad Region and in St. Petersburg conforms to the opinions, received in the interview, and allows us to speak with confidence about a significant difference in the school climate between schools in Selezniovo and Roshchino. The Roshchino school performs higher than the Selezniovo school in a number of parameters. From the students' perspective, there is a higher sense of belonging, a better academic culture, and satisfaction with the school. From the teachers' perspective, there is also higher a sense of belonging, satisfaction with their school head, and general work satisfaction.

Figure 3 Sociopsychological Characteristics of the Schools in the Priozersky District



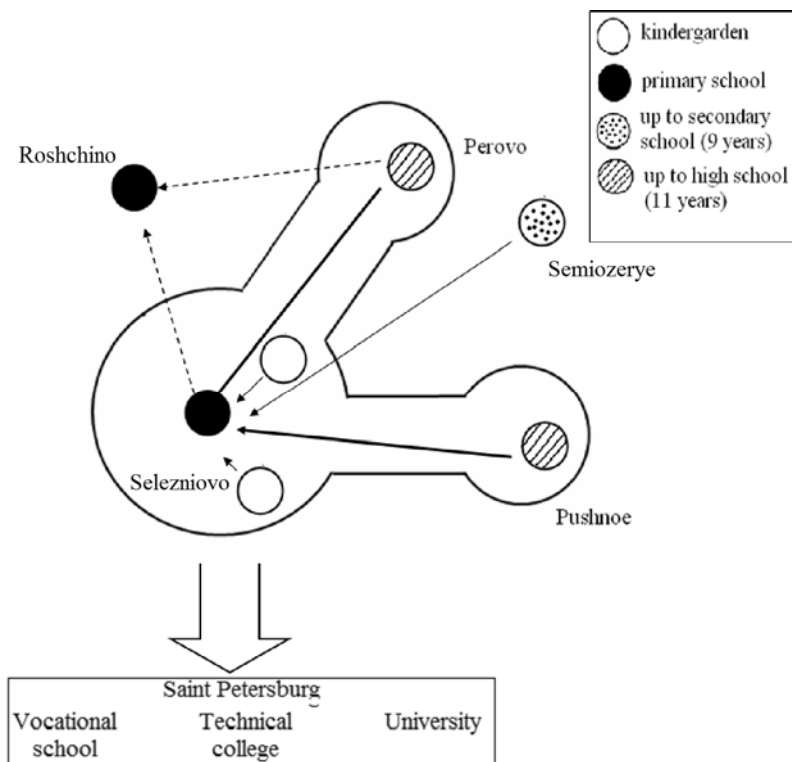
The students from the Roshchino school have shown better results at the GIA than the students from the Selezniovo school: their average score on the subject of the Russian language was 4 pts higher than the score of the Selezniovo students. In other words, not only the Roshchino school students feel more comfortable and confident but they also, in fact, receive a more effective education. Finally, in the Roshchino school a higher share of students have chosen to continue their education in the 10th and 11th grade than students from the Selezniovo school, explainable by the higher sense of belonging students feel at the Roshchino school.

We can conclude that a strictly achievement-oriented culture, when not supported by good relationships between students and teachers, compares poorly to a school with less strict requirements, where, at a first glance, the focus is not academic achievement.

The Figure 4 shows flow of the students in the LES at a micro-level developed roughly within the borders of the Selezniovo settlement. The Selezniovo school is located in the centre and draws children from the whole settlement. The main incoming flows of students come from

the satellite villages of Perovo and Pushnoe. Most children get in the school at with their first year, or, if they were attending a kindergarten with elementary classes in their home village, after the elementary school. The Selezniovo School also accepts students graduating from a 9 grade school in the village of Semiozerye. Some children from the village of Perovo also attend the Roshchino school, at times also starting at the first grade.

Figure 4 Local educational system: microlevel



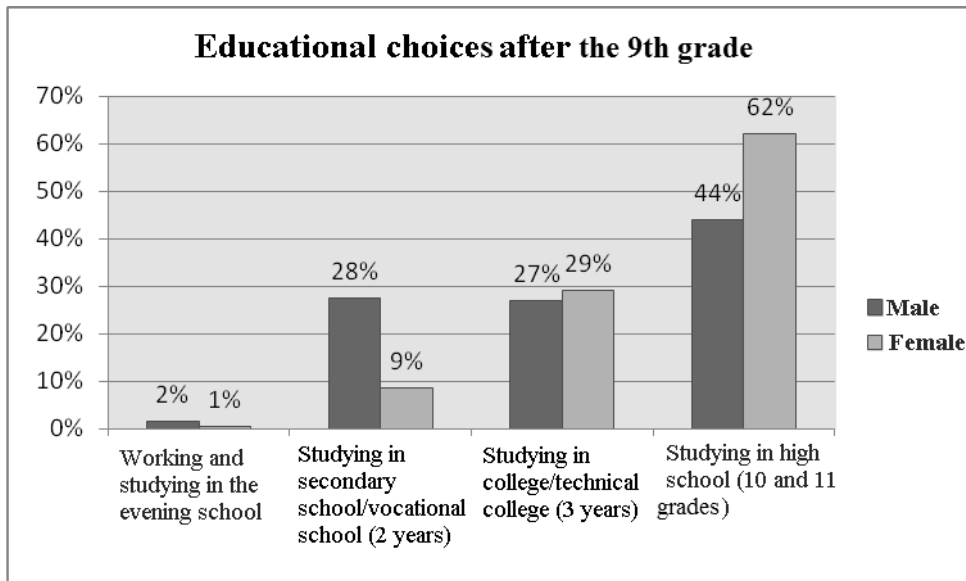
Education Choices After the 9th Grade: a Mesolevel Analysis

All recent surveys of the students have shown that higher education is becoming a mass phenomenon for all strata of students in Russian schools. Formerly, graduation from a full-cycle school was a necessary condition for enrollment. However, lately a strategy is to get into a higher educational institution through a technical college is becoming ever more popular. Most of the students who apply to these specialized schools intend to transfer to a higher educational institution upon graduation. We shall examine this strategy in more detail later.

In our survey of rural schools in the Leningrad Region, the answers of the 9th grade students concerning their nearest plans for the future were distributed as follows: 62% girls and 44% boys intended to continue their education in the full-cycle school; studying in a college was the second most popular choice (29% girls and 27% boys).

The percentage of boys wishing to study in a vocational school was roughly the same as the amount of boys wishing to study in a technical college (28%), but only 9% girls chose this path. This difference is caused by specific conditions of the local education system. There are only two vocational schools in the Priezorsky District, and both of them offer education only in the professions that traditionally regarded as masculine (driver, auto mechanic, etc.). The girls who would wish to continue their education in a vocational school would have to leave their home district.

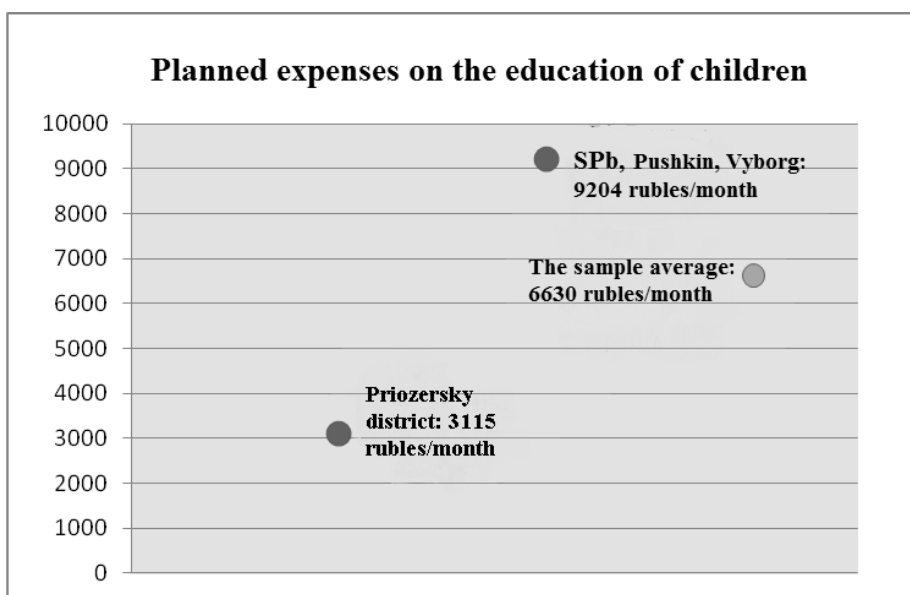
Figure 5 Educational Choices after the 9th grade, gender dependent



Pearson Chi-Square = 31.35; Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) <0.001.

About one third of the students intend to complete their education within the local education system and choose studying in their local vocational schools or colleges. Out of the students who intend to continue their education in the Priozersky District, boys represent a majority. Unlike girls, they can continue studying in the local vocational schools, but the girls do not have this option: even for a starting vocational education they would have to move to the city, or to other districts of the Leningrad Region, mainly in Vyborg or Pushkin. In addition, a low cost of the vocational education within the LES is a major factor for many families: education in the local vocational school or college saves the travel time and travel costs, expenses for food and costs of accommodation. The figure below shows average expenses that the parents are prepared to spend on the education of their children.

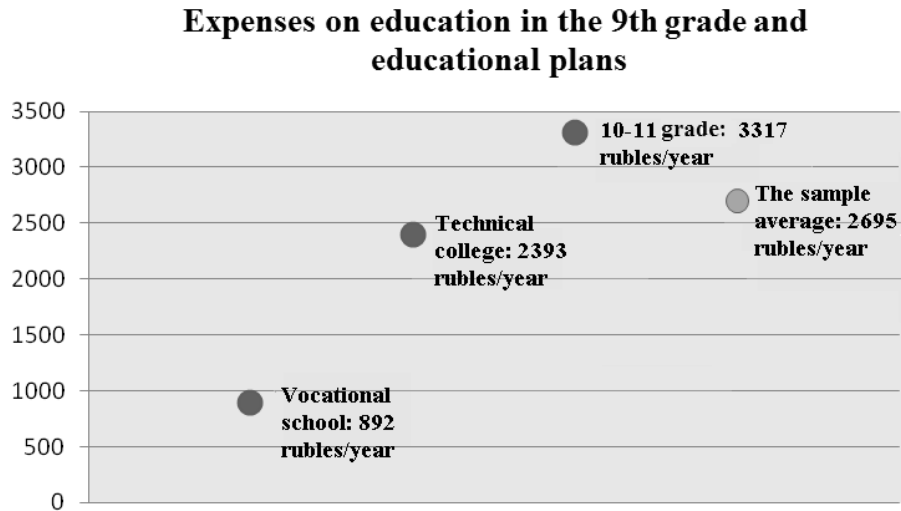
Figure 6 Planned monthly expenses on education of children



The expenses include the transport fare, cost of accommodation, food expenses, and tuition fees. One-way ANOVA: $F(1;121)=8.15$; $p<0.001$.

The total expenses depend not only on a distance of the chosen educational institution but also on its quality. The most expensive strategy consists in continuing education in the high school, which is followed by enrollment in a higher educational institution. Education in a vocational school is the least expensive option.

Figure 7 Expenses on education in the 9th grade and further plans for education

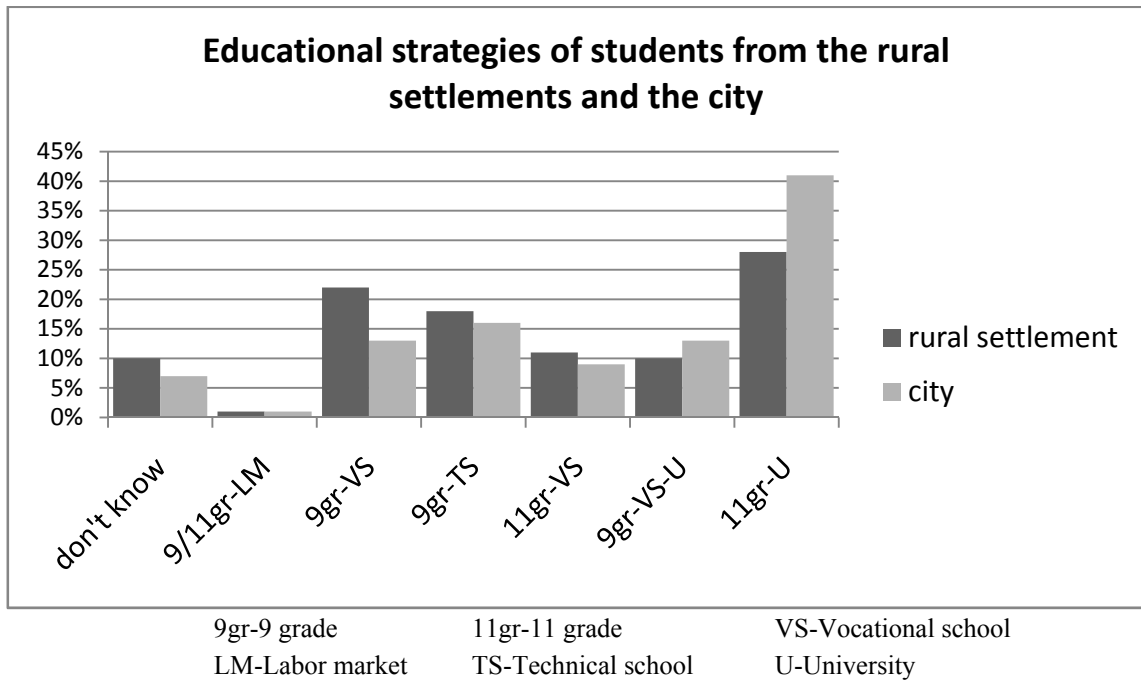


The expenses include the following: tutors fees, extracurricular studies, study groups, and pre-entry courses. One-way ANOVA: $F(2;327)=3.36$; $p<0.05$.

For the students from villages located far from St. Petersburg, which represent a majority of our sample, the least expensive option is to continue their education in the 10th and 11th grades, since the expenses of leaving home are not required.

Let's consider in more detail the difference in educational plans for students in the town and village schools of the Priozersky District. The urban students mainly intend to apply to a technical college, while rural students focus on the vocational schools. 22% of rural students plan to apply to a vocational school, and only 14% plan to apply to a technical college. In contrast, 14% of urban students plan to continue their education in a vocational school, and 33% students plan to apply to a college. These differences are statistically significant. Simultaneously in rural and urban areas, most students choose to continue their education in the 10th and 11th grades.

Figure 8 Educational strategies in rural and urban areas.



Urban students are more focused on higher education than rural students, and often they choose the strategy of getting into a higher educational institution through a technical college. In practice, this means planning to study in one of the urban colleges, and upon graduation transferring to a 2 or 3-year institute. Rural students mostly prefer to discontinue their education after vocational school. However, this difference in the aspirations cannot be explained only from their self-identification as rural or urban dwellers; there are more objective reasons for this difference.

There is a very large disparity between socioeconomic development in rural and urban areas in the district. There is also a statistically significant difference in the income and SES³⁵ of rural and urban families, as can be seen from the following figures.

Figure 9 Average Income in urban vs. rural area

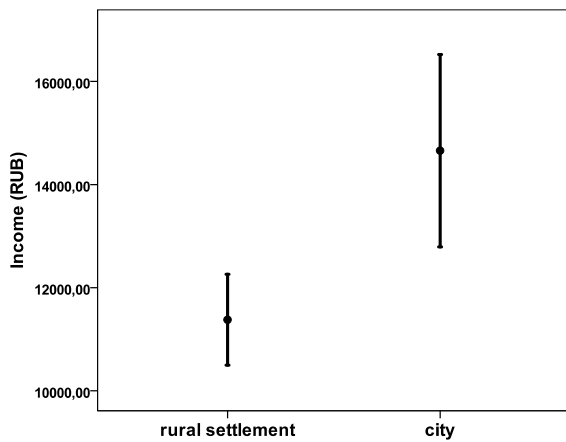
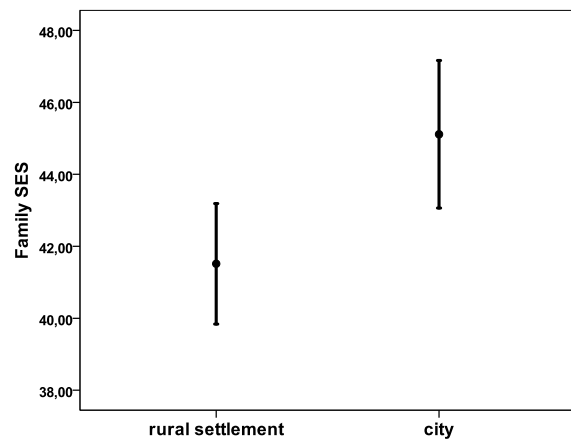
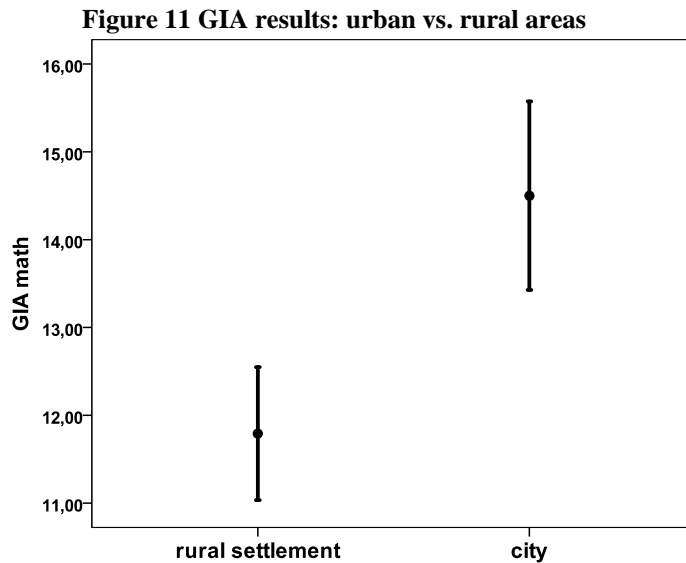


Figure 10 Average SES in urban vs. rural area



³⁵ SES – Socio-Economic Status, in our case measured through Harry Ganzeboom’s socio-economic index ISEI’08

There is also a disparity in academic success of students from urban and rural schools. Students at urban schools show a better result in GIA than students from rural areas:

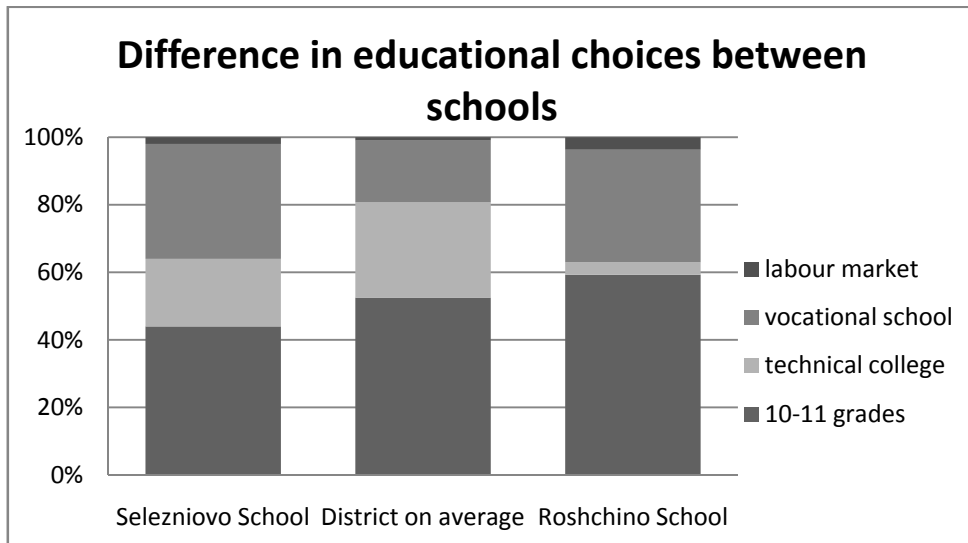


Educational Choices After the 9th Grade: a Microlevel Analysis

Now we analyze in more detail the educational choices after the 9th grade at a microlevel of the local education system in the Selezniovo settlement, which we described earlier. As it has been shown above, until after 9th grade, this LES including several elementary schools and two full-cycle schools in Selezniovo and Roshchino is closed: all children from the nearby villages study within this LES. This picture changes after the 9th grade: only about a half of the students choose to continue education in the 10th and 11th grades; the other half leaves this LES to continue their education in the vocational schools and colleges.

The education plans of the 9th grade students in the Selezniovo school are radically different from the typical plans across the district. As shown in the chart below, in the Selezniovo school the share of students planning to continue their education in the high school or apply to a college is lower than average, but the percent of students choosing vocational schools is higher. At the same time, the students graduating from the 9th grade, plan to apply to educational institutions located beyond the boundaries of their micro-LES. What educational pathways do they choose in this context?

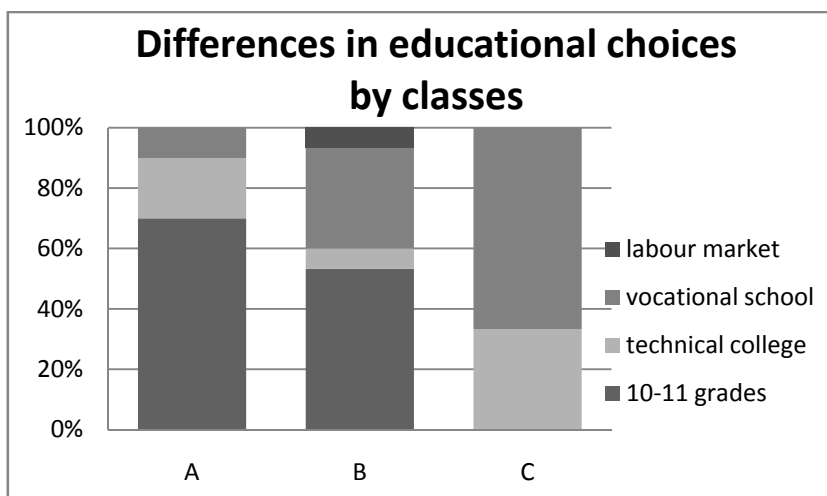
Figure 12 Difference in educational choices between schools



However, average results for the Selezniovo school do not provide much information, since, as we have pointed out before, this school is characterized by distinct sorting of students. The diagram below shows different education options for each of these classes separately.

It becomes apparent that the difference in educational choices between classes is radical. The students of the Class A are obviously focused on academic career: 70% of students in this class choose to continue their education in the 10th and 11th grades, which is 20% higher than in other schools of the district. The distribution of educational choices in Class B is similar to the average distribution across the district. The educational choices of Class C almost completely focus on professional education in vocational schools and colleges. It can be supposed that from the moment of initial sorting the A class was trained toward academics, Class B as an average class was trained toward an average school, and Class C drew students with low academic success who should leave school after the 9th grade.

Figure 13 Differences in educational choices by classes (Selezniovo School)



Let's examine the educational institutions being chosen by the students from Selezniovo. As we have pointed out earlier, Selezniovo is located relatively close to St. Petersburg making it

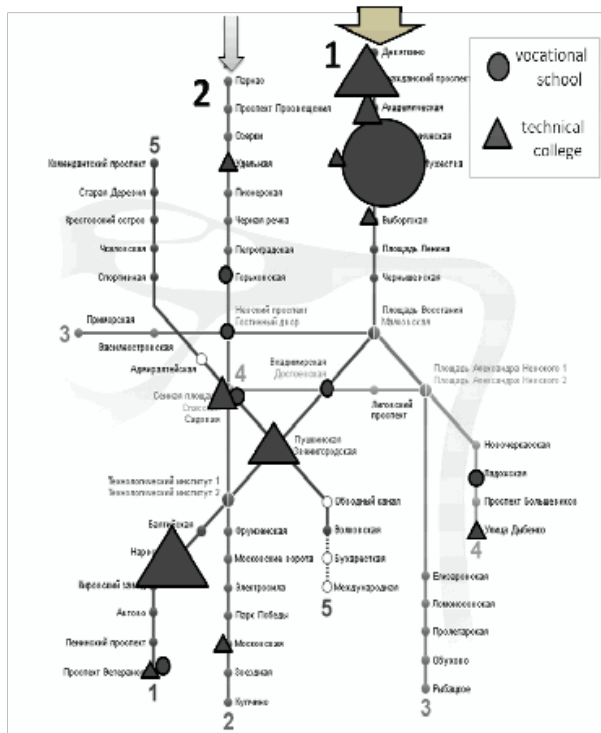
comparatively easy for the 9th grade students to apply to and study at the city’s educational institutions. The families avoid many risks associated with sending a 15 years old student to live alone in large city. For this reason, an option to apply to a vocational school or college in St. Petersburg is more attractive for the Selezniovo students than for students of other schools in the Priozersky District.

As we mentioned above, there are only two vocational schools in the Priozersky District. One of them is located near Selezniovo and is generally considered to be very poor. In 2009, only 3 students were going to apply to this vocational school from the Selezniovo school – all of them were from the “problematic” C class. All of the colleges and most of the vocational schools chosen by the students were located in St. Petersburg.

The figure below shows the locations of the vocational schools and colleges targeted for applications by the Selezniovo students against a scheme of the St. Petersburg subway. The arrows point at the terminal subway stations that can be reached from Selezniovo: Deviatkino (1st Line) by train or bus, and Parnas (2nd Line) by bus. All education institutions chosen by the Selezniovo students are located exactly along these two subway lines. In other words, the students choose the colleges and vocational schools, which will be faster and easier to reach from their home village.

As mentioned above, for many 9th grade students, the choice of a city college is dictated not as much by a desire to obtain a professional education but by a wish to transfer upon graduation to the second or third year of a partner higher educational institution and ultimately to receive higher education. Recently this strategy has become very popular, especially among the families with average income. This strategy conserves resources, which would be spent otherwise for tutoring before the USE and pre-entry courses for higher educational institutions. In addition, it also provides a failsafe: even if the plan to transfer fails, the student nevertheless will get a specialized education for a profession and will not be disadvantaged in the job market.

Figure 14 St. Petersburg vocational schools and technical colleges chosen by the students of the Selezniovo School



To summarize, we have shown that until the 9th grade, the micro-LES of the Selezniovo settlement is a closed system that encompasses four kindergartens and two full-cycle, (grades 1-11) schools. After the 9th grade, this system becomes more open. From this point on, it partially includes St. Petersburg as students actively seek to continue their education at schools there. This is a particular case, due to Selezniovo’s convenient location near St. Petersburg which allows families to choose more attractive, higher quality professional education, as opposed to waiting for graduation from the 11th grade before applying to an institute for higher education.

Conclusions

Local educational systems condition both a particular set of pathways and differences in specific trajectories. Structural limitations, including those of purely geographical nature affect access to the existing educational market. Most students, both in urban and rural areas, want to receive a higher education, and this pathway is preferred for students from different districts and even regions. The choice of alternative educational paths is to a greater extent affected by local contexts.

Students tend to choose an educational institution within an accessible distance. A large share of the Priozersk students, for instance, aspire for a college located in the town. Students from Priozersky District villages close to a local vocational school choose primary vocational education. The families strive to minimize the costs, both economic and psychological. The choice of an educational institution located in the neighborhood becomes the cheapest and most viable alternative preferred by the majority (after the option of higher education).

Students from communities close to St.Petersburg prefer metropolitan education. Even those who only aspire for vocational track, enroll at St.Petersburg's vocational schools, not local ones. For residents of most other communities St.Petersburg is too distant and thus is taken into consideration only when a family wants to send a child to a university, because the district does not have any.

Stable flow of students emerges inside the local educational system, largely due to the introduction of per capita financing. Students move to a school which is better for some properties. The tendency we observe suggests that in the Priozersky District sociopsychological characteristics are more important than academic performance: students move to a school with a better climate even if it is in no way superior to their former school in terms of academic performance. Educational market in rural areas may shape differently than in a city. School climate can contribute more to the school's competitiveness than the school's academic ranking among its peers.

Sorting within an individual school creates a semblance of local educational system. Different classes significantly differ from each other with respect to typical educational choices. Some classes are markedly oriented at academic career and choose the option of higher education, others are apparently readying themselves for blue-collar jobs and prefer vocational schools. Although a particular set of educational alternatives is generally determined by the relevant LES, every class in the same year group forms its distinctive set of available pathways, which in many respects depends on decisions made by the school principals.

Higher education remains a general trend, the first choice among urban and rural families in different regions of Russia. Educational reforms may change this situation, which makes research into motivations behind the educational choice all the more relevant. As our study has shown, the pathways should be considered within the framework of a particular LES, considering its internal flow of students, sorting, geographical features. Only taking into account structural dimensions, we can develop an insight into the existing educational market and the ways individuals act therein.

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