

Csaba Jancsák: Social Capital And School [review]

Pusztai Gabriella: A társadalmi tőke és az iskola – Kapcsolati erőforrások hatása az iskolai pályafutásra [Social Capital And School – The Effect of Social Capital On Educational Career]. Budapest, Új Mandátum, 2009, 271 p.

The new work of *Gabriella Pusztai* is a thoroughly elaborated issue within the field of the sociology of education, in Hungary, however, it only has been in focus since the nineties. The new book of the associate professor of the University of Debrecen and the senior collaborator of CHERD Research Institute can also be interpreted as a part of an extensive career of a researcher, the previous writing of the author can be found in various international and Hungarian periodicals and in the volume titled *Iskola és közösség* (*Pusztai, 2004*).

The book is the third in the row of the series called Education And Society nursed by Új Mandátum Publishing House. In line with the previous issues (*Ladányi, 2008; Kozma és Rébay, 2009*) the book brings a new perspective into the research of the community and value generating effects of school in today's society. The social and political changes in Central and Eastern Europe create its context in which process religious and secular schools have emerged and have become comparable, even regarding previously common educational-economic units (the counties of Hajdú-Bihar and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg in Hungary, Bihar and Szatmár in Romania and the townships of Beregszász, Munkács, Nagyszőlős and Ungvár in Ukraine).

In his work the author focuses on resources generated by social structures surrounding the individual, and how they influence youth taking part in different sectors of education. The relevance of this approach is further stressed by the statement that the studying of the reproduction of cultural capital mainly 'considered the isolated individual as the basis of research', therefore it is mostly restricted to sociodemographic characteristics and surveys of stratification explaining personal behaviour, 'this approach', however, 'neglects the role of certain social connections effecting personal decision making', though, as she describes, 'choosing a school and achieving does not only depend on the position of the student in the vertical social structure and on personal decisions, but also on the social context which can greatly influence the behaviour and attitude of the individual'. (7. p.).

The expectations and the school notion of the new millennium do not fail to strengthen the concept of the author that a deeper understanding of the pattern of social capital, not to mention its availability and marketability, is needed as a way to find an explanation. Until recently the means of schools have been very limited regarding care and nursing and youth has been socialised outside the framework of education, but as time spent in education has started to grow and adulthood been reached at a later age, while consumer society involves children as early as they start school, school has to face a wider range of responsibilities. (Husén, 2004) 'These new demands,' as she puts it, 'push the limits of school beyond the accumulation of cultural capital towards the strengthening of social capital and, furthermore, they make it clear that the accumulation of social capital is a prerequisite of the development of the cultural one.' (8. p.) The school of today is not only a place for transmitting knowledge, but also a house of services, where non- and informal educational, recreational and leisure activities occur as well. What is more, school is a communal space, where peer and intergenerational communication takes place at the same time. It is worth mentioning that, on the basis of the theory of intergenerational transfer of capital, the manifest and latent functions of school can also be considered as investments into society. The author emphasises that 'the new challenges concerning the educational system are not just about the transmission of knowledge, but also about the transmission of values, norms and patterns of behaviour' (8. p.), that is why the book puts particular emphasis on sets of values and networks of connections within school and their effects on the lives of students and further educational career. Values are extremely important for the actors of education, because they represent the first step of the set of social relations while the exchange of values do not cease to stop.

The volume has five major chapters: The World of Social Capital And Education, Canonised Resources, Hidden Resources, Who Wins Now And Then?, Summation. The clear and well-organised structure of the chapters is a good example of the soundness of the researcher. The first chapter is about the relations between social capital and education- We also get a clear picture about the formation and scientific representation of the theory of social capital and the approach focusing on connections, while the author presents the debates about the theory and the possible usefulness of the approach. Then the author shows us the complex relation between educational attainment and social capital and the wide range of variables of the system: the characteristics of political, economic and sociological approaches, relations within and outside the family (friends, teachers, classmates), extracurricular activities (sports, scientific, professional and artistic activities) and their effects on achievement. Later she focuses on the differences between institutions maintained by different bodies and compares

the different sectors of the educational system. Here she tackles several problems, such as the ontological approachability of belonging to sectors, the manifest and latent functions (defined by the founder, the maintainer or the financier) of school, how school is related to politics. She states that 'education is a sphere where which stands on the crossway public and private matters and interests, so the social space of private financing and considering education as a private matter has been closing down.' (8. p.). The paragraphs of the chapter (Religious Faith And Educational Attainment, The Differences Between Maintainers In America And Europe) cover the historical and theoretical background of the issue in order to create the framework of further interpretation, but this is true in the case of the whole text which makes it even more valuable. The author also presents the educational system of the region and defines the notion of religious school, while she has further proposals concerning this scientific segment. Later she studies the capital types of the students of the regional secondary and tertiary educational institutions and whether the difference in their attainment can be led back to sector-like effects and, if yes, how we can explain this phenomenon.

The book of *Gabriella Pusztai* is groundbreaking not just because she deals with hidden resources beside the canonised ones (connections, consent on values, religious capital), but she also focuses on the educational(political) differences of three countries (Hungary, Romania, Ukraine).

Social Capital And School is an outstanding reading not just for scientists, because it is well-prepared from a scientific point of view, but it can also address others, a wider public due to its elaborated style and different approaches. It is therefore very useful for educators and participants of teacher training.

Literature:

Husén, Th. (2004): Tanítás és/vagy tanulás. In. Kozma Tamás (szerk.): *Oktatás és társadalom*. Debrecen: Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó, 229-256

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