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Cheating the lottery...

**Correlations between a state regulated school system,
access to high quality schooling and middle class school
choice in Berlin.**

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Abstract

Particular for the UK and the Netherlands it has been argued that processes of gentrification going hand in hand with privileged access to schools. This paper examines if strategies of school choice by middle class families have a similar impact on socio-spatial exclusion in Berlin, Germany.

What makes the German case special is the role of the state within the process. Catchment areas are the main mechanism for allocation at primary school level (Noreisch 2007). Public school access is independent from income or social status of the parents.

First the paper argues that high quality public schooling in Germany is connected to one type of school: the “Gymnasium” (grammar school). As access to it relies on a good primary school education, middle class parents try to avoid the “wrong” primary school which could lower their child’s opportunity to attend the “Gymnasium”.

Second the paper discusses which coping strategies are used by the worried middle class, and this includes middle class families with migrational background, to guarantee the best schooling for their children (Boterman 2012). Because primary school education is organised in catchment areas, one strategy is moving into certain areas. The papers discusses if this strategy might intensify processes of Gentrification.

1. Introduction

A number of studies in the past years tried to understand the logics of social reproduction of families in the city-centre and their connection to a growing urban inequality within cities. It became clear that school choice plays an important role and therefore is at the core of studies on class formation as well as inequality in different metropolitan contexts. It is argued for European countries like Britain, Sweden, France and the Netherlands (Karsten, 1994; Merry and Driessen, 2005; Noreisch, 2007a; Bunar, 2010a; Maloutas, 2007; Raveaud and Zanten, 2007; Butler, 2012) as well as for the USA, Australia and Canada (Bryk et al.,

1993; Hoxby, 2003; Fiske and Ladd, 2000; Ladd, 2002;) that middle class hopes for a “better” environment when changing or choosing a specific school.

Studies mainly focussing on the UK context have shown that middle class parents seem to formulate the choice for their children’s school in a more distinctive way than lower class groups. Butler with Robson for the British (Butler with Robson, 2003) and Boterman (Botermann, 2012) for the Dutch context show that middle class parents nowadays strategically choose their place of “belonging” and living mainly due to educational ambitions. The involvement of middle class parents in the school creates a “geography of school choice”. The consequence is a growing level of segregation.

More importantly Butler with Robson (Butler with Robson, 2003) connected the “coping strategy” of middle class school choice with gentrification processes . For them, resources and capital play an important role in securing access to the “right” school. Because these parents are willing and able to pay higher costs of living, the fields of housing and education are interconnected. Local schooling becomes an urban dimension putting pressure on the housing market. For the case of London it has been argued that processes of urban development like gentrification go hand in hand with privileged access to schools.

The discourses on middle class families as well as inequality and segregation linked the issues to the role of the education system. The mechanism of school choice differs; various systems of freedom of choice are deployed in different countries. However, most of the research focuses on countries with an education system that is in parts neo-liberal (Waslander, et al. 2010; Clasen, 2006) Countries like the UK, the Netherlands but also Scandinavian countries like Sweden see a ever closer relation between the state, economic organization and the educational systems (Karsten, 1999; David and Bansel, 2005; Bunar, 2010b). The emergence of new financial constraints by the state, competition between states, regions, cities as well as the increasing importance of knowledge production brought a closer relationship between state and business. This increased trends to marketization and deregulation of social services like education. Lohmann even argues that free school choice can be seen as an important instrument of neo-liberalisation. (Lohmann, 2001).

At the same time, some countries are effected by the marketization of educational policies and neo-liberal reforms in a much smaller sense. For instance, in contrast to the countries mentioned, the basic structural character of the German primary and secondary educational

system has remained relatively unaffected (Brauns and Steinmann, 1999). Because of that, school choice is actually limited. This paper discusses school choice strategies in a neighbourhood in Berlin, Germany and reviews if Germany with its state-dominated education system is an exception from the recent debates about school choice. It examines if the school choice of middle class parents in Germany differs from the more “neo-liberal” cases.

2. The importance of education for middle class parents

To discuss school choice, different theoretic approaches have been used. Butler and Robson connected their work in 2003 to Bourdieu’s social theory of habitus, which argues that individuals have different potentials that they can structurally use and transfer. All four different sorts of capital (economic, political, cultural, social) can be relocated to the next generation. For Butler and Robson, middle class living is a question of a metropolitan habitus. Next to employment, housing and consumption, ensuring a successful education can be seen as a process of protecting social as well as cultural capital. The idea is that children who are assisted “through educational credentials and other advantages [...] become themselves middle-class subjects” (Butler with Robson, 2003: 30).

According to Reay, school choice becomes one of the main mechanisms for identity formation of the middle class (Reay et al, 2011). The search of the middle class for good education becomes a matter of self esteem. For middle class parents, the choice for a specific school or a specific type of school ensures the cultural, as well as the economical status.

Boterman argues that while often seeking diversity before having children, middle class parents see migrant groups as a threat when it comes to school choice.(Botermann, 2012) Ball argues that parents see the future chances of their children threatened if the nearby school is attended by children from a social background different to their own. Heterogeneous composition of students creates a level of insecurity where the situation at school as well as the neighbourhood they live in seem to be mutually negative for the

development of their children (Ball, 2003; also Hollingworth and Williams, 2010; Vincent et al., 2008, Crozier et al. 2008).

The theory of planned behaviour by Ajzen (Maaz et al., 2006) can be useful to explain school choice mechanism. It assumes that behavioural intentions arise from the interaction of attitudes to behaviour, subjective norms and of perceived behavioural control.

Especially in the German educational studies literature about school choice, the rational theory approach is used to explain parental behaviour. Here, it is assumed that decisions of school choice are made "on the basis of the available information in a utilitarian way" in order to "maximize the expected benefits and to keep costs as low as possible "(Clausen, 2006: 72; also Schauenberg, 2006; Suter, 2012). In its investigation of parental school choice behavior Clausen assumes that "decision forms that correspond to the ideal of a rational choice, are more affected by parents who belong to the formation surrounding layers."

However, because most of the authors using a rational choice approach have an educational studies background, none of them saw the spatial dimension of school choice. It seems rather unclear how to combine arguments of a rational choice theory with finding that middle class parents are willing to accept a significant increase in housing costs.

Ironically, in the discourses around area based approaches to decrease inequality middle class families play an important role. They are imagined as the "golden sheep" resolving a range of urban problems by different policy approaches. Keeping the discussions about school choice in mind, they might actually increase segregation within cities. (Bondi, 1999; Lees, 2008). The research on school preferences contests these ideas of education as the

3. Research questions

Compared to other countries, the question how school choice effects inequality is not a very prominent topic for academics in Germany. This article utilizes the theoretical and methodological approach developed in the national context in the UK and the Netherlands. As Boterman points out: "It is often emphasised that residential practices and school choice are tightly interwoven in a 'geography of education'" (Botermann, 2012: 2). The question is

how a specific educational context influences school choice mechanisms within different urban contexts.

The aim of this paper is to translate the research approach into a German perspective. It attempts to open the discussion about new social divisions in inner-city neighbourhoods by developing a research scheme to analyse school choice strategies.

Two questions guide the discussion:

- What strategies do parents use to ensure that their children attend the primary school they prefer?
- Do the patterns of the German school system influence the use of school choice strategies of middle class families?

Moreover, the paper tries to give first hints how to answer the following two questions:

- What effect do the school choice strategies have on segregation within schools as well as on the neighbourhood level?
- Do school choice strategies influence housing market processes?

Compared to the other countries, the German school system does not allow much choice at the primary school level. The assumption therefore is that school choice strategies might differ from the ones found in more “neo-liberal” and reformed contexts, mainly the UK and the Netherlands. As a result, the effect of school choice strategies on segregation should be low.

To discuss the questions, this paper will present first findings using the example of the Berlin borough of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg. To do so, the next chapter explains in what way school choice in the German educational system differs from the British and Dutch example. Then it seeks to examine school choice processes within schools but also within the neighbourhood.

The paper uses quantitative data to examine how school choice strategies work and what consequences they have. The paper will mainly focus on the northern areas of the borough of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg. Methodologically, this paper analyses migration data of families, demographic indicators as well as school performance data from primary schools within the area of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg. The analysis will be supported by policy documents as well as literature on the topic of school choice.

The analysis focuses on the role of ethnic composition of schools and neighbourhoods. Although ethnicity is just one dimension, it still plays an important role in the description of inequality and is an important factor in the research on school choice decisions (Hamnett, C., Butler, T. and Ramsden, M, 2013). Boterman points out that parents struggle with the issue of ethnicity when it comes to school choice and when it comes to choose housing possibilities (Boterman, 2012). In German educational studies, there is a wide consensus that the issue of ethnic or racial composition of the school population is increasingly central to the educational performance of a school (Schröder, 2002).

4. Background: the state-dominated German education system

4.1. The German school system

The national characteristics of the education system play an important role for the present research paper. A first characteristic of the German education system is the responsibility of the federal states (*Bundesländer*) for education policies. Every federal state can develop a different policy approach and school reforms are not implemented simultaneously (Phillips, 2011). On the national level, however, institutional mechanisms exist to ensure quality of education.

This paper focuses on the Berlin education system. In Berlin, children start school at the age of six years. After six years, primary school teachers make recommendations what secondary school the student should attend; but the parents have the final say in the decision (Schlotter, 2012)¹. In Berlin, the traditional multi-tier system of secondary education has been kept even after the school reform of 2006. Students continue either at the Integrated Secondary School, where they complete their compulsory intermediate general qualification, which takes four years. The other option is the six year track of the Gymnasium for preparing the Abitur (A-Level) which allows access to higher education (Kaßner, 2007). This multi-tier selective school system differs from integrated school systems in Scandinavian countries and Canada. The Netherlands also have a multi-tier system, but the differences between the different school types are much lower.

¹ Rarely, the transition to a Gymnasium can already be taken after four years.

4.2. Primary school education as the key for higher education

The main characteristic describing the peculiarity of the German education system is the high level of visible social selectivity when it comes to successful education, access to higher education and job positions (Bude, 2011). Additionally, high quality schooling in Germany is connected to one type of school: the Gymnasium. Comparable with the British grammar school system, the Gymnasium is a type of secondary school with a strong emphasis on academic learning in the German education system. Successfully graduating the Gymnasium allows access to all forms of higher education.² In Berlin, parents can enrol their children at any Gymnasium but students can be sent to a lower school type if they fail after a period of six months.

Because the decision if students can continue at the Gymnasium is taken only six months after they started at the secondary level, a good primary education is the key factor. The quality of schooling at primary school level defines the chances to successfully graduate the Gymnasium (Kirsten, 2005). As access to the Gymnasium (and higher education) relies on a good primary school education, middle class parents try to avoid the “wrong” primary school which could lower their child’s opportunity to attend the Gymnasium.

4.3. Primary school choice

Besides this general framework, the following characteristics are important for understanding the school choice decision at primary school level in Berlin:

- Catchment areas implemented by local educational boards are the main mechanism for allocation at primary school level. This ensures that primary schools enrol their students from nearby neighbourhoods. Catchment areas allocation is part of educational law and therefore binding for parents.
- School access is independent from income or social status of the parents. Most children visit a public school; private education plays only a minor role. In the

² Not only those graduating from the Gymnasium are admitted to university in Germany. But even though there are several other ways to earn the A-Level (Abitur), it is still seen as the main mechanism entering higher education or high paid vocational training.

Netherlands, school fees are also uncommon, but private schools play a more important role.

- In theory, the German state creates an “egalitarian” school system, where school budget is allocated in a per capita way. (Noreisch, 2007a; Noreisch, 2007 b).

	United Kingdom	Netherlands	Germany/ Berlin
Role of private schools	Important, school fees, economical capital needed	Important, but state subsidized	Only minor role
Catchment areas	No, but preferences of schools for children living within neighbourhood	Freedom of school choice	Yes, for public primary schools (Berlin)
Selective school system	Not until A-Level	Plurality of school concepts and school structures	Strong selectivity, starting early at age 10 to 12.
Responsible for education policy	National Level	National Level	Federal level

Table 1: Differences between the educational system of the UK, the Netherland, and the federal state of Berlin.

What makes the German case special is the role of the state within the process. The absence of a market orientation at primary school level and the allocation of students on the basis of catchment areas limit the freedom of school choice. The main difference between the German and the Dutch and British systems therefore is that parents actually do not need to have a preference for one specific school because the choice is made for them.

The second part of the paper discusses if parents follow the given decisions according to school law. It tries to find first evidences of coping strategies which are used by the worried middle class, and this includes middle class families with ethnic background, to guarantee the best schooling for their children.

5. Cheating the lottery: School choice strategies in Berlin-Kreuzberg

5.1. Choice of case study

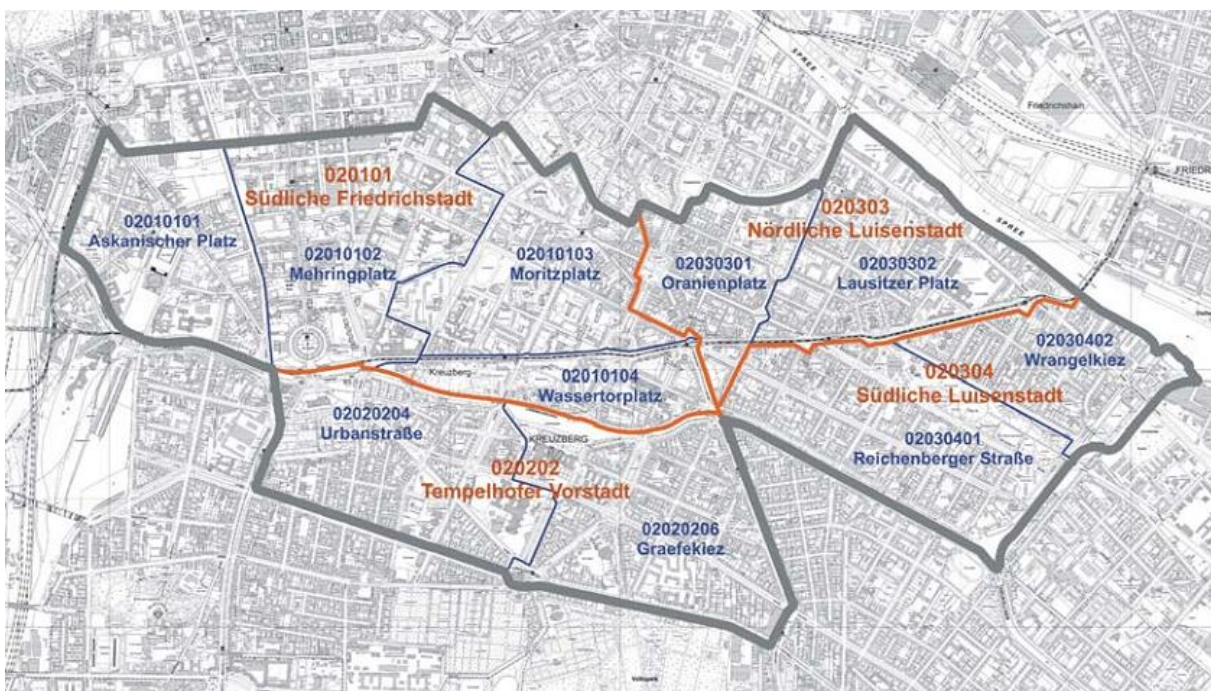
School choice in Berlin was examined among others by Noreisch (Noreisch 2007 a, Noreisch 2007b; also Schulz, 2002; Häußermann, 2007). Noreisch showed that parents use coping strategies to get access to the school. She also was able to illustrate how school choice in catchment areas works. However, due to the low pressure on the Berlin housing market at that time, she was not able to link the topic of school choice to an increase in inequality or developments on the housing market. The perception of Berlin as a socially mixed “European city” (Häußermann and Kapphan, 2000) changed dramatically over the last five years especially when looking at inner-city neighbourhoods. (Förste, 2013). There are various reasons for this development. First, after the number of inhabitants had been declining until 2007, this trend is reversed now. In some of the inner-city neighbourhoods, the new groups moving in are different from the old inhabitants: they are better educated, they have a higher income and they also have children. Second, a growing interest in Berlin’s housing market is visible. Both developments together lead to a housing shortage and growing rents in the more popular inner-city areas of Berlin (Investitionsbank Berlin, 2012). Third, with an average income and a GDP lower than in Germany, Berlin’s economic situation is still weak. The percentage of people who are depended on welfare is also much higher than in other metropolitan regions.

This paper chooses the North-western part of the borough of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg for its case study (Map 1)³ The area as well as the borough has been a focal point for the description of changes in Berlin. It consists of heterogeneous neighbourhoods. On the one hand, an attractive housing stock as well as bars, restaurants and galleries set an attractive environment for young people and young families (Investitionsbank Berlin, 2012). On the other hand, some parts of the area are dominated by council housing estates. Here, a high concentration of unemployed persons and welfare dependency goes hand in hand with a

³ In the following, this area is called Kreuzberg-North.

high share of ethnic minorities. The majority of these migrants are of Turkish origin. (Mayer 2006).⁴

The important point here is that because of its housing stock and the diversity of the population, the area is still attractive for young families. However, when it comes to schooling, it seems that families become more sensitive to the social problems. The majority of the schools are seen as “bad schools” due to the high share of migrants as well as welfare dependency.



Map 1: – Area of Kreuzberg-North with different Neighbourhoods

Source: Senate Department of Urban Planning and Environment

5.2. Coping strategies of parents

In the following, coping strategies employed by parents in the north of Kreuzberg to ensure that their children do not have to attend a “bad” school are described.

⁴ Welfare dependency is a problem of German as well as non-German inhabitants.

5.2.1. Moving away

Because primary school education is organised in catchment areas, a first strategy could be to move away from Kreuzberg-North. Table 2 shows that this coping strategy is visible. While the total net migration is only slightly negative, the level of net migration of children is extremely negative. Families with children under six seem to leave the North of Kreuzberg more frequently than the rest of the population.

Year	Total Net Migration of children under age 6 in % of inhabitants under age 6	Total Net Migration (all age groups) in % of inhabitants
2007	-4.3 %	-0.6 %
2008	-3.5 %	-0.1 %
2009	-3.4 %	-1.7 %
2010	-3.9 %	-0.8 %

Table 2: Net Migration of Kreuzberg-North between 2007 and 2010

Source: Office of Statistics Berlin-Brandenburg, Senate Department of Urban Planning and Environment

If one looks at the exact age of the children moving away, it can be seen that children up to the age of eight years move out of Kreuzberg-North into other Berlin neighbourhoods in two waves. Also, negative net migration is not distributed evenly. The first wave starts when the children are between one and two years old. It can be presumed that at that time, most of the families need more room and therefore start looking for a bigger flat. A connection to schooling is not clearly given. The second wave starts at age five which is when parents are confronted with the topic of school choice. The number stays high for children age six, at which primary school education starts. Moving out seems to be one of the coping strategies for families choosing a school in Kreuzberg.

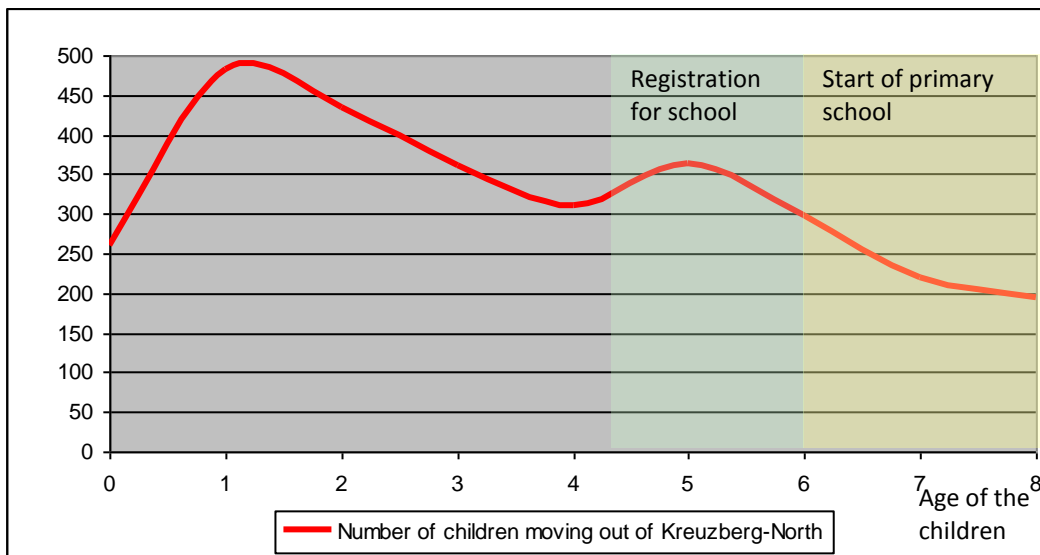


Table 3: Number of Children age 0-8 years moving away into other areas of Berlin (migration outside Berlin not included), period 2008-2012

Source: Office of Statistics Berlin-Brandenburg, own calculations

The migration out of the area is not an ethnically balanced process. There is evidence that more children of German origin than children with migrational background leave the area (see table 4). In 2007 there were 29 percent of children of German origin in the area. This number dropped to 22.6 percent within six years. On the other hand, the share of the non-German population within this cohort increased from an already high level of 71 percent to 77.4 percent. More than three out of four children have an ethnic background when registration for primary school starts; the level of segregation already is quite high.

	Percentage of German population	Percentage of non-German population	Increase in non-German population
Age 1 (2007)	29.0%	71.0%	6.4 percentage points
Age 6 (2012)	22.6%	77.4%	

Table 4: Change of % of German and non-german inhabitants between age 1 and 7

Source: Office of Statistics Berlin-Brandenburg, own calculations

5.2.2. Ignoring catchment area allocation

Even if the parents stay in the same area, some try to select a specific school. In Berlin, catchment areas determine the school choice geographically. If catchment areas organise enrolment of the students from the surrounding neighbourhoods, the social situation at the school should be nearly identical to the surrounding area. Noreish already showed that six percent of the parents in the borough of Tempelhof-Schöneberg used a wrong address to evade catchment area allocation (Noreisch 2007a). A comparison between the ethnic compositions at primary school level with the data from the surrounding neighbourhoods yields the same result. As table 4 shows, nine of the eighteen primary schools in Kreuzberg-North show a negative mismatch.

Primary School	Percentage of non-Germans at school	Percentage of non-Germans in surrounding area	Differences between school and neighbourhood level	Percentage of difference
02G12	92.9	92.1	0.8	0.9
02G24	92.6	89.0	3.6	4.1
02G22	98.3	90.0	8.3	9.2
02G16	72.8	54.1	18.7	34.5
02G20	64.4	54.1	10.3	19.0
02G26	88.6	68.5	20.1	29.3
02G15	89.5	68.5	21.1	30.7
02G30	94.6	75.7	18.8	24.9
02G23	78.8	70.7	8.1	11.4

Table 5: Negative mismatch of percentage of non-German children between primary schools and neighbourhoods around school.

Source: Office of Statistics Berlin-Brandenburg, own calculations

The mismatch does not seem to follow a specific logic. Some of the schools show an extremely high percentage of non-Germans, while others show a much more balanced composition. These schools are not focussed on one location but distributed evenly over

Kreuzberg-North. In consequence, these schools are more segregated than the other schools. The exit strategy of ignoring or evading the catchment area system by own school choice strategies increase the segregation at school in some cases quite heavily compared to the neighbourhood.

5.2.3. Strategies of public pressure

Attempting to actively influence the school situation is another strategy used by parents to ensure their children can visit the preferred primary school. One example for the use of this strategy can be found in Kreuzberg as well. In 2012, a group of parents which all sent their children to the same kindergarten tried to negotiate with the Lenau primary school for a class which consisted only of their children. All twelve children spoke mainly German at home. Eleven of them had a German white middle class background, one was of Korean origin. In principle, schools in Berlin are allowed to ensure that parent initiatives can enrol a group of children known to each other which than are sent to the same class. In this case however, a parent initiative wanted to negotiate with the principal of the Lenau primary school not only that no other child would be sent into their children's class but also demanded that the best teacher be assigned to the class. The principal initially agreed on the conditions. However, when school started, Turkish parents complained about the segregation in the school. Their children attended classes with an exclusively Turkish and Arabic student body. The principal refused to rethink the mix of the classes, essentially breaking school law. To enforce their rights, the Turkish parents went public and called on the Senate Department of Education to settle the dispute. After the Senate Department of Education's intervention, the principal gave in. As a result, some of the German parents enrolled their children at different schools. After this incident made public it also became known that white middle class parents also used their political voice in other cases in the borough of Berlin –Wedding (Vogt, 2012).

5.3. Moving out of Kreuzberg-North – target areas and housing market implications

The migration analysis has shown that a number of parents leave the area of Kreuzberg-North before their children have to attend the school determined by the catchment area.

This wave of migration is at least partly connected to ethnicity. It remains to be seen which neighbourhoods the parents move to when leaving the area of Kreuzberg-North.

Examining migration data for children between 0 and 8 years, two geographical directions of migration are visible. One group moves to areas outside the city centre. A possible explanation might be the parents' desire for a more suburban environment for the children. A second group of families who move away from the north of Kreuzberg focuses on neighbourhoods in the city centre. Here, a migration wave into the areas in the south of Kreuzberg, the most northern parts of Neukölln as well as into Friedrichshain and even Prenzlauer Berg can be witnessed.

As explained in chapter 5.1., Berlin sees a housing shortage especially in these inner-city areas. An increase in rent prices is also witnessed. Especially the areas of interests for families moving away from Kreuzberg-North saw steep increases in rent prices within the last five years. Holm described these areas as focal points for gentrification in Berlin (Holm, 2012).

As pointed out by recent studies on Berlin's housing market (Investitionsbank Berlin, 2012; Bernt and Holm, 2010), rents in this area increased rapidly. Astonishingly, middle class parents are able and willingly to pay this dramatic increase in rent prices. Although it can only be assumed here, a connection to the quality of schooling seems at least relevant.

6. Conclusion

Studying social inequalities is at the core of urban studies. In the US and in Western Europe, a growing inequality in different metropolitan contexts is visible not only within the residential composition. What is new in the discourses on inequality and segregation is the linking of these issues to the role of the education system.

The relationship between school choice strategies, education policies and social inequality is complex. The paper argues that the question of parental school choice plays a role in the creation of socio-spatial inequality. Parental choice has an influence on educational segregation because middle-class parents have more possibilities of formulating their choices than working-class parents and thus are able to ensure that their children attend better schools. In some of the schools within the case of Kreuzberg-North, the segregation at

school level nearly reached a maximum level as over 90 percent of the children attending the schools are non-German.

The paper describes three strategies of parents to ensure that their children attend the preferred primary school. First, parents move into other areas before the registration process starts. For those parents, the social problems at school lead to a decreasing attractiveness of a neighbourhood; the willingness to move into areas with “better” schools increases. This increases the level of segregation within cities and has an effect on the housing market. Second, some of the parents stay in the area of Kreuzberg-North, but try to evade the schools within the area. Third, parents use pressure to influence the composition of the classes at school.

It seems that the strategies of parents to ensure access to a certain school are similar to the ones found in the UK and Dutch context. Even in an educational system where the state is still the main actor and choice of primary school is organised by the state, parents try to evade this system. The German state on the one hand creates an egalitarian system; on the other hand, it also implements an extremely selective school system. As the Gymnasium is the school usually attended to gain access to higher education, the school system in part motivates school choice strategies of middle class parents. The German education system makes a good primary educational necessary to later succeed at the Gymnasium and to gain access to higher education.

The state itself is the main actors with the power to modify gatekeeping mechanism to high quality schooling. Changing patterns in the school system might influence the use of coping strategies of middle class families and therefore have an effect on the level of segregation.

The paper has highlighted possible links between class, educational aspirations and housing while using quantitative data. But the present research is neither able to answer questions of motivation of parents to choose a different school than the one in the catchment area. It also cannot give an answer to questions of choice formation. Additional research is necessary. For example, the majority of the authors could enhance their knowledge about school choice conducting interviews with parents. What's more, the term middle class needs to be defined more specifically for the German case. Moreover, not only ethnicity but also the socioeconomic situation might play a role in school choice mechanism. Finally, more coping strategies of parents are possible.

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