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Vučković Juroš, Tanja

Sveučilište u Zagrebu
Filozofski fakultet
University of Zagreb
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

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TANJA VUČKOVIĆ JUROŠ

University of Zagreb, Zagreb, Croatia

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Habitus, Emotions, and the Educational Trajectories of Disadvantaged Youth

ABSTRACT The goal of this study is to highlight the embodied nature of social class inequalities in education. Drawing from a larger study that examined educational outcomes and work careers of young people whose families received welfare benefits in Croatia when these individuals were of high school age, the article focuses on biographical narrative interviews with three young individuals. These strategically selected cases were characterized by a shared experience of living in poverty that was, nevertheless, marked by very different initial intersections of social advantages and disadvantages (middle-class fall into poverty, intergenerational poverty, and poverty intersecting with anti-Roma racism). Based on the comparison of these three life stories, this study utilizes Bourdieu's concept of habitus as a conceptual tool, incorporating both cognitive and affective schemas, to examine how these young individuals framed their lives and educational trajectories. In doing so, this study builds on the work by scholars such as Reay who extend the explorations of embodied social inequalities in education into the realm of emotions, which are—in line with the growing body of work in the sociology of emotions— understood as embedded in (unequal) social relations. Therefore, the analysis of this study focuses on how, in the three examined life stories, the horizons of probable, possible, and unimaginable were perceived very differently and shaped by distinct affective structures. The findings of this study suggest that cognitive and affective schemas function jointly, as integral elements of a social inequalities' mechanism rooted in the compounding of advantages or disadvantages.

KEYWORDS poverty, social class, education, habitus, emotions

INTRODUCTION

The 1990s transitions from socialism to liberal democracy and capitalism in Eastern Europe were characterized by deep economic and social crises, leading to a sharp rise in unemployment, poverty, and inequality—from which these countries, Croatia included, had not yet recovered when they were hit again by the 2008–9 economic crisis (Noelke & Müller, 2011). In place of the promised capitalist life of plenty, the post-socialist period led many to experience poverty for the first time, whereas those already vulnerable, such as the Roma, were often disproportionally affected by the loss of socialist safety nets (Bićanić & Franičević, 2006; Šikić-Mićanović, 2017). Similar disappointments were echoed in education. The substantial educational expansion, characterizing Croatia and other post-socialist countries, occurred hand in hand with the commercialization of higher education. This sustained and, arguably, strengthened the link between

socioeconomic background and educational outcomes, which the socialist educational project failed to eliminate (Kogan et al., 2012; Doolan et al., 2018; Ganzeboom & Nieuwbeerta, 1999). Thus, the patterns of educational inequalities in post-socialist countries converged with the patterns of older capitalist democracies (Bodovski et al., 2017; Thompson, 2019). These have been insightfully dissected by Bourdieu's analysis of cultural and social reproduction, one of the most influential theoretical frameworks on the role of class in education (Swartz, 1998; Thompson, 2019).

Analyses within a Bourdieusian framework have most extensively examined the role of cultural capital—the right kind of knowledge, competences, and preferences rewarded by the educational system and typically possessed by the middle classes—in educational inequalities (Bourdieu, 1984; Thompson, 2019; Davies & Rizk, 2018). However, the weight of class and other social inequalities is felt in more than just the possession and profitable use of material and cultural resources. Social inequalities permeate how individuals think and how they approach the world they inhabit—and they also shape how individuals feel, as positive and negative emotions are not equally socially distributed (Reay, 2005, 2015; Turner, 2010). Therefore, to highlight this embodied nature of social inequalities in education, I turn to Bourdieu's concept of habitus, formulated for exactly such a purpose.

Drawing from a larger study of young people born between the late 1980s and early 1990s, whose families received welfare benefits in Croatia during these youth's high school years in the 2000s, this article focuses on the life stories of three young individuals with the shared experience of living in poverty, but with different initial intersections of social advantages and disadvantages (middle-class fall into poverty, intergenerational poverty, and poverty intersecting with anti-Roma racism). Using Bourdieu's habitus as a conceptual tool, I examine these three stories for the perceptions of probable, possible, and impossible educational trajectories—and for the silences and emotions that accompany these estimations, and which sometimes become visible only through a comparative outlook.

EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITIES IN POST-SOCIALIST CROATIA

The association between social class background (measured by parental education and/or occupation) and educational outcomes is one the most robust findings of 50 years of Croatian educational research, covering the period of both socialism and post-socialism (Doolan et al., 2018). This immediately evokes one of the central elements of Bourdieusian analysis: that social inequalities are always situated in a larger social setting, or "field" (Bourdieu, 1984; Swartz, 1998). Though the concept of field may refer to several levels of relational social settings (from society to family), in this study I use field to refer to the characteristics of educational systems that structure educational choices and outcomes. Specifically, in the Croatian context, two features of the educational field are related to this long-standing association between social class and educational outcomes. These are horizontal stratification of the educational system (tracking) and the heavy dependence on earlier performance for access to certain tracks (cf. Thompson, 2019). Thus, after

eight years of elementary schooling, Croatian students—based on their previous academic results—enroll into one of three tracks: (1) selective four-year grammar schools intended for continuation into higher education; (2) four-year vocational (VET) schools that provide both professional qualifications and access to higher education; or (3) three-year VET schools that do not enable access to higher education (Matković, 2011). Switching tracks is not easy. For example, despite the increasing numbers of four-year VET students aspiring to higher education, they transition to tertiary education at lower rates than grammar school students (Baketa et al., 2020). Likewise, although there are mechanisms in place that allow three-year VET students access to higher education, these are rarely utilized and problematic (Matković et al., 2013). While this system purportedly operates on academic merit and different interests regarding the labor market, it is a notable pattern that students from disadvantaged backgrounds mostly end up on a vocational track or in less prestigious schools (Doolan et al., 2018).

In attempting to explain similar associations between social background and educational outcomes, numerous international studies have followed Bourdieu in showing how, in the educational field, which functions under the presumption of meritocracy, economic capital can be transformed into cultural capital, which is then associated with successful educational outcomes (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014; Lareau & Weininger, 2003). Although similar studies are not widely available in the post-socialist context, the evidence from Croatia and several other post-socialist countries suggests that cultural capital has an independent effect on educational outcomes and it also mediates the association between social background and educational outcomes (Puzić et al., 2016; Bodovski et al., 2017). Although these insights are valuable, they capture only a fraction of the deep influence of social inequalities, which I aim to highlight by the third building block of Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction, habitus, which operates jointly with (economic, cultural, and social) capital in the educational field (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984; Swartz, 1998; Reay, 2004).[1]

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Habitus as a Conceptual Tool for Studying Educational Inequalities

Habitus refers to the internalized dispositions shaped by the formative influences of (group) conditions experienced early on in life that, in turn, shape individuals' aspirations and expectations and thus, ultimately, their practices (Bourdieu, 1977; Swartz, 1998). With habitus, Bourdieu attempted to capture the pervasive, embodied nature of social inequalities that get inscribed into body schemas (bodily postures and stances, ways of

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1. Though its embodied nature sometimes makes habitus difficult to differentiate from the embodied dimension of cultural capital (internalized dispositions manifested in taste, participation in cultural activities, linguistic competences, etc.), in this study I follow Edgerton and Roberts (2014), who argue that it is heuristically useful to distinguish between the two. Specifically, "to say someone has cultural capital in a particular field is to say they have dispositions to think and act . . . in ways advantageous . . . to their position or trajectory in that field" (p. 208). In contrast, the dispositions of habitus may or may not actualize in cultural capital, that is, the type of competences or aspirations rewarded by the (educational) system.

speaking) and cognitive schemas—including the estimations of what is probable, possible, or unimaginable for others "like them" in that particular field, based on one's possession of different forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1977; Swartz, 1998).

The concept of habitus has been criticized for being too deterministic and for not accounting sufficiently for the disjunctures between opportunities and aspirations (Swartz, 1998; Thompson, 2019). In addition, habitus is notoriously difficult to capture empirically. In rare educational quantitative studies of habitus, in the US context, it has mostly been operationalized as students' occupational aspirations or educational expectations, or as parents' attitudes about their children's schooling or educational expectations for their children (Dumais, 2002, 2006; Roksa & Robinson, 2016). Qualitative studies have attempted to capture the intangibility of habitus in more diverse ways: in the UK context, these analyses ranged from observing how middle-class and working-class children approach tidying up in schools to examining life histories of university graduates for their evaluations of a university degree and attitudes toward the job market (Reay, 1995; Costa et al., 2019). In the post-socialist context as well, empirical studies of habitus in education remain rare.[2] An exception of sorts is a study by Doolan, Lukić, and Buković (2016) on class in the Croatian VET system, where the concept of habitus is refocused from individuals to school practices in order to capture the workings of "institutional habitus."

The elusiveness of the concept notwithstanding, I follow Reay in approaching habitus as a conceptual tool whose primary value lies less in defining exactly what it means, but more in the focus on the collective burdens that it brings to the analysis of empirical data (Reay, 1995, 2004). By highlighting how the individual perspectives of what is probable, possible, or unimaginable can be weighed down by social class inequalities, habitus functions as a corrective against interpreting individual aspirations and expectations solely as personal traits that can be "blamed" for the lack of educational success. At the same time, habitus is neither fixed nor unified, which creates space for agency (Silva, 2016). Thus, individuals can have a "split" habitus and they can transform their dispositions by shifting their perceptions and adapting their practices to changing circumstances or to moments of crisis, whether societal (e.g., social transformations) or biographical (e.g., new perspectives accessed through schooling) (Bourdieu, 1977; Swartz, 1998; Reay, 2004; Wacquant, 2016).

Affective Dimension of Habitus and the Social Stratification of Emotions

Developing further the use of habitus as a conceptual tool, authors such as Reay have also highlighted another, less frequently examined, dimension of habitus: its affective dimension. While the common definition of habitus, presented at the beginning of the section,

2. For example, a search of the Central and Eastern European Online Library (www.ceeol.com), in May 2021, identified 14 results with the keyword "habitus" and subject "Education," and 40 results with the keyword "habitus" and a more expansive subject, "Social Sciences." Neither of these articles is an empirical study attempting to capture students' habitus to examine educational trajectories or outcomes, though two articles (one in Lithuanian on social experiences of adolescents with mobility disabilities and the other in Polish on habitus and creativity of students) seem to be somewhat, though not directly, related to this topic.

accounts for the body and cognitive schemas, emotions are another schema inscribed by social inequalities, present though less developed in Bourdieu's work (Reay, 2005, 2015). However, this element was picked up by other researchers, especially concerning the working-class experience in education: from the presumption of failure and the associated feelings of worthlessness to feelings of uncertainty or not belonging to a university environment (Reay, 2001, 2005; Lehmann, 2007; Tarabini & Curran, 2018). Though these patterns seem similar across UK, Canadian, and Spanish contexts of existing research, the affective dimension of habitus still seems under the radar of researchers in post-socialist contexts, even though some other elements of emotions and class within Bourdieusian framework are, for example, notably picked up by Daniel (2022), who, in this issue, analyzes classed feelings of disgust targeting musical taste of certain fractions of the Czech working classes.

On a more general level, the body of work on emotions and class can also be related to the growing sociological interest in the embeddedness of emotions in social relations, especially in the work examining the associations between emotions and structural conditions (Bericat, 2016; Olson et al., 2017). In this area, the affective dimension of habitus is particularly compatible with Turner's theory of the stratification of emotions, specifically his examination of positive (e.g., satisfaction) and negative (e.g., fear, anger, disappointment) emotions as resources that are both unequally distributed across social classes and that structure the degree of access to other socially valuable resources (Turner, 2010). Building on these developments, in this study I approach habitus by integrating both its cognitive (perceptions of probable, possible, and impossible) and affective dimensions (emotions accompanying these and related evaluations).

METHODOLOGY

Data and Cases

This article draws on material from a larger project (OBRIRK, 2015–16) that examined the educational outcomes and work careers of young people (19–29 years old) whose families received welfare benefits in Croatia for at least three years when these individuals were between 14 and 18 years old (high school age). The young people were selected using three-stage cluster sampling: probability-proportional-to-size (PPS) sampling of social welfare centers (SWCs; 40 selected out of 113), PPS sampling of eligible families within 26 SWCs that responded to the call for participation, and the selection of all eligible children ($N = 1{,}197$) within these families (for more details on sampling, see Ogresta et al. [2016] and Ružojčić et al. [2018]). The data were collected from three sources: the SWC documentation on families of selected young people, a quantitative survey[3] of reachable young people willing to participate ($N = 193$), and biographical narrative interviews with a subset of 14 survey participants selected strategically based on their

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3. The questionnaire included questions on individuals' sociodemographic characteristics and their behavior in general, in elementary school, in high school, as well as questions about circumstances of their growing up, the relationship with parents/caretakers during this period, their higher education (if applicable), work career, work and/or unemployment experiences, and current life situation.

educational and labor market outcomes. Specifically, the research team targeted primarily (1) young people with no higher education, who were still in the welfare benefits system or with income satisfying living-in-poverty criteria; and (2) young people with higher education who were employed with permanent work contracts or with higher-than-average incomes (later expanded to also include undergraduate students). These two groups were also joined by "atypical" individuals (e.g., highly educated individuals still in the welfare benefits system). For the present analysis, I further selected three cases on the extreme ends of these outcomes: one with a university degree and a permanent work contract at the time of the recruitment, and two with no more than a high school degree and still in the system of welfare benefits (one of them a member of the Roma community).

An in-depth analysis of three strategically selected cases allows fleshing out the patterns identified in the quantitative segment of the OBRIRK study. The latter, most notably, indicates lower educational achievements of young people growing up in poverty compared to their peers, and low educational and cultural capital levels of their parents/caretakers, with cultural capital likewise transmitted poorly (Ogresta et al., 2016). Roma children, furthermore, disproportionately experienced educational difficulties (Ružojčić et al., 2018). At the same time, however, many dimensions of cultural capital, as typically operationalized, did not have a significant effect on the chances of these young people entering higher education, although social class did play a role, both directly and indirectly (Vučković Juroš & Ogresta, 2017).

In light of these patterns, the selected cases are particularly interesting because they also offer an illuminating variety of family histories (middle-class fall into poverty, intergenerational poverty, poverty intersecting with anti-Roma racism) combined with different educational outcomes. Therefore, while these three individuals shared an experience of living in poverty, this situation was entered from different initial positions ranging from (1) a family of highly educated parents suddenly facing unemployment, through (2) a family of lower-educated parents and a long history of poverty, to (3) a Roma family whose deep poverty and low educational levels are closely linked with systemic racism and educational exclusion.[4]

Interviews and Data Analysis

Young people in this study were interviewed using the biographic-narrative interpretive method (BNIM) (Wengraf, 2001). This lightly structured method of interviewing consists of two sessions separated by a short break. The first session starts with a single narrative-inducing question that participants answer freely, without any interruptions or additional questions. In this study, which was introduced as a study on the lives of young people growing up in diverse life circumstances, the participants were asked to tell the story of their life, since they started school until today. Such an approach allowed participants to take greater control over their story, emphasizing the elements they found

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4. The long-term social and educational exclusion of Roma minority in Croatia is well documented. See, for example, Ured za ljudska prava i prava nacionalnih manjina RH (2012) and Potočnik et al. (2014).

most important. In the second session, the interviewer returns to the narrative of the first session and starts asking questions about it. The interviewers were instructed to follow up on these topics: educational expectations and aspirations and reported changes; influences, opportunities, and obstacles during schooling (experiences, events, people); and key turning points / important decisions. Still, in asking questions, the interviewers also had to follow the main BNIM principles: strictly respecting the order of topics as narrated in the first session, formulating questions using the participants' verbatim words, and following up on the elements indicated by the participants as personally important, even if not visibly related to the research questions (Wengraf, 2001). The interviews lasted from 35 minutes to two hours, most typically between an hour and an hour and a half.

The interviews were conducted by two interviewers trained by the author, audiotaped and transcribed verbatim.[5] All the participants indicated their interest in the interviews in the earlier survey and were consequently provided with the information required for informed consent. While the core research team could link all the available sources of data (SWC documentation and survey questionnaire) to the interview participant through an identifying code, this information was kept confidential and anonymized during the analysis. All the participants were offered a financial incentive for participation in the interviews. The project followed ethical guidelines for working with vulnerable groups and was approved by the ethics committee at the research team's institution. The names used in this study are pseudonyms and, when the specifics (e.g., precise age or biographical details) are not necessary for the understanding of patterns, I present the participants' data so as to preserve their confidentiality (e.g., age is presented approximately and some biographical details omitted).

The present analysis is based on the selected cases' life stories—the narrative summaries that consist of chronologically organized interview material, complemented by additional information available from the SWC documentation and the survey questionnaire. The SWC documentation added more on family background to the interview narratives, and the questionnaire provided systematic information about participants' educational transitions and outcomes and also some relevant attitudinal measures (e.g., motivation for attending high school). Nonetheless, the analysis rests most heavily on the life stories narrated in the interviews that provide an invaluable contextual understanding of all the available data. Specifically, these life stories provide a glance into the complexities of educational aspirations and expectations that are not easily, or at all, available from the SWC documentation and the survey data, even though these other sources of data are useful for identifying general patterns.

The three cases selected for deeper comparison in this study cannot be considered representative of the disadvantaged youth in this study, nor does this study claim probability-based generalizability to this population in Croatia. Nevertheless, these cases were selected for their potential to contribute to a better understanding of theoretically important patterns (theoretical generalizability) (Gobo, 2008). Therefore, as it is the

5. The interview quotes presented in this article were translated from Croatian to English by the author.

practice of biographical research, I use what is highlighted by the specific to think about the general (Wengraf, 2000). The comparison of these three cases, specifically, is illuminative of the different ways in which the disadvantages of class and social inequalities work in the educational system.

THREE STORIES OF DISADVANTAGED YOUTH

In this section, I present the life stories of three young people who all share the experience of living in poverty during their growing up in Croatia in the 2000s, but who differ in their family backgrounds (some shared elements notwithstanding) and educational trajectories. In the comparison of these life stories, I highlight how these young individuals framed their lives and educational trajectories and how their horizons of probable, possible, and unimaginable were perceived very differently and shaped by distinct affective structures.

The Story of Lucija: A Case of Middle-Class Fall into Poverty

Lucija was born in the late 1980s, as one of four children of parents who both have higher education degrees. Her family, living in an urban environment, was initially doing well financially in the 1990s, although only the father worked; the mother chose to stay at home caring for the children. However, family circumstances were radically transformed after Lucija's father lost his well-paid IT job in the mid-2000s, when his firm's new foreign owners laid off everyone over 50. At first, the poverty was staved off by selling the property Lucija's parents had inherited. Still, neither the father, now part of the hard-to-employ category of older workers, nor the mother with hardly any labor-market experience, could find another job, and the family entered the social welfare system. Situated in the broader context of Croatia's post-socialist period, Lucija's family story testifies to the delayed effect of polarization into "winners" and "losers" that emerged with the 1990s transition to a market economy in Eastern Europe (Bićanić & Franičević, 2006). While initially avoiding the fate of "losers," Lucija's family experienced the consequences of demolished safety nets as soon as they became part of the "vulnerable" category. In these circumstances, not even the cushion of inherited property prevented them from slipping into poverty.

   At the time when Lucija's family entered the social welfare system, Lucija was completing four-year grammar schooling and transitioning into higher education. As an excellent student, Lucija was supported by a scholarship already in high school. She then successfully obtained a tuition-free place at a prestigious and highly competitive academic university program. Nevertheless, to finance her living and other expenses, Lucija worked alongside her studies. Some of her study jobs were casual, but some were also related to her profession and, with this experience and the successful completion of her university degree, Lucija was able to find a job immediately after graduation. At that point, she moved away from her parents and continued to live independently. At the time of the interview, Lucija—then in her late 20s—had recently quit her job to migrate abroad in the pursuit of better life chances.

The Story of Martina: A Case of Intergenerational Poverty

Martina was born in the early 1990s in a family of six children living in a rural environment. Both Martina's parents completed only elementary schooling, and the father left the labor market because of a disability during her childhood. The family qualified for social welfare benefits in the late 2000s, when Martina's mother, then around 50 years of age, was registered as unemployed. However, the family was living in poverty even before that period, surviving—with six children—on the father's disability pension, child benefits, and the mother's low-paying work since at least the mid-1990s. This situates Martina's family into the vulnerable category of people living in long-term poverty that started to inflate in Croatia following the drastic jump in poverty rates after 1990; the members of this category were typically characterized by lower education, labor-market inactivity, older age, and more children in a family (Malenica, 2011).

At the time when Martina's family entered the welfare benefits system, Martina was attending a three-year VET high school, which she successfully completed. She then transferred to another school to finish the fourth year and gain access to university. However, she never took the state graduation exam (*matura*) required for university enrollment. Martina had never been formally employed, although she occasionally took on odd jobs cleaning or helping out people in her village. At the time of the interview, in her early 20s, Martina was still living in her parents' household and remained in the social welfare system.

The Story of Jasmin: A Case of Poverty Intersecting with Anti-Roma Racism

Jasmin was born in the early 1990s to a Roma family of five children, living in a segregated Roma settlement in a rural environment. Jasmin's father has elementary education, and his mother has not completed elementary school. The family was also already living in poverty when they qualified for social welfare benefits after Jasmin's father, a construction worker then in his mid-30s, lost his job in the mid-2000s. Jasmin's parents belong to a younger generation than both Lucija's and Martina's parents. Still, Jasmin's father remained formally unemployed, and with the mother also out of the labor market, Jasmin's family, like Martina's, can be situated into the category of people living in long-term poverty. This is the category in which the Roma people are disproportionally represented, especially after the loss of many social advantages accessible during the socialist period (Šikić-Mićanović, 2017).

At the time when Jasmin's family entered the social welfare system, Jasmin was still attending the second level ("upper classes") of elementary school, after which he enrolled in a three-year VET school. Jasmin repeated the first grade of his VET school due to many absences, but then, with the help of the school counselor and a representative of the Roma community, he was able to obtain a scholarship. After that, Jasmin started studying harder and getting good grades, and he successfully completed high school. Following high school, Jasmin worked in construction for a while, including a job he quit because the salary was too low, and a job that was better paid but where the employer did not register his employment nor pay his social security contributions. Since then, he has been unemployed and has found it difficult to find a job because of anti-Roma discrimination.

Jasmin also married soon after completing high school and moved away from his parents' household. After that, he was living with an unemployed wife and two young children; they remained in the social welfare system. At the time of the interview, Jasmin—then in his early 20s—was pursuing a requalification opportunity, and was also considering emigrating in the hope that, as a Roma, he might more easily find a job abroad.

THREE STORIES IN COMPARISON

Framing Life Stories and Educational Trajectories: Pride, Shame, and Fear

At the very beginning of their narratives, Lucija, Martina, and Jasmin—responding to the same question about the story of their life, since they started school until today—already provided different interpretive frameworks of their lives. They immediately introduced themes—and emotions—that would continue to appear throughout their interviews.

Lucija started her narrative with her extraordinary academic achievement, visible at the very beginning of elementary school:

> Actually, I knew a lot already, when I started school. I mean, writing, reading, calculating, all, more or less. And I was, like, quite advanced. Actually, I have always been, like, the best student, ever since I started school. I never had any problems. I was good at everything.

This academic achievement was a source of pride that built the foundations for Lucija's self-identification as a competent and smart person. As I will show later, it also served as a source of Lucija's agency in overcoming the economic hardship she faced at university.

In contrast, Marina did not start her story with her education, but rather with the context of her childhood: "I was growing up in poverty." For her, the school starting age evoked most strongly the self-identification with poverty related to the first realization that they were a poor family, living in a dilapidated house, receiving donations and essentials from other people—and the negative emotions associated with these difficult circumstances: a feeling of shame that other children had to share their food with her in elementary school or that the teacher had to give her the textbooks, as well as anger at her parents and life in general. The feeling of shame was further extended to her early academic outcomes (average C grade), as she identified as not a good student, and poignantly noted: "I have always thought that, if I am poor, I'm also supposed to study poorly." When Martina exercised her agency and worked to transform her educational dispositions and expectations at the end of elementary school and in high school, she had to struggle against this negative affective structure.

Therefore, while the pride associated with Lucija's academic achievement, which was sustained from her earliest life, empowered Lucija in overcoming challenges she experienced later, for Martina these early negative emotions served as another obstacle she had to overcome. These patterns are similar to those observed by Reay (2001) in her examination of UK working-class youth whose educational trajectories were predicated upon the expectation of academic failure which, subsequently, became internalized as low self-worth. Conversely, for middle-class youth, academic success was expected routinely and

interpreted as an indicator of cleverness and potential (Lucey & Reay, 2002). In the Croatian educational field, such class-based expectations are even more strongly institutionalized, with different levels of expected academic ability accorded to different tracks of secondary schooling. Middle-class children are more frequently expected to be academically able and thus continue to the university-track grammar schools. In contrast, working-class students—with the exception of those who choose VET because they are coming from families in crafts—are expected to end up in VET schools by default, as such schools, particularly three-year ones, are not as selective as grammar schools (Doolan et al., 2016).

However, the playing field shaping educational trajectories and choices is certainly not equal, neither in the UK nor in Croatia. Without diminishing Lucija's achievements, her story also reveals early access to both economic and cultural capital. In addition to starting elementary school with some basic skills already acquired, which signals an early investment in Lucija's academic success, Lucija also benefited from other opportunities building up children's academic skills—and cultural capital. These were available to her through attendance of music school, participation in diverse extracurricular activities, and taking part in school academic competitions. None of this was identifiable in Martina's story, nor Jasmin's. Admittedly, not all these activities necessarily required economic capital for participation, and some were also likely more available to Lucija because, unlike Martina and Jasmin, she was growing up in an urban environment. Nonetheless, that such activities were not equally accessible to Martina nor Jasmin is also at least partly due to them growing up in a more challenging context of early schooling.

These early circumstances were, arguably, even harsher in Jasmin's case than Martina's, as he was growing up in a deeply marginalized Roma community. In light of this, a notable silence of Jasmin's narrative was the lack of identification with poverty comparable to the one expressed by Martina. Instead, Jasmin's opening immediately added the dimension of anti-Roma racism to his educational narrative, where the fear of expected discrimination underlined all other considerations. All Jasmin's experiences, including educational ones, were evaluated against the measure of how much he was accepted.

> Well, the elementary started, like, really well. I didn't have any difficulties, and so. Grades, like, C and so, I passed each grade. I got along well with others, and so. I was accepted well in school, and teachers. . . . I had good friends there.

In this context, where the most critical aspect of Jasmin's early schooling was whether or not the teachers and other students had an issue with him being a member of the Roma community, the criterion of academic success was not repeating a grade, and the average C grade in elementary school was framed as a good educational outcome. Living in poverty, although undoubtedly part of Jasmin's life (and visible from the SWC documentation and the survey), was so taken for granted that it almost did not register when routinely appearing in Jasmin's narrative in the form of background facts to the stories that displayed his constant acts of agency to overcome obstacles defining his schooling experience: from continually walking to school through rain and snow as there was no public transport

connecting his isolated Roma settlement, to going to friends' houses when he needed access to a computer or Internet for schoolwork. Nonetheless, it is a telling indicator of a limited horizon of possibilities defined by these structural limits that Jasmin's bar of early academic success was set so much lower than Martina's. As I show in the next section, this limited horizon of possibilities becomes even more visible later, betraying the double weight of poverty and anti-Roma racism shaping Jasmin's story.

Horizons of Probable, Possible, and Unimaginable: Self-Assurance, Uncertainty, and Disappointment

For Lucija, an excellent student from day one, and a child of two highly educated parents who were evaluated as supportive with clear expectations of good grades, the grammar high school and the subsequent university trajectory were not only probable but assumed futures as well. Not only Lucija, but all three of her siblings went to university. When Lucija was planning her future, at the end of her elementary schooling, the imagined future was hard to specify only because it was full of possibilities. There was no doubt that she would go to university, even if she was not certain about what to expect from a prestigious program to which she aspired.

> Yes, it was very difficult for me, in the seventh grade, when I was thinking about what I wanted to be in life (laughter). This troubled me a lot, and I kept changing my interests because, as a rule, I was okay at everything—and languages, and maths, and I don't know what. And then I had some big plans for the future. . . . I enrolled into [the study program of] architecture, and this is, like, what I knew since the elementary school that I wanted to enroll. This was actually, like, when I started uni, I didn't—I didn't know what's in front of me. I actually didn't have a clue, and it took me some time to figure out what, what I'm studying (laughter). But everything turned out good in the end.

Poverty was never a part of Lucija's self-identification, and she was effortlessly self-assured about her belonging in a higher education context—one in which she was following her parents before her. Therefore, despite diminished family circumstances, which meant that she had to work while studying, it was easier for Lucija to see such challenges not as insurmountable obstacles, but as temporary setbacks on her university path. As such, through her agency, they could also be turned into opportunities.

> And I had to work because my folks didn't work then. Then I worked in a bookstore. . . . I think I was the only one who had to work at the first year of uni, because that was really very exhausting. . . . Actually, this turned out to be somehow good for me, because I didn't want to ask them for money, so I always had to do something on the side. So, essentially, I started to work in my profession very early, what was actually great, and helped me a lot in life, because later I never had any trouble finding work . . . this is a small circle of people and everybody knows everybody and so on, so essentially, I always had good recommendations. And, I don't know, when people, during the crisis, when everybody was looking for work, I didn't have any problems because, I don't know, I have worked since the beginning with various people so they knew me and could recommend me.

In contrast, Martina started her educational trajectory with lower-educated parents who provided no academic support and did not expect Martina to have good grades, but only to behave well in school. Moreover, supporting Turner's observation (2010) that a negative affective structure is also transmitted intergenerationally in families experiencing persistently limited material, cultural, and social resources, Martina identified her father as instrumental in undermining her self-confidence and discouraging her from an academic path.

> Father . . . has always undermined my self-confidence. Because something bad happened to him and then he talked like this the whole time. . . . He said, like, because we were poor and so . . . then when I wanted to go to school, he said "Don't go." . . . And some [siblings] didn't listen to him. . . . Only me and my sister listened to him. And later I realized that I don't have to listen.

Only after this personal moment of revelation did Martina reorient herself toward school, so in the seventh grade of elementary school she realized she did not have to study poorly because she was poor and "then everything started to interest me more . . . and all subjects . . . only I was bad at maths. Only this, I barely passed this, but everything else, I raised my grades."

Therefore, at the period when Lucija was imagining a grand future, Martina was struggling to overcome the unsupportive family context of her schooling that, despite these academic improvements, still filled her with uncertainty and fear of failure. These academic improvements at such a late point in her schooling were also not sufficient to get her accepted into the four-year VET school of choice, so she enrolled into a three-year one, continuing to feel uncertain about her capabilities. For example, in the survey, Martina identified that one of the main reasons for attending high school was to prove to herself that she was intelligent and that she could finish it.

Nonetheless, the success Martina then experienced as an A student during her secondary vocational schooling was what, for the first time in the interview, evoked a sense of personal accomplishment and pride. Building on this new confidence, Martina started thinking about going to university and studying languages as a new possible trajectory. Therefore, after completing the three-year VET school, Martina utilized the available opportunities ("I was also helped in this. . . . I couldn't pay myself for everything") to enroll into the fourth year of VET giving her access to university. As already indicated, this is not a well-known or a frequently utilized option, which again suggests Martina's agency in attempting to transform the educational path on which she started earlier. However, when faced with the idea of requirements she thought she could not possibly fulfill, and the necessity of working alongside studying, Martina gave up on these plans.

> It was too much, no, I couldn't . . . it was too much, I don't know if I would be able to pass anyway, I would have had to work at the same time, and all this together. I gave up, this is what a neighbor said, "Don't be surprised when you see big books." . . . I applied for the state graduation exam . . . and I studied Croatian and English . . . but then, I thought that I couldn't pass and then I gave up. I certainly would not have passed maths, and also, when they see my grades, one needs grades from high school and

I think, mine were good, but this was a vocational commerce school, and they would certainly rather want somebody from a bigger school. . . . I don't think I would have gotten in.

This strong suspicion of not belonging truly to a higher education environment and the fear that the obstacles were unsurmountable identified in Martina's narrative echoes stories of uncertainty, the feeling of not belonging, and the fear of (expected) failure identified among working-class students in higher education, both those who remained and those who dropped out of university in the end (Reay, 2001, 2005; Lehmann, 2007). But, as Martina's story suggests, some also self-selected out of the attempt, as Martina did, despite their aspirations. Furthermore, there are also those, like Jasmin, for whom deviations from a certain path have always been unimaginable.

Jasmin's story is particularly illuminative in this respect, as many of its elements indicate constant attempts to overcome difficult circumstances, by his actions and by the support of his parents and some other important figures on his educational path. Nonetheless, these attempts were both limited in their reach and disappointing in the end. Although Jasmin started elementary school with the expectation that, for "others like him," repeating a grade was a probability, his story also indicated a positive orientation toward learning, one that was—unlike Martina's case—supported by his parents. Though with little formal education, Jasmin's parents were reported to have been very involved in his schooling, regularly helping with schoolwork and communicating with teachers, and expecting both good grades and good behavior in school. Jasmin's father, in particular, was seen as a source of strong support, always pushing Jasmin to study harder and trying to help him—though, as his father's skills were practical and not academic, Jasmin could benefit from his help only when already in the VET high school. Therefore, despite parental support and a positive orientation toward schooling, similar to the one Lucija received from her highly educated parents, Jasmin's parents were distinctly limited in both the material and the cultural resources they could provide to Jasmin. Consequently, the expectations of Jasmin's parents did not go beyond a vocational track. Within these limits, however, they were committed to Jasmin's success in school, as seen from his father's instrumental role in encouraging Jasmin to return to his three-year VET school, when he was at risk of dropping out at the end of the first year, due to truancy.

When something had to be done, he always taught me, how to obtain knowledge, and so . . . and he always pushed me to study, study, study, and to learn something, to know. . . . When I failed a grade, I lost the will to go to school and everything. He says: "You have to start again. I know you can do it and you will finish it. I will help you." And so, with his help, I enrolled into school again, so I completed it again. . . . I didn't know, he would say: "Come, watch, learn and you will know." . . . And I learned and now I really know what he does. Maybe even better than him . . . in the construction work.

After he returned to school, Jasmin also learned, from a representative of the Roma minority visiting the school, that he could apply for a scholarship. With the help of the representative and the school counselor, Jasmin then successfully obtained that

scholarship. After that, Jasmin recalled studying hard in high school, not to lose the scholarship, but he also felt proud and accomplished with his consequent successes—he completed high school as a B student, with excellent grades in all his vocational/practical courses.

Still, the possibility of another path was never on the horizon of the imaginable in Jasmin's narrative, not when recounting the period of elementary school in which Lucija was imagining her grand future, nor during high school when he, like Martina, was feeling accomplished in a way he did not before. Whereas Martina, for a short time, aspired to affect a change in her life through higher education and then gave up on this as unrealistic for someone in her circumstances, Jasmin never verbalized this possibility, setting his bar of success lower—using the vocational qualifications he acquired to find a job that would provide his family with a good living. Disappointed in this ("It's real difficult because, it says 'Roma' right there in my papers, when they see that, it's immediately . . . there is no chance of getting something here today. It doesn't matter if they see the school, it matters nothing."), Jasmin was left attempting to affect a change in his life in another way, pursuing both a requalification and the possibility of migration—again, displaying his agency in struggling against the double burden of poverty intersecting with anti-Roma racism.

Summary

Lucija's story represents a case of a middle-class fall into poverty. Her early life was characterized by higher levels of economic and cultural capital, and an educational trajectory marked by early and sustained high academic achievement. This was the source of pride and a sense of self-assurance that empowered Lucija's agency when faced with the challenging circumstances of her later life, so as not to be derailed from the university trajectory to which she aspired and which she implicitly expected since elementary school.

Martina's story, on the other hand, represents a case of intergenerational poverty. The extreme lack of economic and cultural resources deeply influenced Martina's educational trajectory, not only by making it more difficult to navigate the educational system but also by creating additional obstacles and challenges. These included the negative affective structure of self-identification with poverty, the associated feelings of shame, and the internalized expectation of academic failure. Though Martina, later in her schooling, actively resisted these expectations, reshaped her educational aspirations, and actively engaged in changing her educational path, she remained uncertain about her capabilities and belonging on a university trajectory. This ultimately led Martina to estimate that her goals were not realistically possible and to withdraw from further educational attempts.

In contrast, Jasmin, whose life story was characterized by the double burden of intergenerational poverty and anti-Roma racism, never stopped working to overcome his difficult circumstances, empowered in these attempts by both parental support and other resources he accessed later in his schooling. Still, from the very beginning of elementary school, Jasmin's horizon of imaginable was more limited than both Lucija's and Martina's, as it was shaped by the fear of discrimination deeply pervading his educational trajectory, and followed by the disappointment in his vocational

qualifications' aspirations that, though successfully achieved, did not help him challenge anti-Roma racism in the labor market.

DISCUSSION

When analyzed along the cognitive dimension of habitus, the patterns outlined above are similar to those found in other studies, both those using habitus as a conceptual tool and those who did not necessarily engage with the concept but focused on individual educational aspirations or expectations. Such studies have, for example, demonstrated that students from different class backgrounds make different (unconscious) evaluations of their life chances and risks in pursuing higher education (Grant, 2017). In the present study as well, Lucija's, Martina's, and Jasmin's stories reflect different evaluations of possible and probable educational trajectories in relation to one's circumstances and perceived capabilities, where the latter is also a judgment not unrelated to social background, as some studies on class in education have suggested (Reay, 2001; Lucey & Reay, 2002). Therefore, these young people's estimations of what is probable and possible vs. what is unimaginable or just unrealistic cannot be separated from the social inequalities shaping their early lives—from class differences that become most visible in the comparison of Lucija's and particularly Martina's story, to the intersections of poverty with ethnic inequalities that Jasmin's story highlights.

For those from middle-class backgrounds, such as Lucija, expectations constructed out of comparisons with "others like them" are typically well aligned with the personal aspirations encouraged by parents and further reinforced by early academic achievement, where the latter is partly related to receiving greater support in navigating the educational system. Such an alignment of expectations and aspirations more easily results in what Grant (2017), following Webb, calls "sound hope"—an orientation toward a future higher education that is expressed through specific and concrete goals that are, above all, plausibly achievable. Therefore, Lucija's habitus, shaped in a home with middle-class (higher) cultural capital, proved to be an advantage counteracting her highly educated parents' later economic disadvantage. In contrast, for the youth lacking such middle-class initial advantages, such as Martina and Jasmin, the educational expectations and aspirations are more frequently at odds. Their hope can never be "sound" with little uncertainty and high plausibility, but only "resolute"—persisting through individual agency despite challenges and perceived greater risks (Grant, 2017)—or it can be disappointed or abandoned, such as in Martina's case. Moreover, as Jasmin's case vividly demonstrates, certain types of educational aspirations can be perceived as so unimaginable that hope for a better life is never seen as achievable through them, despite otherwise agentic action to change one's expected path. This case, then, further calls attention to the necessity of utilizing an intersectional approach in Bourdieusian analyses of inequalities in education since social class does not function in isolation from other social differentiations, from gender structures to ethnic and racial structures, as authors such as Reay (2004) and Lareau (2003) have clearly pointed out.

However, it is difficult to fully explore the power of these cognitive schemas without examining them together with the emotions they evoke or which support them. In other words, as elaborated by Reay, adding an affective dimension to these explorations of embodied social inequalities highlights how emotions can play a crucial role in sustaining certain dispositions, but also in shifting them, as strong emotions and internal conflicts are what often drives divided or shifting habitus (Reay, 2015). This powerful integration of emotions with cognitive schemas, which then jointly shape practices, is seen from the patterns observed in this study as well. Pride and self-assurance, shaped early in Lucija's schooling, thus played an important role in sustaining broad horizons of what is possible and in empowering Lucija's agency at university. Conversely, an equally powerful but constraining role was played by negative emotions such as self-doubt and the fear of failure that crucially contributed to Martina giving up on her attempt at university. Likewise, any examination of Jasmin's story that does not consider how the expectation and the fear of discrimination underlined Jasmin's evaluations of his possible paths will necessarily be incomplete. Finally, these patterns also support Turner's (2010) theory of stratification of emotions that conceptualizes affective structures as equally central for the dynamics of social inequalities as other structures, since "just like all resources distributed by institutional domains, emotions have this tendency to compound their effects: positive emotions provide the energy to gather resources in many domains, whereas negative emotions in one domain will often work against securing resources in others" (p. 175). In other words, a positive affective structure was another advantage that encouraged Lucija on her educational trajectory, and a negative affective structure was another disadvantage on Martina's and Jasmin's paths.

In the present analysis, I focused primarily on cognitive and emotional dimensions of habitus. Therefore, I mentioned but I did not analyze in depth other factors that shape educational practices and choices, in a dialectical relationship with habitus. This includes not only economic and cultural capital,[6] but also educational and broader societal fields into which both habitus and capitals must be situated (Bourdieu, 1984; Swartz, 1998). Despite being temporarily bracketed, these elements are identifiable at every step of the analysis. The Croatian educational field's reinforcement of social class differences, for example, is reflected in its inflexible tracking system that operates under the presumption of meritocratic evaluation of academic success. This shifts responsibility for educational trajectories onto individual students and their families—which puts students like Martina and Jasmin at distinct disadvantage, their ability or motivation notwithstanding. Even those few measures that are in place to address the consequences of a tracking system continue to ignore structural differences and thus reinforce them further. This is vividly illustrated by in-school preparation courses for the state graduation exams (*matura*). While these courses are intended to help VET students close the gap with grammar school students when applying for universities, they are in practice often used by grammar school students too, to sharpen their advantage (Baketa et al., 2020). Finally,

6. And social capital as well, although my data did not allow me to address this aspect.

though such a stratified educational system was inherited from the socialist period, with the only comprehensive structural change being the commercialization of higher education, socialist safety nets accompanying such a system did not survive to the same degree (Kogan et al., 2012; Doolan et al., 2018). In light of growing post-socialist vulnerabilities of many families like Lucija's, Martina's, and Jasmin's, who found themselves insufficiently supported in times of need, this likely means that the association between educational outcomes and social differentiations, such as those based on class and ethnic inequalities, will only continue to strengthen. In order to truly engage with educational inequalities, therefore, educational policy must start with structural changes of the field. These changes must serve, primarily, to systematically diminish the power of the initial (and then growing) differences between children, from providing in-school resources addressing educational, but also material and emotional, needs of children who lack the privilege of (knowledgeable) parental support, to delaying formal evaluations of children's academic abilities as much as possible and dismantling the current track system.

CONCLUSION

In this study, I examined the educational trajectories of three young people who shared the experience of growing up in poverty in Croatia—that is, whose families belonged to an impoverished underclass—but whose life stories were, nevertheless, critically shaped by nuances in their life circumstances. The goal of this article was to highlight how social class inequalities can be embodied, and how such embodied inequalities can be both reproduced and resisted. Therefore, using Bourdieu's notion of habitus as a conceptual tool incorporating both cognitive and affective schemas, in my analysis I focused on how three young people—Lucija, Martina, and Jasmin—perceived what was probable, possible, or unimaginable for them in terms of education, and on the emotions that accompanied such practical though frequently unconscious estimations of educational trajectories. This analysis was underlined by an exploration of how these cognitive and affective structures foster (or constrain) these three individuals' agency to continue in or to change their expected trajectories.

The findings of this analysis suggest that cognitive and affective schemas function jointly, as integral elements of a social inequalities' mechanism based on the compounding of advantages or disadvantages. Thus the initial middle-class advantages of Lucija's early schooling helped her build the foundations for a self-assured and confident approach to higher education and her future life more generally, which then empowered her in overcoming the difficult circumstances she faced during her family's fall into poverty. In contrast, Martina and Jasmin, in circumstances of long-standing scarce economic and cultural resources, experienced negative affective structures as another obstacle in their way, one so pervasive that it did not even register as an additional disadvantage of their lives, including the period of early schooling. Although both Martina and Jasmin acted to affect change in their trajectories, they did so within different—and more limited—parameters of what is possible and imaginable for someone "like them," where this evaluation was heavily weighed by the emotional burdens that marked their lives.

The conclusions of this study are based on three very specific life stories. Therefore, they are limited in their reach, with no claim to generalizability to either other participants in this study or Croatian youth in general. Nonetheless, the patterns these three narratives highlight still provide a deeper understanding of some possible mechanisms through which embodied social inequalities get reproduced in the educational system. For example, while the quantitative segment of the OBRIRK study already identified important factors contributing to the reproduction of classed disadvantage among these young people, including lower levels of access to material and cultural resources (Ogresta et al., 2016), it is only with the in-depth look obtained through interviews that more of the "how" of this reproduction unveils, thus setting this study's claim to theoretical generalizability. Moreover, by building further on the developments and investigations of the affective dimension of habitus in educational research, and by connecting this line of thinking to the closely compatible investigations in the sociology of emotions that highlight the connections between social and affective structures, this study contributes to the body of work investigating how and why the well-established association between social background and educational outcomes so doggedly persists. Emotions, for such a long time neglected or dismissed as a peripheral phenomenon in sociology, should instead be given serious consideration as another structure shaping social inequalities. Future studies adding the affective dimension of habitus to their conceptualizations of factors contributing to educational inequalities are a right step in that direction. These future studies, however, must also keep in mind that to analyze cognitive and emotional dimensions of habitus means focusing on the collective burdens of social inequalities—and thus these must also be situated into their broader social settings, or fields, that sustain and reproduce such inequalities. Though the present study has provided only a bare outline of such an approach, building further on this aspect of analysis is a promising way forward. ■

Corresponding author email: tanja.vuckovic.juros@gmail.com

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