

The territories of education: new approaches, renewed challenges

Introduction to Issue No. 102
of the journal *Éducation & formations*

Jean-Richard Cytermann¹

MENJS, Honorary Inspector General

Olivier Monso

DEPP-MENJS, Sub-Directorate for Synthesis

1. It is with pleasure and pride that I introduce this issue of *Education & formations* on territories. As a former director of the DEPP, it enables me, twenty years on, to measure the extent of the progress made by this Directorate.

REMINDER The opinions expressed in the articles or reproduced in the analyses by the authors are their own and not those of the institutions to which they belong, nor *a fortiori* of the DEPP.

This issue deals with “the territories of education”, which is an essential theme. It was present in the first public statistics on education, since education is organized into territorial districts. Thus, in the administrative bulletin of the Ministry of Public Instruction of 1868, there is a *comparative statement by department of the degree of education of the conscripts of the classes of 1832, 1852, 1862 and 1867*. The subjects of territories and territorial disparities have been a constant in the work of the DEPP and its predecessors for nearly sixty years. From the outset, school statistics have of course been presented by *académie* (main administrative district of the ministries in charge of school and higher education) or department. The work carried out in Claude Seibel's time formed the basis of the priority education policy launched in the early 1980s. In 1993, Claude Thélot published the first issue of *Géographie de l'École*, a territorial version of *L'état de l'École*, the thirteenth edition of which was published in 2021. In 1995, the journal *Éducation & formations* published an issue on the education system in rural areas. In 2002, a joint DATAR/DEPP call for tenders was issued on territorial disparities in education, which was concluded by a scientific symposium. And many of the studies published in the journal have dealt with territorial disparities and, in particular, issues of social diversity in secondary schools.

It soon became clear that presenting statistics by *académie* and department was not enough to assess territorial disparities. Differences are just as great, or even greater, within *académies* and departments, and even within metropolitan areas, than between *académies* or departments, and this diversity of territories has increased even more with the creation of large regions. The disparities between territories in terms of social origin, educational provision, careers and tracking of pupils and their school results have become significant. The issue of territorial inequalities has been added to or combined with that of social inequalities.

Moreover, the methodology of studies on territorial disparities has been refined thanks in particular to the development of geographic information systems. It is now possible, for example, to compare the places of residence of pupils or teachers with the places of teaching. And the description of rural and urban territories has also been clarified, through the typology of municipalities used in this issue. These methodological advances and the availability of new tools have made it possible to thoroughly renew studies on territorial disparities.

At the same time, the issue of territorial disparities has become increasingly important in recent years in the public debate and in public policy, particularly in education. From this point of view, the work carried out by the Inspectorate General is in line with the work of the DEPP and builds on it. In particular, we should mention the IGEN/IGAENR report of 2016, *Territoires éducatifs: état des lieux et perspectives* and the Azéma-Mathiot *Mission Territoires et réussite* report of 4 November 2019 on both the evolution of priority education policy and the definition of policies dedicated to the rural world.

This issue dedicated to territories is divided into four parts.

THE TERRITORIES OF EDUCATION: A TRANSVERSAL VISION

The first part includes cross-cutting articles. First, as in the article by Yann Fournier and Robert Rakocevic, the aim is to place the French education system in the European context and to see whether it is possible to identify geographical groups of countries

according to some criteria which include: the existence or not of a common structure for primary and lower secondary school, the existence or not of streams at the end of primary school, the importance of education funding and the share of vocational education. Although there are points in common with certain countries that are geographically close (single school including lower secondary school in the Scandinavian countries, separate streams at the end of primary school in several Central European countries), these groups are not homogeneous in terms of all the criteria used.

The following article draws its substance from a research project conducted by the authors (Jacques Lévy, Shin Koseki and Irene Sartoretti) in partnership with the Reims education authority and aimed at answering the question: "*Does location create predispositions to academic failure or success?*" This article puts forward the notion of "*spatial capital*" of places alongside those of "*economic capital*" and "*cultural capital*", which are more usual in research on education. The article also defines an indicator of remoteness entitled "*urbanity gradient*". The study shows that examination results (*brevet* - certificate of lower secondary education and *baccalauréat* - upper secondary school leaving certificate) vary little according to the urbanity gradient, and more generally that the French education system offers the same educational performance in the weakest urbanity gradients (sparsely populated countryside far from cities). The article concludes with the interest of crossing this analysis according to the place of residence of the pupil with that of the performance of the schools, with the help of the indicators of upper secondary schools added value developed by the DEPP. The third article, by Fabrice Murat, shows the extent of the differences between municipalities in terms of both social background and school performance. While these inequalities, both social and educational, seem to remain stable over time, the author observes a strengthening of the link between these inequalities. Finally, he notes that the social characteristics of the municipality are not the only explanatory factor and that living in a given municipality seems to have an effect of its own, possibly as a consequence of specific local practices. The author thus proposes, following the example of what is done for high schools, the calculation of an "*added value*" of the municipality.

CHARACTERISTICS OF EDUCATIONAL PROVISION AND THE SCHOOL POPULATION

A second series of articles deals with the characteristics of both the education supply and the school population in different areas. Olivier Monso's article shows that the social backgrounds of secondary school pupils in rural areas retain some specific characteristics. But, more than the rural-urban divide, it is the strong heterogeneity between types of municipalities, within the "urban" and "rural" categories which is relevant in this study. The article also uses the new methodological tools that the DEPP has developed or helped to develop: typology of rural and urban municipalities, new measures of social position (social position index, social category of the household).

The article by Loïc Ourdouillie, Antoine Van Assche, Magalie Vigé and Élisabeth Vilain, from the Lille education authority, is in a way a variation on the previous one applied to the Hauts-de-France *région*. The authors identify four main profiles of the areas where students live: dense and very dense municipalities, characterized by highly contrasting social situations, outlying municipalities with the most favourable situation, remote rural municipalities, villages and small cities, often in economic and demographic decline. Finally, they note a very high degree of correspondence between the areas where pupils live and where they attend school.

The first article by Mustapha Touahir and Sylvain Maugis is a methodological contribution to the construction of a remoteness index for lower secondary schools, in order to establish a new approach of rurality applied to this type of schools.

This indicator integrates the various dimensions of the notion of remoteness, measured at the level of each college: rurality of the territory, density and diversity of schooling, access to sports and cultural facilities. The article shows that the remote secondary schools, which are mostly rural, are rather socially homogeneous. They are characterised by the teaching resources allocated to them (hours of teaching per pupil) and by above-average examination results (*brevet* - certificate of lower secondary education). The tracking towards vocational education is more marked in these schools. The following article, by David Broustet, proposes an adaptation of this remoteness index to the specific needs and realities of New Caledonia.

The article by Sylvain Maugis and Alexia Stéfanou aims to show how the range of educational opportunities is differentiated between lower secondary schools, depending on the area. It shows that special educational pathways (Segpa, ULIS, UPE2A ²) are over-represented in priority education schools, but that there is also a desire to make these schools more attractive: sports sections, bilingual and European sections, and classes with special timetables in the arts (essentially music) are over-represented in priority education schools. The teaching of ancient languages and cultures is present in a very large majority of schools, but is less frequent in the most remote schools.

A second article by Mustapha Touahir and Sylvain Maugis provides an original analysis of the issues of social diversity in lower secondary schools and the avoidance of the school map by comparing the schools where secondary school pupils attend with those of their nearest neighbours. The results are in line with those of the scientific literature and previous work by the DEPP. Attendance at a local public secondary school is a highly socially marked phenomenon. The more advantaged the students' social background, the more likely they are to attend another school, often private, sometimes public. Opting out of the local public school mainly changes the social profile of the most socially disadvantaged schools. More generally, it has the effect of increasing social segregation between schools.

The article by Franck Evain and Olivier Monso clearly illustrates one of the facets of the DEPP's activity, the provision of the results of its work and methodological tools to other directorates of the Ministry of National Education. The distribution of teaching resources between *académies* in public secondary education is a strategic area. As in the case of primary education, the DEPP provided the DGESCO with methodological support for the renovation of the model for the allocation of resources. The article presents both the methodology adopted and proposes a diagnosis of the actual distribution of teaching resources between *académies* and schools. It identifies the contribution of the criteria of socio-economic context, structure and training offer to differences in allocations.

The last article in this section, by Luc Masson, looks at the distribution of apprenticeship training and its consequences on the travel time of apprentices. Logically, travel time increases with the level of training, as apprentice training centres in higher education are more concentrated than those leading to a vocational baccalaureate or a *certificat d'aptitude professionnelle* (certificate of vocational ability). Similarly, the closer the apprentices live to an urban area, the shorter the travel time. They are longest for apprentices who live in villages or small cities.

2. Programmes for children with severe and persistent educational difficulties; educational units for small groups of students with disabilities; educational units for migrant students not having French as their mother tongue.

STUDENT TRAJECTORIES, PATHWAYS AND OUTCOMES

The third part of this issue analyses the differences in school performance and schooling. The first two articles renew the approach to schooling in rural areas by using the new typology of rural and urban municipalities. Marianne Fabre's article is based on assessments in Grade 1 and 2. Even if a higher success rate is observed at the beginning of Grade 1 in rural schools, the gap between rural and urban, and more generally the explanatory power of the typology of municipalities, remains low. On the other hand, belonging to a given *région* explains a larger part of the variance in pupil performance. There seems to be more differences between students in the north and south of France than between students in geographically close rural and urban municipalities.

Fabrice Murat's article addresses the issue of territorial disparities in school performance and tracking at the end of Grade 9, based on the new typology of municipalities. The article confirms that school performance, in terms of skills, varies little from one type of municipality to another. There are, however, more marked differences in terms of school careers. Pupils in rural areas are less likely to choose the general and technological pathways. The differences in tracking according to the type of territory also vary from one *région* to another. The results of this study are confirmed in Claudine Pirus' article by an analysis based on a panel of pupils who entered the sixth grade in 2007. This analysis confirms the differences in tracking between the types of territories. Pupils from remote rural areas, from very sparsely populated outlying rural areas, and from villages and small cities are less likely to choose the general and technological pathways. These differences in orientation are consistent with the differences in the aspirations of the children and their families.

The article by Cécile Bonneau, Pauline Charousset, Julien Grenet and Georgia Thebault focuses on geographical inequalities in the recruitment of students to the *grandes écoles* (highly selective higher education institution). In particular, it shows an overrepresentation of Parisian students in the *grandes écoles*, and this overrepresentation is even stronger in the most selective and most "prestigious" schools. These geographical inequalities in access are only partly explained by the average differences in academic performance and social composition between pupils in Paris and in other departments. This article thus clearly reinforces the idea of a concentration of 'elites'.

CHARACTERISTICS OF TEACHERS, CONDITIONS OF PRACTICE AND PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES

The final part of this issue looks at variations in the teaching profession according to territory. These articles complement the previous issue of the journal *Éducation & formations* devoted to the teaching profession and once again demonstrate the wealth of the DEPP's work in this area.

Pascaline Feuillet's analysis presents an overview of teachers in different territories and points out that nine out of ten teachers work in urban areas, with this proportion falling to eight out of ten for primary school teachers. Highly densely populated urban areas and remote rural areas are more likely to have teachers with less experience, i.e. younger teachers or teachers with fewer years of experience. The study then analyses teachers' travel time, which is an important factor in their living and working conditions. Logically, primary school teachers have a significantly shorter commute to their schools than secondary school teachers.

This is due to the wider spatial distribution of schools in all territories. Younger teachers also have longer travel times than older teachers.

The article by Jean-Éric Thomas is complementary to the previous one, in particular by taking into account the fact of living in a given *académie*. The variations from one *académie* to another are more significant, in terms of the proportion of experienced teachers, than the fact that the school belongs to a given type of territory defined according to the typology of municipalities. Within the most attractive academies, the schools that are furthest away have the lowest proportion of teachers with experience in the profession, or who have been in the school for a long time. These findings reflect, above all, the effects of the systems of first assignment and transfer of teachers.

The latest article by Laurène Bocognano, Axelle Charpentier and Christelle Raffaëlli, which uses data from the Talis survey, looks at the specific characteristics of teachers in rural areas in terms of their teaching context, their perception of their profession, their training needs and their professional practices. According to the teachers' statements, the climate is calmer in rural schools. Teachers are more inclined to develop innovative practices, whereas collaborative practices are more common in urban areas. Generally speaking, however, there are no significant differences in teachers' professional practices.

This issue dedicated to territories also aims to highlight the wealth of DEPP's data, which should make it possible to extend and deepen territorial analyses ³. Thus, this first issue, which was largely produced by analysts from the DEPP and the statistical services in the local education authorities, but also with contributions from researchers, is intended to pave the way for many other research projects on this theme.

³. Examples include works on State and local authority expenditures on education, on school income and expenditure, which provide a complementary view to works relying on the number of hours per pupil (H/P) or the number of teachers per pupil, or on boarding schools.