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IMPACT OF LIFE STRATEGIES OF SCHOOL GRADUATES, SUCCESS AT SCHOOL AND THEIR PARENTAL RESOURCES ON CHILDREN'S ASPIRATIONS IN UKRAINE AND GEORGIA

This analysis examines school youth's aspirations toward social advancement: their desired level of education, level of autonomy of work tasks, range of supervision at future work place and desired location on the social ladder. The hypothesis of determination of aspirations by parental status, education grades success at school and value orientations is tested for a first time on the representative sample of high schools in Ukraine and Georgia. The data proves the soundness of this hypothesis and provided confirmation of the lasting effect of life management strategies.

Keywords: social aspiration, school graduates, social status, Life strategies, Ukraine, Georgia, structural equation modeling.

Аналіз присвячено розгляду домагань школярів в контексті їх соціального розвитку: бажаного рівня освіти, рівня автономії при виконанні робочих завдань, діапазону контролю на майбутньому робочому місці й відповідного положення на соціальних щаблях. Гіпотеза впливу на домагання шкільної успішності, ціннісних орієнтацій та статусу батьків вперше перевіряється на репрезентативній вибірці школярів старших класів України і Грузії. Дані доводять правильність цієї гіпотези та підтверджують тривалий ефект вибору життєвих стратегій.

Ключові слова: соціальні домагання, випускники шкіл, соціальний статус, життєві стратегії, Україна, Грузія, моделювання структурними рівняннями.

Introduction

This analysis addresses the question of formation of school youth aspirations toward their future social status: desired level of education, mode of occupational activity, range of supervision at future work place and desired location in the social hierarchy. Various comparative surveys conducted in Ukraine and Russia indicate rapid growth of material and social aspirations within school graduates on the eve of the Soviet Union dissolution (Magun and Engovatov 2004, Rutkevich 2002) [1, 2]. In particular young people at the beginning of 1990-s showed much higher aspirations toward living standards, future social standing and the level of education to be attained than their peers in 1985 (Magun 1998) [3]. The scholars specified that this growth did not go in parallel with the growth of welfare of school graduates' parents and with recognition of the social cost to be paid for obtaining high status in society. Opening of ideological borders made it possible for consumerism ideology to come from the West, however, for achieving high living standards not everyone was able to find "socially approved means" (Merton 1938) and agree to pay the price for these standards: to work hard, to delay gratification of wishes and so on.

The scholars qualified the aspirations of school graduates of early 1990-s as "inadequate" to the reality, in which they live. What kind of reality confronted the

aspirations of the young at that period of time? Macroeconomic and structural changes were really dramatic at that time in post-communist societies. Development of private educational institutions in the 1990-s widened the opportunity to enter university, however, high pay for the study there and growing cost of living in large university cities made the chances to enter university highly differentiated and dependent on parental resources of the applicants. In the late 1990-s Russian sociologists were able to provide the evidence of strengthening of class basis for chances to enter university: children of managerial staff had more chances to enter university than all other categories of the applicants (Konstantinowsky 1999) [4]. On the other hand longitudinal analysis made in Ukrainian and Russian cities showed growing misbalance of benefits and costs within young generation; this is to mean that motivation to work hard for the sake of the future status was not correlated with growing aspirations (Magun 1998) [3].

It turned out that there are two basic sources of “inadequacy” of the aspirations of the young: improper estimation by the children of their parents’ resources and inadequate cost-benefit balance concerning individual talent and motivation to fight for a better human lot. The question is which explanation – class based limitations or personal abilities and motivation – is more useful for the explaining of aspirations of the young in post-communist societies. Do the relative importance of these factors change in time? The pioneering study of the school graduates’ aspirations started in Soviet Russia and Ukraine by V. Magun and E. Golovakha in 1985 (Golovakha 1988) [5] provided the empirical evidence of the growing material aspirations in 1985–1990 that enabled them to formulate the hypothesis about the “revolution of aspirations” (Magun 1998) [3]. However, after the conducting of the consequent waves of the study in 1995 and 2001, Magun and Engovatov reported about the decrease of school graduate aspirations in Russia and Ukraine and simultaneous increase of motivation to work hard for the future success (Magun and Engovatov 2004) [1]. The researchers resumed that the aspirations became more down to earth, or more “adequate”, probably because of the experience of the market society: both growing costs of education and growing return for human capital. This means that young people recognize both structural and personal limitations for obtaining high social status and living standard. In order to prove this, two factors, structural limitations, from the one side, and personal motivation, from the another, will be compared and juxtaposed in the following analysis.

Educational and social status aspirations: review of the literature

The studies conducted in Western countries during last three decades show ever strengthening reproduction of parents’ social status by children (Shavit and Blossfeld 1993, Raftery and Hout 1993) [6, 7]. It is indicated that educational attainment is the key mechanism of reinforcing social inequality in developed countries. The demand for higher education remains continually high despite the fact that salaries of many professional positions stopped to grow that made Western scholars to start to talk about deflation of education (Boudon 1974) [8]. Adherents of class approach explain persistent inequality in the “world of equal opportunities” by repeatable attempts of parents who have access to material and human resources to provide opportunities for their children to maintain high social class of their parents.

Comparative studies done by M. Kohn and C. Schooler explained the mechanism of this process by the correlation of early childhood environment with aspirations toward future occupation, which, in turn, determines the development of personality which promotes maintenance by adults of their status that will effect their children (Kohn and Schooler 1983) [9].

The argument of the cultural reproduction mode of P. Bourdieu was that it is not only material and social capital, but also cultural habits, value system, style of life are also the matter to be inherited and socialized by children (Bourdieu 1977) [10]. In the countries of Communist regime cultural capital was even more important factor of strong of striving for education than material capital. Economic motive seemed not to work in the Soviet Union at all since the leveling of incomes made the motive of expected material rewards almost unnoticeable. However, the demand for higher education was quite high and it grew disproportionately among the children of highly educated parents. The studies conducted in Hungary (Simkus and Andorka 1982) [11] persuasively showed, that although barriers for working class children were substantially lowered in Stalinist period, social inequality in attainment of higher education quickly regained in the 1970-s. Statistical data analysis for Russia showed that down to the end of the 1970-s educational class reproduction in a case of “mothers-to-daughters” attained almost 100 percent (Gerber and Hout 1995) [12]. The interpretation emphasizes the ever indispensable role of cultural capital in these conditions: being not able to inherit material capital children inherit cultural capital of their parents which includes high value of “interesting, creative work and high education.

R. Breen and J. Goldthorpe (Breen and Goldthorpe 1997) [13], trying to combine structural explanation, cultural capital concept and personal abilities concept, developed the hypothesis according to which all kinds of parental resources contribute not only to the better progress at school and successful entering university, but also to better ability to calculate risk of taking wrong decision on educational career. They figured out two effects of educational inequality reproduction: primary effect, which is the effect of social origin on scholastic ability, and secondary effect, which is the effect of cultural capital on ability to make a good choice a cost-benefit analysis of the available educational options. This “good choice” means “realistic estimation” of one’s abilities and knowledge of entry rule and educational options.

Thus, for Breen and Goldthorpe “adequate” aspirations implies rational choice, and rational choice is the choice entailing high probability of success basing on adequate perception of both material parental status and personal abilities. However, this approach hardly makes a distinction between structural component, which entails the question of social justice, and personal component, which entails the question of success at school, motivation to study, personality traits and so on. University level of education could be “rationally” chosen by a good pupil but a son from the low positioned family, or, vice versa, by a son from the high status and rich family with very poor record at school. Breen – Goldthorpe hypothesis’s application in the case of occupational choice is even more problematic, since it assumes that it is exactly known, which type of education “corresponds” to which score for which school subjects. Occupation, which demands creativity and intellectual flexibility, could be “quite rationally” chosen by good pupil, but “inappropriate person”, who is psychologically predisposed to do rather routine work entailing strict description of rules. The problem is that structural approach does not go into psychology of a choice, while is in the case of contemporary adolescents relatively autonomous from parental resources and attitude but depends very much on the perceived competitions to universities, life plans of classmates and older siblings, new trends in carrier building and achieving ideology that came from mass media.

A promising approach of future life prospects was suggested by Golovakha (Golovakha 1988) [5]. Life prospects are composed of life distant goals and specific plans, or short-term goals, both are driven by value orientations. Individual make

their future prospects accounting for their value orientation, distant life goals and short term goals which are to be attained at a certain consequence and at approximately fixed age. Attitude toward education depend very much on whether education considered as a mean to obtain a distant goal, which is high status or desired occupation, or as a goal in itself. And this is, in turn, depends on high education is valued in the society. Golovakha emphasized that school graduates frequently set obtaining higher education as a goal per se, without accounting for any specific profession or carrier; the situation which he describes as the absence of a distant goal, result of the deficit of life planning skills. Growing demand for university level education was interpreted by him as a proof of this hypothesis: more and more of young want to enter university disregarding their choice of a specific carrier or value orientations or success at school. Therefore, Golovakha has developed alternative to the Goldthorpe's understanding of "inadequacy of choice" typical for none-stratified societies that is in the lack of correlation between short term and distant life goals, and the discrepancy between the choice of higher level of education as a goal and not recognizing the social and psychological price which is to be paid in a case of inability either to pass the enter exams, or to graduate university, or to find an occupation which will correspond to the obtained diploma.

Changes in higher education and future work aspirations in some countries, successors of the Soviet Union

System of education and labour market has endured dramatic changes during the last fifty years in the countries successors of USSR. After the Second World War the Communist state favors massovization of higher education pursuing double goal of providing educated working force to the weakened by the War industry and implementing the Communist party policy of equal educational chances for the working class and peasants' children. Despite these efforts there were no competitions at the universities entries in the 1950–1960-s. Partially this was explained by poor demographic situation, partially by poor economic conditions of families that did not allow sending children to university cities. In the efforts to implement the State plan on higher education teachers of secondary schools were instructed to recruit to higher school (9–10 classes of secondary polytechnic school in Soviet system, 10–11 in post-Soviet period) more and more children despite their low grades at school. In a result in the 1970-s composition of 9–10 classes changed dramatically since it included considerable number of those who were not well prepared or even motivated to go to universities.

Substantial part of that school graduates, however, tried to enter university. Thus, the educational policy, improving demographic and material situation resulted in a gradual growth of competition at universities in the 1970–1980-s. Aspirations for university level education considerably grew. In early 1990-s the situation has been changed once more. Growing inner differentiation in incomes of specialists, and inequality between private and state owned economy sectors caused the decrease of competition at universities for some specialties like teachers and engineers, and simultaneous growth of demand for the new, economically profitable occupations: finances, law, management, computing.

There is a speculative attempt to classify "groups of interest" in higher education depending on the "stability" of school graduates' interest to education (Konstantinowsky 1999) [4]. The first group comprises those, who have stable interest in highly qualified labour, inherited from highly educated parents. The second represents non-stable interest that incorporates students with good records but lower aspirations (by Konstantinowsky, presumably children of professionals from small towns), who go to

less prestigious universities or technical colleges. Third group includes middling pupils, who went to higher school without clear preference for higher education, however, depending on circumstances may have equally high aspirations as good pupils. The interest in entering university in high school depends on the educational policy and the offer at educational market: the groups of non-stable interest to higher education ensure growing competition in favorable periods and the decrease of competition in the periods of economic instability because they withdraw from the competition if they see that their success is uncertain. In the 1960–1970-s substantial part higher school graduates (probably, “non-stable interests” by Konstantinowsky) meant to obtain only “complete secondary education”¹ or pursue the carrier of technical or non-manual middle range specialist. In contrast, since the 1990-s more and more pupils go to higher school in order to obtain higher education that is explanative for crystallizing of “stable interest” in occupation which demand higher education.

Some scholars, who have studied education since 1960-s, speak about complete change of value orientations of those who sought for education in the 1990-s: instrumental motivation came to change teleological values (Mkrtchian 2005, Rutkevich 1995) [14, 2]. This change in value orientation supposedly produces two consequences: either school graduates applied for economically profitable occupations, or they try to obtain any sort of university diploma to enable themselves to pretend for any position that demands higher education preferably in private economy sector. However, as to the change of motivation, it must be admitted that not only material aspirations have grown since 1985. The data below also show the dramatic change in aspirations of young Ukrainians for the content of work, which is desired to be much more creative and independent than in 20 ago past. Statistical data labour market composition hardly provide an evidence on strengthening the ground for these aspirations: Ukrainian private sector of economy is very small, accounting for less than 1 % of business owners and 3–4 % of self-employed (the data of yearly monitoring “Ukrainian society”, Pani-na 2006) [15]. Service sector increases and industrial sector decreases in correspondingly low rates. Double employment on official and unofficial works, unstable employment, wage arrears and hidden unemployment characterizes changes in employment structure rather than something else. Under the circumstances when business initiatives and managers’ position are no exceedingly rewarded, striving for work creativity and complexity does not necessarily implies instrumental need. We prefer to make a cautious assumption that aspirations toward all components of status – wealth, prestige and power – have grown, that entails the work of both objective and subjective factors.

Hypotheses

We focus on the cross-country comparison. The comparable cases are Ukraine and Georgia in 2005. These two successors of the Soviet Union cannot be identified as contrasting cases: both are classified as slow reformers, countries with unstable political situation and relatively strong detachment from Soviet economy and ideology since 1990-s. Some differences in these two cases are, however, probable. Since 2000’s Ukraine showed the signs of economic growth based on national industry and foreign investments. Georgia because of substantial political instability demonstrated remarkably weaker progress in reforms, leaning hard on exporting industries and trade. The observed differences could be interpreted both in terms of relative market success of Ukraine, and cultural differences in the level of modernization, which has been higher in Ukraine since the second half of XX century. The hypotheses assume that:

¹ In Soviet system only completed higher school was considered as “completed secondary” and completed technical college considered as “secondary special education”.

In Georgia social aspirations are higher than in Ukraine (Pohorila 2011–2012) [16]. This suggestion stems from the idea that because of more retarded market development in Georgia it passes the stage of “unrealistic” high aspirations, which Ukraine passed in 1985–1995. This result would stress the role of consumer and achievement ideologies contra the role of market experience: the less advanced in reforms country is more effected by these ideologies that made the aspirations grew.

The level of aspirations depends not on the ideology, but on perceived chances of success. Social aspirations will be higher at that country, where more opportunities of social advance are offered. This would support the hypothesis of everyday experience against ideology.

Slower modernization implies sharp gap in success opportunities between the large cities and rural areas. Supposedly higher level of modernization in Ukraine than in Georgia will show up in sharper differences in aspirations between urban and rural areas in Georgia than in respective areas in Ukraine.

However, basic mechanisms of the level of aspirations’ formation are expected to be the same in two countries.

In both countries the effect of parental resources on the children’s aspirations is mediated by the progress at school, which is supportive for the role of human capital in explanation of both educational attainment and of aspirations for high social status.

Social status and household wealth of parents are supposed to have also direct effect on youth’s aspirations that will be illustrative for formation of specific strategy of life, parental dependent path, typical for quickly growing, urban centers of transforming countries.

Data description

Original project “Life Perspectives and Occupational Orientation of the Young” has been started in 1985, in Kyiv when 625 questionnaires were administered in 10 classes of secondary polytechnic schools including students at the age of 16–17 years and in 1990 in Moscow, where 387 questionnaires were administered. In 1991–1992 the study was replicated in Kyiv and some Northern oblasts of Ukraine. Since that time two replications in 1995 and 2001 in Kyiv and Moscow were conducted adding two more Russian cities: Orel and Mtsensk. In 2005, the study was partially replicated in Ukraine and Georgia in the frame of the project “Tension between aspirations and reality in age groups” is a part of the research project funded by INTAS (Ref. Nr 04-79-7323). The 2005 study was done with samples, which were representative of four main regions of each country and the size of living units there. The sample size was 920 school graduates in Ukraine and 939 respondents in Georgia.

Life strategies

The question about the preferred life strategies were formulated in the following way: “You have told us about your future plans. In order to fulfill these plans, would you agree: (11 options listed below). Answers are coded on a three-point scale (1 – “No”, 2 – “Difficult to say, yes or no”? 3 – “Yes”. Following the literature (Magun and Engovatov 2004). The answers are grouped in two types:

(1) Life quality restrictions strategy (LQRS – abbreviation used in Figures 1 and 2): (“would you agree”) to work under unhealthy conditions (LQRS-1), to work in the condition of frequent separation with family (LQRS-2), to frequently change place of living because of work (LQRS-3), to do hard manual labor (LQRS-5), to work under inclement climate conditions (LQRS-6), to do routine work (LQRS-8), to do dangerous work (LQRS-11) and to do work which demands fewer skills than those learnt (LQRS-12) in order to obtain life goals.

(2) Human capital accumulating strategy of (HCAS): readiness of respondent to study hard at an university (HCAS-4), to do responsible job (HCAS-7), to do interesting work for little reward (HCAS-9), to sacrifice free time, leisure for work (HCAS-10), to delay marriage until education and social status will be obtained (HCAS-13) or to change qualifications (HCAS-14) in order to obtain life goals.

Dependent variable

The index “social aspirations” is composed of four variables: (1) the desired level of complexity and creativity of future job: from routine work with strictly defined tasks to highly creative and independent work; (2) the desired position at future work place (from rank-and-file to top managerial position); (3) desired level of education and (4) of the social status in the future.

Independent variables

Objective measure is household property measured as an inversely proportional index of wealth (IPIW) invented by K. Zagorski (2005) [17]. In this study the index is constructed as follows: parental family possession of four items (binominal variables) – TV, car, video player, and computer – was recoded in such a way that each respondent, who reported the possession of an item, was assigned a value, which is inversely proportional to the percentage of those who possess it in the sample (say, TV possession receives the lowest value 5, if 95% of the interviewed have it). Then the sum of possession of four items was calculated. The obtained index varies from 0 to 142 in Ukraine, and 0 to 188 in Georgia. In such a way the largest values of the IPIW are assigned to those who have the largest set of the “deficit” or the most expensive goods.

Parental social status on self-esteem is coded in 1–10 scale (1 – very low, 10 very high).

The grades at school were coded as 5-point scale. Although Ukraine and Georgia gradually approved the 12-score system of grades, the options of an answer were collapsed in five categories that corresponded to conventional interpretations of grades by teachers which remained traditional 5-score: “12” – excellent, “9–12” good, “7–9” fair, “6–7” bad, “4–6” very bad.

Education of parents was coded on a 6-point scale, educational aspirations of school graduates was coded on a 5-point scale basing approximately on the years required for the attainment of a certain level of education. Scale of parental education contain one category – “8 classes of primary school”, code “1”, which is absent in coding of school graduates’ aspirations, since by definition they have already finished eight classes of secondary school.

Structural Equations Method

We applied the structural equation models (SEM) for national representative samples in Ukraine and Georgia for 2005 in order to find out principal determinants of social aspirations. The models explain the variation satisfactorily well with the help of the following independent variables: human capital accumulation strategy, life quality redaction strategy, school graduates’ scores at school, the property their parents possess and parental social status. This finding confirms well the hypothesis about strong and independent effect of the family material and social status on a part with success at school and life strategies on the height of social aspirations of a student. These five variables, when isolated, provided the best models for Ukraine and Georgia (Figures 1 and 2), which fits the data well – the Chi-squared ratio to number of freedom degrees does not exceed five.

The factors LQRS and HCAS correlate positively among each other (Pearson’s $r=0,6$ for Ukraine and $r=0,3$ for Georgia) that is the sign that two factors measure two dimensions that are not inseparable. However, LQRS influences negatively the social aspirations (for Ukraine $\beta = -0,31$ and for Georgia $\beta = -0,29$); HCAS influences positively (for Ukraine $\beta = 0,44$ and for Georgia $\beta = -0,45$). This means that those who aspired for higher status are not prone to such strategies as

doing low qualified, physically harmful work, work entailing constant migration, in other words to apply strategies that lowered living standards. In the Soviet Union these strategies were associated with the work “in the North” in oil-producing plants of the far north of Russia. At the same time, the strategy associated with the accumulation of human capital, correlates positively with high aspirations that possibly means high motivation to obtain high status via “middle class” strategies: to study hard at university, to change qualifications, to delay marriage, to sacrifice free time. The only strategy of obtaining life goals that in previous studies of Magun was a component of HCAS and is not correlated to endogenous factor of HCAS in Ukraine in 2005 is doing interesting but low paid work (HCAS-9). This means that in Ukraine doing interesting but not properly paid job is no longer correlates with human capital accumulation. However, in Georgia the coefficient is relatively high and significant.

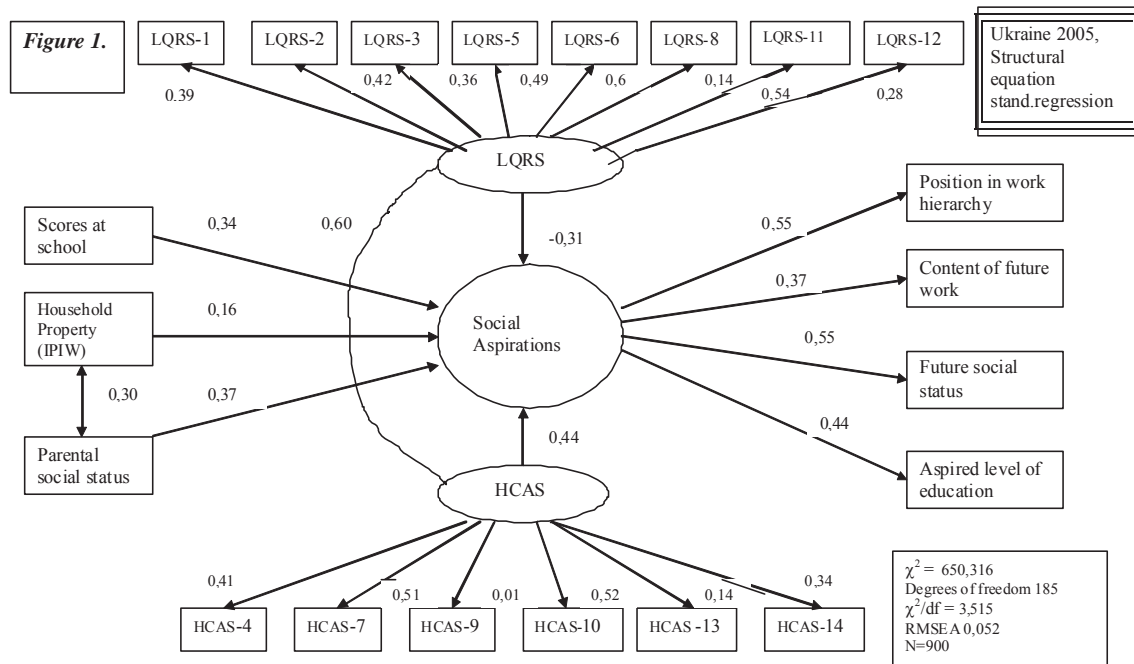
The aforementioned differences deserve comment as it refers to the difference between Ukraine and Georgia in the preference toward job content. It turned out that the Georgian high school students recognize the importance of doing interesting but low paid work as a means to obtaining their goals. However if Georgian students are asked about the preferred type of work task, they tend less to pick up creative work than Ukrainians, and they are even less inclined to do so if they are asked about the choice between interesting job and stable income. This is the sole difference between Georgian and Ukrainian school graduates, however it could point to different work value systems – those of entrepreneurial and bureaucratic type (Miller and Swanson 1958). It seems that Ukrainian school graduates constitute rather the former type for which initiative, creativity and risk are attributive, while Georgian school graduates probably lean more to a secure strategy, that implies as long-term goal high position in a society while interesting job is perceived as a mean to obtain this goal.

The important fact is that the predictors of social aspirations – perceived parental social status and property status, are independent from the effect of school grades and the readiness to accumulate human capital. This supports the Breen – Goldthorpe hypothesis about the effect of class on aspirations if we take household property and social status measured by subjective perception of parental status by their children. However, parents’ education does not explain school graduates aspirations. Therefore, if we take education as a proxy of social class that is obviously needed asset to educate children about their proper choice, the hypothesis does not hold. Since education of parents is not significantly correlated to the choice of life strategies, we can also reject the hypothesis of cultural capital inheriting: if a student has a strong motivation to study, this is not necessarily explained by education of his parents. In addition, we tested the effect of a number of books parental family possess as a proxy of cultural capital, however it did not help to improve a model.

Psychological hypothesis developed by Golovakha and Magun proves to be sound in Ukraine – in 20 years span life strategies seem to have an effect on aspirations, despite the fact of their divergence in early 1990-s. However, psychological theories of sex role socialization have not received their confirmation – sex proves to be irrelevant to social aspirations.

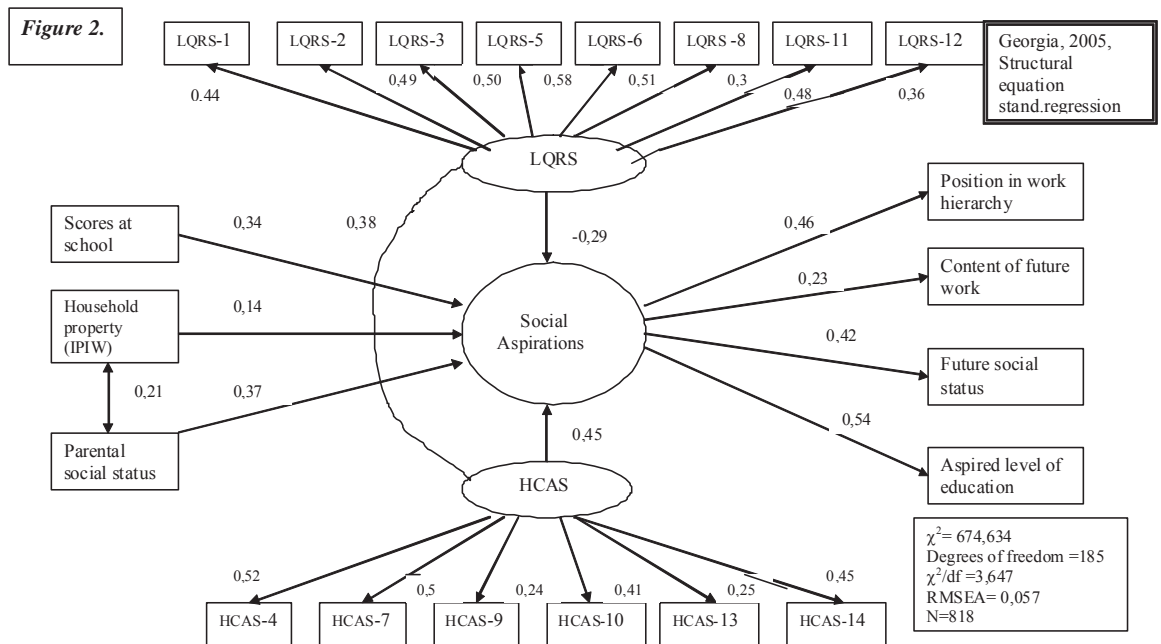
The differences between Ukrainian and Georgian models proved to be minor, besides one component of LQRS. Georgia has smaller values of coefficients of three components of social aspirations with the latent factor of “Social aspirations”. However, explanative part of both models is strikingly similar.

The Figure 1 presents b-coefficients with exception of two doubled-arrowed lines, which are Pearson’s correlations. All shown coefficients are significant at 1 % level with the exception of HCAS-9.



The Figure 1 presents β -coefficients with exception of two doubled-headed lines, which are Pearson's correlations. All shown coefficients are significant at 1% level with the exception of HCAS-9.

Figure 1.



The Figure 2 presents β -coefficients with exception of two doubled-headed lines, which are Pearson's correlations. All shown coefficients are significant at 1%.

Figure 2.

Conclusions

In the year 2005, school graduates developed their aspirations toward future social position based on their parents' social status and household wealth, and their success at school. An important variable that effects the height of aspirations is an approving of human accumulation strategy, in other words, a tendency to use high qualified work and acquiring of new skills as a way to obtaining the desired goal. Following the study by Magun and Engovatov we can say that the importance of life quality reduction strategy has decreased in 1995-2001. Our study shows that those who aspire to high position in a society would not likely pursue their goal working on manual and harmful jobs.

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Although Georgian school graduates show higher educational and positional aspirations than Ukrainians, there are no striking between-country differences in the models explaining aspirations. Only one aspect of human accumulation strategy, namely, readiness to do interesting but low paid work distinguishes the two models. This difference calls to further study of the aspirations toward job characteristics that could bring the researcher to explaining cultural differences in developing by the young the new ideas of decent and interesting life.

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