

On Positioning of Business, Management and Economics Fields of Study in the University Space

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Based on available studies on business and management fields of study as upwardly-mobile university field of study choices as a basis, this study seeks to test this hypothesis of upward mobility. In doing so, it endeavours to identify correlations between field of study choice and educational background and between field of study choice and gender. The base data is taken from a survey of all domestic first-time students at Austrian universities in the 2011/12 winter semester (N=27,575). This data was subject to a correspondence analysis, which allowed us to visualise and interpret the relations between the positions of these fields of study in the university space. The results indicate a clearly structured (stratified) university space. Our supplementary regression analysis shows that the upwardly-mobile higher education choice hypothesis can be confirmed for the fields of study studied. Our analyses also confirm the feminisation hypothesis for the business and management fields of study studied: women significantly more frequently select fields of study which lead to a career in a pedagogic (business education), social (social economy) or language (international business and management) context. In the group of fields of study explored, business education fields of study had both the highest share of first-time students and the highest level of feminisation. In contrast, economics fields of study, which were included in the analysis in addition to the business studies and management fields of study, have a significantly higher share of male students and the lowest share of higher education climbers.

Keywords: business and management, economics, fields of study, higher education, habitus, stratification, gender, upward-mobility, Austria.

1. Baseline situation and background theory

The massive growth in the number of students in higher education in highly developed countries is one of the most significant changes seen in society over the last decades. At the same time, the realisation that the massive expansion in higher education has not brought about the expected reduction in inequality has become the accepted state in research in the field of educational stratification (Field, Morgan-Klein, 2013; Reay, 2013; Souto-Otero, 2010).

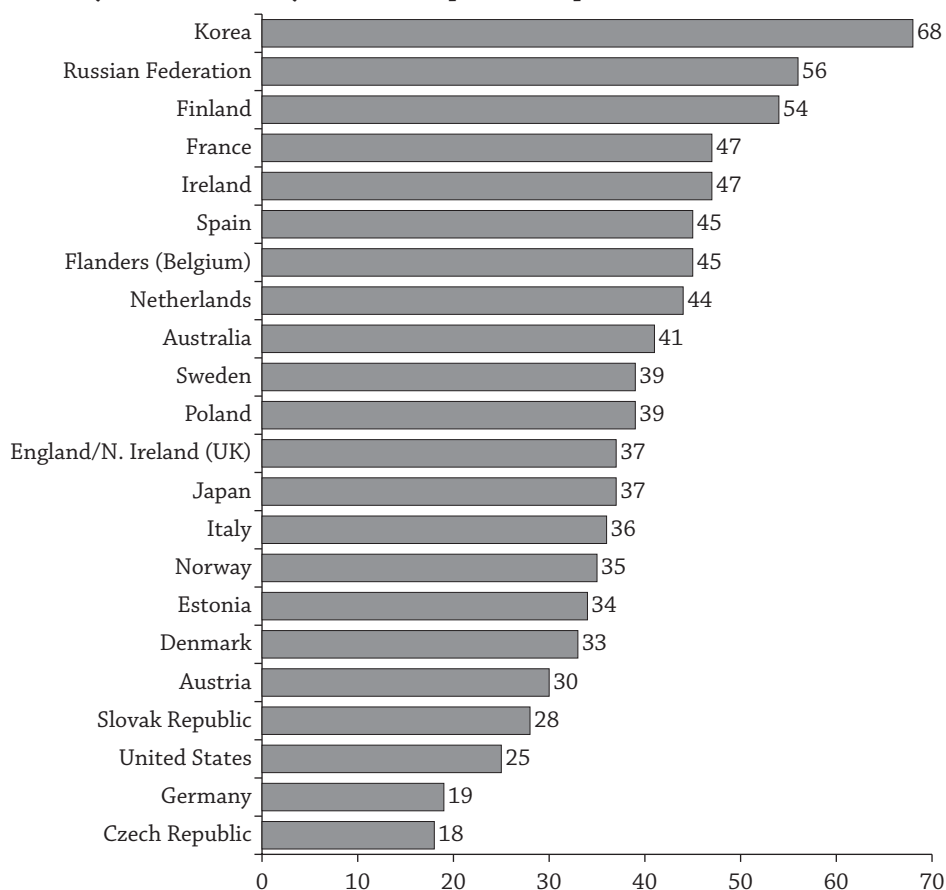
Equalization of educational opportunities can be looked at from the upward mobility perspective. In the education context, upward mobility is an indicator of the share of people in a society whose educational attainment is higher than that of their parents. Upward mobility in educational attainment among 35–44 year-olds in OECD countries lies, for example, at 40 per cent (OECD, 2014), whereby the Czech Republic, Germany, the United States, Slovakia and Austria are the nations bringing up the rear (see Figure 1).

Given this situation, experts have now begun to debate, for instance, whether the cause of persistent educational inequalities can be sought in the rapid speed of educational expansion or how to go about linking the advantages of educational expansion with more effective policies to promote the equalization of educational opportunities among social strata (Bar Haim und Shavit, 2013).

The low upward mobility in education in Austria can be attributed in part to the national education system, and in particular to its early tracking approach, where the resources and level of educational attainment at home assert a stronger influence than they do in education systems with tracking at a later stage (Betts, 2011; Hanushek, Woessmann, 2005; Brunello, Checchi, 2007; Piopiunik, 2014). Young people from families with a low level of education (parents without a secondary school qualification) in Austria rarely achieve upward mobility in educational attainment: only one in ten members of this group attains a higher education qualification, compared to an OECD average of one in five (OECD, 2015).

However, whether a young person's chances of attaining an education qualification are distributed equally or unequally is influenced not only on social background but also on gender. Women have higher entry rates into university-level education than men (OECD, 2014), but there are persistent inequalities here in their choice of field of study. Studies show that men avoid feminised fields of study, while income expectation plays a lesser role in this choice for women (Bobbitt-Zeher, 2007). Davies, Guppy (1997, 1421) describe this gender segregation by field as “a stubborn basis of inequality”.

Figure 1. Educational upward-mobility among non-students (age group 35–44 year-olds) in the year 2012 (expressed in per cent)



Source: OECD 2014; graphical representation by the authors.

The race for the most sought-after academic titles thus does not finish with the possibility of being able to enter higher education. Researchers in the field of stratification in higher education contend that a reduction in inequality in access to higher education for students from so-called low-education backgrounds is ultimately only achieved in higher education establishments with reduced prestige (e.g. universities of applied science) or in fields of study with “limited social advantages” (Ayalon, Yogev, 2005). Indeed, differences from a gender and social background perspective persist on multiple levels: members of higher socio-economic classes and people who live in capital cities are particularly over-represented in universities and prestigious fields of study. Students whose parents have a university education tend to opt more for the medicine or law fields of study, while

young people from low-education backgrounds have a tendency to opt for the more practical fields of study or for teacher training, education science or engineering. Meanwhile, studies in numerous countries show clearly that students with parents from the higher social strata are more likely to choose life sciences or humanities over business or management. More women than men enter higher education, but women still remain under-represented in the more lucrative technical and prestigious fields of study and over-represented in languages, education science and teacher training courses (Zarifa, 2012; Van de Werfhorst, Kraaykamp, 2001; Van de Werfhorst, Luijkx, 2010; OECD, 2014). A number of studies show that while parental level of educational attainment does clearly influence a young person's field of study choice, gender in fact has a greater influence here (Duru-Bellat, Kieffer, Reimer, 2008).

Consequently, an increasing number of empirical studies have sought in recent years to illuminate horizontal inequalities (like student segregation by social background or gender) in various more prestigious higher education institutions or fields of study (Shavit, Arum, Gamoran, 2007; Triventi, 2013; Lörz, Schindler, Walter, 2011). One criticism of many of these intra-higher education studies is that they analyse fields of study or disciplines in “bundles”, e.g. by grouping together technical, natural sciences, business studies and social sciences fields of study (Van de Werfhorst, Luijkx, 2010, 2010; Prix, 2011; Triventi, 2013). Such reckonings or endeavours assume homogeneous student populations within these fields of study or disciplines.

Our study seeks to provide a more differentiated perspective and, thus, analyses individual university fields of study in the “business, management and economics fields of study bundle”, an approach which allows us to offer a more segregated view of this issue. We also seek to interpret the findings from a spatial perspective by analysing fields of study in relation to their composition and positioning in the university. The following business studies and management fields of study were included in our analysis: applied business administration, social economy, business law, business and management¹, business education, international business and management and economics. These fields of study reflect the inner differentiation in business and management fields of study, which we used to test the upward mobility and feminisation hypotheses (Drudy, 2008; Zarifa,

¹ The actual names used for these fields of study differ in each university in Austria, where they are referred to interchangeably as, for example, business administration, business sciences or business and social sciences). Around 10% of first-time students opt for the technical business informatics and business engineering fields of study. These fields of study were not included in our analysis.

2012). The economics field of study was included in the analysis in addition to the business studies and management fields for comparative reasons (Becher, 1994).

2. Theoretical framework

In his various works on the education system (Bourdieu, 1996, 1998) Pierre Bourdieu demonstrates that the capital resources of teachers and students in the higher education space and fields, i.e. the disciplines and fields of study, differ according to their social background, gender, religious affiliation and marital status as well as their cultural and other preferences. The fields represent so-called disciplinary cultures and are differently endowed with university (academic), scientific and intellectual social capital (Huber, 1990; Mendoza & Kuntz & Berger, 2012).

In the university space, preference for a specific discipline or field of study is guided by the habitus, i.e. by a person's incorporated life history. The habitus can be interpreted as a mediating instance between life history and field of study choice. It develops right from early childhood in the home and then later through secondary socialisation, above all in the fields of the school. While people are growing up, they incorporate both their family lifestyle and family culture as well as the disciplinary cultures of the educational establishments they attend. This includes the distribution in the fields of education and occupation with regard to gender, social origins and other forms of capital. Pronounced disciplinary cultures attract students with a "suitable" habitus and corresponding capital resources. This is not, however, a deterministic model: newly emerging habitus that is alien to the field can also shape it. In other words, a field of study is always dynamic because habitus, field and capital influence each other reciprocally.

Bourdieu's argumentation ties in well with one of the most influential hypotheses regarding education expansion and inequality, namely the "Effectively Maintained Inequality" (EMI) hypothesis, whereby socio-economic inequalities remain persistent not through vertical but through horizontal (Lucas, 2001, 2009). In the field of higher education, these inequalities in social background are reflected above all in the choice of higher education institutions and fields of study with different levels of prestige.

A higher degree of stratification in the school system, as encountered, for example, in Austria and Germany, is also reflected in field of study choices. It is a selection mechanism that favours the homogenisation of the habitus and the capital endowment in the respective disciplines and fields (Bourdieu, 1998). The preference for a specific field of study in the university space is guided by the

habitus and can be interpreted as a positioning for a specific preference/field. This positioning should be interpreted in the context of different positioning and, in true keeping with Bourdieu's philosophy, in relational terms (Bourdieu, 1998; Bourdieu, Loïc Wacquant, 1992). The position of the respective fields of study in the university space should therefore be seen in the context of their relationship to the position of other fields of study and understood as habitus differences.

3. Empirical study

As is the case in other highly developed nations, education in Austria has undergone a massive expansion over the course of the last half century. The 22 state universities and the universities of applied science that were established from 1994 onwards constitute the two largest providers of higher (university) education. Of the two, around 80 per cent of current students attend one of the state universities, which means that the classic universities are currently still accorded greater significance in academic higher education than their applied science counterparts (Statistik Austria, 2014). However, student enrolments at the universities of applied science continue to grow, and this sector is thus also gaining in relevance. Business studies and management fields of study can be studied at both classic universities and at universities of applied science. The greater share of first-time students in business studies and management fields of study are enrolled at the classic universities, and around half of these are studying at Vienna University of Business and Economics.

Our empirical study covers all Austrian students (N=27,575) studying for the first time at a classic university or university of arts in the 2011/12 winter semester, who can choose among 254 fields of study. The seven business, management and economics fields of study analysed in depth for this paper account here for 4,320 first-time students or 16 per cent of the total first-time student population.

A relational perspective on field of study choices and socio-demographic variables requires a multivariate statistical analysis technique which "thinks in relations" (Bourdieu, Loïc Wacquant, 1992, p 126). In other words, a technique which presents these field of study choices and their corresponding traits and characteristics in spatial terms and interprets their relations is needed. The correspondence analysis method offers us this possibility. In a second step, we then carried out a regression analysis in order to calculate the influences of gender and parental level of educational attainment. We also checked whether the influence of gender on the choice of either business studies or management field of study is higher than the influence of parental level of education achievement.

3.1. Correspondence analysis

A correspondence analysis is an exploratory statistical method, which permits a relational view and analysis of tabular data (Greenacre, 2007).

Figure 2. Business, management and economics fields of study in the university field

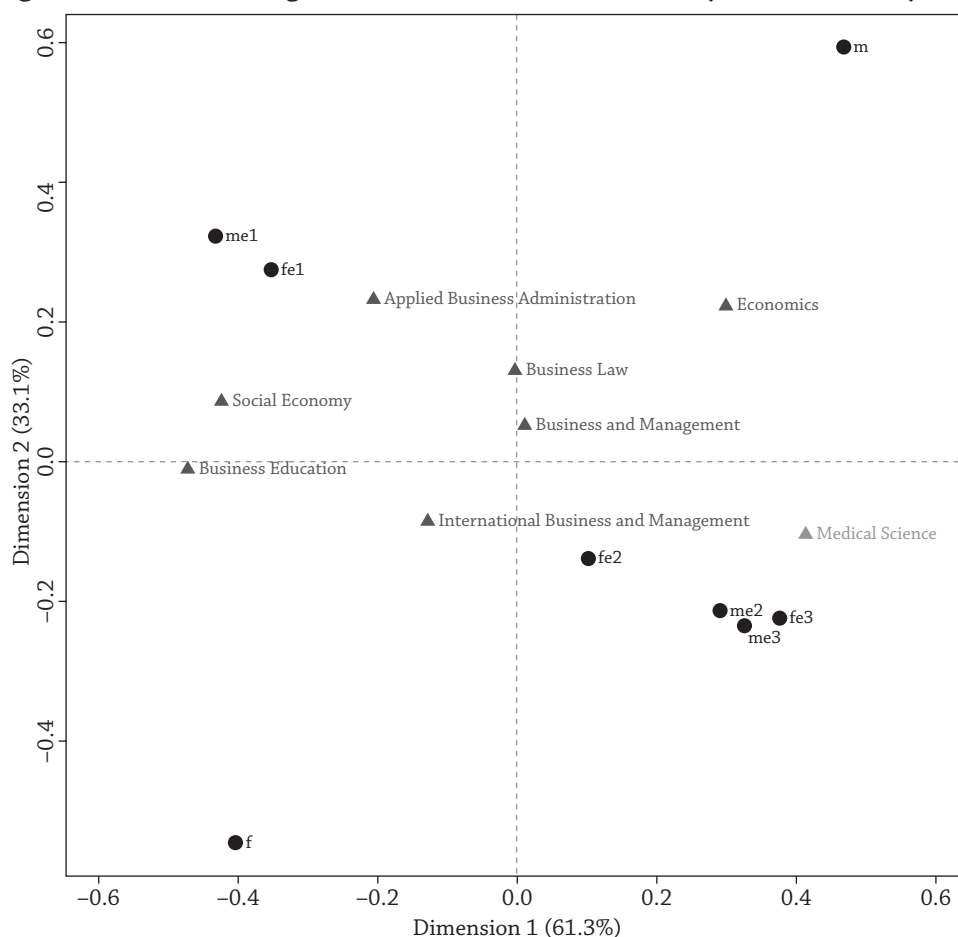


Figure 2 visualises the results of a subset correspondence analysis (Greenacre, Pardo, 2006), which allows us select a subset of all fields of study for analysis, yet leave the characteristics of the full space, i.e. of all fields of study and variables, intact. In our case, the different positioning of the respective business studies and management fields of study and the field of study “medicine” are visible. Medicine was included here as a so-called contrast case, since this field of study is located

in the upper field in the hierarchical order of fields of study and professions. The purpose of this visualisation was to show how the fields of study in the selected subset (applied business administration, business education, business law, business and management, economics, international business and management, social economy) are positioned in relation to each other and how the positioning of medicine relates to these fields of study. The following student characteristics are included in the visualisation: gender (a fundamental dimension in Bourdieu’s habitus) and parental level of education achievement.

The visualisation of this space has been reduced to two dimensions to facilitate readability and interpretation (Clausen, 1998). The visualised space is a “simple” construction, which nonetheless serves well to convey Bourdieu’s relational perspective.

Table 1. Abbreviations used in Figure 2 (subset correspondence analysis)

Abbreviation	
f	gender female
m	gender male
me1	mother’s education below ISCED 3a
me2	mother’s education = Matura (university entrance certificate)
me3	mother’s education = tertiary education certificate
fe1	father’s education below ISCED 3a
fe2	father’s education = Matura (university entrance certificate)
fe3	father’s education = tertiary education certificate

3.2. On the positioning of business studies and management fields of study in the university space

A correspondence analysis allows us to provide a spatial representation of how the individual fields of study relate to specific characteristics (student gender and parental level of educational attainment). The ca package (Nenadic, Green, 2007) for the R statistics programming language (R Core Team, 2015) was used here to calculate and visualise the results. By using the correspondence analysis method, we were able to analyse all pairwise relationships between three demographic variables (gender, father’s level of educational attainment, mother’s level of educational attainment) and the field of study chosen.

Using a two-dimensional presentation, we were able to explain 94.4% of the total inertia (= variance in the data): 61.3% were explained by dimension 1, and

33.1% were explained by dimension 2, respectively. There are various ways to display correspondence analysis results, we elected to use the contribution biplot (Greenacre, 2010) method. This method allows for easy interpretation, since the contribution of points to the solution can directly be seen in the visualisation: the more important a field of study is for the solution, the further away from the centre it is located.

All three demographic variables contribute substantially to the inertia of both axes. The variable with the greatest explanatory value is gender, which accounts for 43.4% of the inertia, followed by mother's level of educational attainment at 31.4% and father's level of educational attainment at 25.3%.

With regard to content, we can see that the 'female' gender is located in the lower left quadrant, whereas 'male' is located in the upper right quadrant. A segmentation of the space into homologous contrastive pairs (male-female) is discernible. We can also see an education axis – from low education background at the top left to high educational background at the bottom right. The upper left quadrant is associated with a low level of parental educational attainment, and the lower right quadrant with a medium or high level of parental educational attainment. According to this breakdown of the space, the fields of study can be interpreted as follows:

- Both business education and social economy are female-dominated; they are also the preferred fields of study for educational climbers.
- Applied business administration is also a field of study for educational climbers, but with a balanced gender distribution.
- Business law and business and management are positioned close to the centre of the space. This can be interpreted as fields of study that are similar to all 254 fields of study, that are offered at Austrian universities, with regard to gender and parental level of educational attainment distribution.
- International business and management has a surplus of female students, but this is not as pronounced as for business education and social economy. In parental level of educational attainment terms, this field of study is similar to all 254 fields of study, that are offered at Austrian universities.
- Economics is a male-dominated field of study, and the one with the lowest share of educational climbers among all economics fields of study.

Medicine has been added as a supplementary field of study and was not used in the construction of the space, but was instead projected onto the space of economics fields of study afterwards. It serves as a contrast case since it represents a field of study with a very low share of educational climbers.

3.3. Regression analysis

We used a multinomial logistic regression (Fox, Weisberg, 2011) to try to determine the influence of gender and parental level of educational attainment on field of study choice. Table 1 (Deviance Analysis) shows that the main effects of gender and parental level of education attainment are highly significant. The interaction effect between gender and parental level of education attainment was removed from the model due to its insignificance based on the results of a likelihood ratio test. If we compare the magnitude of their influences, we can see that gender is a more important predictor than parental level of educational attainment. Accordingly, removing gender from the model would have a larger effect (LR Chisq of 117.56 at 7 degrees of freedom) than the removal of the ‘educational climber’ variable (LR Chisq of 78.12 at 7 degrees of freedom).

Table 2. Change in deviance for removal of one variable from the model

	Dev.	Df.	p Value
Gender	117.56	7	< 0.0001
Educational climber	78.12	7	< 0.0001

For the reasons of clarity and ease of interpretation, we chose to use only odds ratios in the interpretation of the content. These ratios can be calculated from the results of the multinomial logistic regression. Table 2 shows the odds ratios for the individual fields of study in descending order for the ‘educational climber’ column. Table 2 presents the odds ratios for the individual fields of study in descending order for the ‘educational climber’ column. A result of >1 in the ‘gender’ column indicates that the odds of female students selecting a specific business, management or economics field of study are higher – in comparison to the male students, the odds of female students are higher selecting a specific business, management or economics field of study versus selecting one of the fields of study in the reference category (which represents all the other 247 fields of study offered at the Austrian universities). The same applies for the educational background variable, where a value of <1 indicates that the odds of first-time students with two parents with a secondary school qualification below ISCED 3a selecting a business studies or management field of study are lower than for first-time students with at least one parent with an ISCED 3a or higher secondary school qualification.

We can see that the odds ratios in the first column are higher than 1 for business education, social economy and international business and management. For

business education, which shows the highest value (4.08), this would mean that females are approximately four times more likely than males to choose this field of study rather than one of the fields of study in the reference category. Values below 1 just mean the opposite, e. g., a value of 0.35 for Economics means that preferring this field of study over the 247 others, is approximately three times less likely for females, compared to males. With the exception of applied business administration, all the odds ratios are significantly different in value to one. This means that, apart from for this field of study, gender has a significant influence on preference for a business studies or management fields of study over one of the remaining 247 fields of study.

Table 3. Odds ratios for field of study choice by educational background and gender calculated from the parameter estimates in the multinomial logistic regression model

Field of study	Female	Educational climber (parental ISCED below 3a)
Business education	4.08*	2.57*
Social economy	2.01*	2.34*
Applied business administration	0.86	2.01*
Business law	0.75*	1.35*
Business and management	0.85*	1.12*
International business and management	1.75*	1.11
Economics	0.35*	0.84

Reference category for the dependent variable: other fields of study than the business, management and economics fields of study listed. Reference categories for the independent variables gender and educational background; male or 'non educational climber' (ISCED 3a or higher) * $p \leq 0.05$.

Data source: raw data (Statistik Austria, 2012).

Business education exhibits the highest odds ratios for both 'gender' and 'educational climber'. It is approximately 2.6 times more likely that a member of this group will choose this field of study over one of the remaining 247 fields of study than it is for a member of the 'non educational climber' group to do so. Economics and international business and management do not show significant differences to the reference group (i.e. the other 247 fields of study). The other five business studies and management fields of study all differ significantly from the reference group and all show values above 1 for the odds ratios, thus indicating that they seem to be more attractive to educational climbers than non-climbers.

4. Discussion of findings and outlook

Our correspondence and regression analyses show the significant influence of habitus on field of study choice. Both gender (as basic characteristic of the primary habitus or habitus of origin) and parental level of educational attainment evidently have a strong influence on this decision. Whether or not business studies or management fields of study play a stronger role than other fields of study for educational climbers could not be determined through this study.

The upward mobility hypothesis could be confirmed for the fields of study studied, with one exception, namely economics. Educational climbers were significantly more frequent in five of the six other business studies and management fields of study investigated.

Although we were able to show that social background is a contributing factor to field of study choice, gender would appear to have an even greater influence on this decision in the case of business studies and management fields of study. This finding is consistent with international studies on stratification in the field of higher education.

Our analyses confirm the feminisation hypothesis for the analysed business studies and management fields of study: women significantly more frequently select fields of study which lead to a career in a pedagogic (business education), social (social economy) or language (international business and management) context. In the group studied, business education fields of study had both the highest share of first-time students and the highest level of feminisation. In contrast, economics fields of study have a significantly higher share of male students and the lowest share of higher education climbers.

With regard to content, we can see that the 'female' gender is located in the lower left quadrant, whereas 'male' is located in the upper right quadrant. A segmentation of the space into homologous contrastive pairs (male-female) is discernible. We can also see an education axis – from low education background at the top left to high educational background at the bottom right. The upper left quadrant is associated with a low level of parental educational attainment, and the lower right quadrant with a medium or high level of parental educational attainment. According to this breakdown of the space, the fields of study can be interpreted as follows:

Our relational analysis shows a clearly structured university space, which stretches along homologous contrastive pairs (female-male and low parental education-high parental education). The biggest barrier for potential educational climbers is the field of study medicine, which was included in our relational analysis as a contrast case.

Given that business education fields of study recruit their students above all from commercially oriented higher secondary schools (*Handelsakademie*), it can be argued that an institutional habitus which co-determines the future educational and professional careers of students in such schools has already been formed in the school system. This field of study seems to reproduce the following loop: the commercially oriented secondary schools primarily recruit female pupils whose parents have a secondary school qualification below ISCED 3a. The field of study business education recruits graduates of one type of school and prepares them in turn for teaching careers in such schools.

In his theory, Pierre Bourdieu draws attention to the dynamic interplay between habitus and field. Further empirical analyses of fields of study which prepare students for careers in a business or economics setting could serve to examine these correlation effects. A further interesting point relates to a possible correlation between the gender composition of the individual fields of study and the expected future income levels of their graduates. Last, but by no means least, we also need to ask whether academic or vocational school careers form habitus which lead first-time students to be drawn particularly strongly to certain disciplines and to exclude alternative disciplines. This raises important questions regarding the reproduction of disciplinary cultures and the challenges facing curricula and higher education didactics. Our study ultimately also leads to an important education policy question: At which level in the education system should preventive measures be taken to permanently break down the horizontal stratification described in this article?

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Резюме

Позиционирование бизнес – специальностей, управления и экономики в университетской среде

Целью этого исследования является проверка гипотезы, касающейся социального продвижения австрийских студентов, начинающих обучение в университетах Австрии на бизнес – специальностях, управлении и экономике. В рамках исследования была определена корреляция между выбором специальности и средним образованием,

a также между выбором вуза и полом. Полученные результаты свидетельствуют о существовании чётко структуризованной университетской среды. Гипотеза, касающаяся выбора специальности с точки зрения социального продвижения подтвердилась. Исследования также показали феминизацию анализируемых специальностей из области бизнеса и управления: женщины значительно чаще выбирают специальности, открывающие путь к карьерному росту в педагогическом контексте (бизнесовое обучение), общественном (социальная экономика) и языковом (международный бизнес и управление). На специальности экономика был замечен значительно высший процент студентов мужского пола и самый низкий процент студентов, признающих высшее образование как путь к социальному продвижению.

Слова-ключи: бизнес и управление, экономика, специальности обучения, высшее образование, габитус, стратификация, пол, социальное продвижение, Австрия.

Abstrakt

Pozycjonowanie kierunków studiów biznesowych, zarządzania i ekonomii w przestrzeni uniwersyteckiej

Celem prezentowanego badania jest sprawdzenie hipotezy dotyczącej awansu społecznego studentów narodowości austriackiej, rozpoczynających naukę na uniwersytetach w Austrii na kierunkach biznesowych, zarządzania oraz ekonomii. W ramach badania określono korelacje pomiędzy wyborem kierunku studiów a wykształceniem średnim oraz wyborem kierunku studiów a płcią. Uzyskane wyniki wskazują na istnienie wyraźnie ustrukturyzowanej przestrzeni uniwersyteckiej. Hipoteza o wyborze kierunku studiów pod kątem awansu społecznego potwierdza się. Badania wykazały również feminizację analizowanych kierunków z obszaru biznesu i zarządzania: kobiety istotnie częściej wybierają kierunki otwierające drogę do kariery w kontekście pedagogicznym (edukacja biznesowa), społecznym (ekonomia społeczna) i językowym (międzynarodowy biznes i zarządzanie). Na kierunku ekonomia stwierdzono istotnie wyższy odsetek studentów płci męskiej oraz najniższy odsetek osób traktujących wyższe wykształcenie jako drogę do awansu społecznego.

Słowa kluczowe: biznes i zarządzanie, ekonomia, kierunki studiów, wyższe wykształcenie, habitus, stratyfikacja, płeć, awans społeczny, Austria.

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