
LITHUANIAN CENTRE FOR SOCIAL SCIENCES
VYTAUTAS MAGNUS UNIVERSITY
KAUNAS UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

Asta
DILYTĖ-KOTENKO

**THE SUCCESSFUL PATHS TO HIGHER EDUCATION
FOR SOCIALLY VULNERABLE GROUPS**

Summary of Doctoral Dissertation
Social Sciences, Sociology (S 005)

Vilnius, 2024

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LINK AUKŠTOJO MOKSLO**

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INTRODUCTION

A person's position in the education system is determined by various factors. Ranging from structural factors - the choices available to a person in the education system, institutional conditions, the macro context (e.g. the economic conditions of the country), to the meso environment - the context of the family, the social, cultural environment, to individual factors - the person's aptitudes, motivation, preferences, choices - all these factors determine the person's achievements and qualifications in the education system. Lithuania's population is one of the most educated in Europe: in 2022, 61% of the population aged 30-34 had a higher or equivalent level of education (State Data Agency, 2023). Nevertheless, certain groups are more vulnerable in the education system, as they are under-represented in higher education and have a higher risk of underachievement. Socially vulnerable groups in the Lithuanian education system include people with at least one parent without a higher education qualification, low-income social groups, persons with disabilities, people living in distant rural areas, and national minorities (persons whose mother tongue is not Lithuanian language). These groups are socially vulnerable groups in the education system not because of these attributes per se, but because of structural barriers that often create unequal access to resources (e.g. quality education, necessary services) or create barriers to access these resources (Eurydice, 2023). Structural barriers are understood as the ways in which societies are organised, which lead to favourable or unfavourable conditions due to existing complex social categories and power (Eurydice, 2023). According to Gribačiauskas (2003), socially vulnerable groups in the education system are all students who, for one reason or another, are potentially (or actually) at risk of social exclusion at school. The aim is to increase the social mobility of socially vulnerable groups in the education system and to ensure the accessibility of higher education to different groups in society, since early leavers from the education system lack basic skills, risk encountering problems in the labour market, thus becoming an obstacle to economic growth, hindering the increase in the employment rate of the population, and aggravating poverty and social exclusion.

Studies conducted in Lithuania (Trakšelys, 2009; Lazutka, Navickė, 2010; Maksvytienė, Iljina ir Purvaneckienė, 2012; Daugirdas et al., 2013; Aleksandravičiūtė et al., 2014; Maksvytienė, Polgrimaitė, 2015; Liutkevi, 2015; Lithuanian Students' Union, 2017; Gasiūnaitės-Binkienė, 2018; Ruškus, 2020; Platūkytė, 2020; STRATA, 2022) and abroad (Johnston, 2010; Heath, 2015; Naldi et al., 2015; Hassani, Ghasemi, 2016; Dwyer, Sanchez, 2016; Serna ir Woulfe; 2017; Ebersold, 2017; Mendick et al., 2018; Šabić and Jokić longitudinal; 2019), studies have analysed the causes of stratification in education. Most existing studies (e.g. Liutkevi; 2015; Mikutavičienė; 2009; Iljina and Purvaneckienė, 2012) use quantitative research methods. There is a lack of qualitative studies that comprehensively analyse the factors determining social stratification and social mobility, as well as a lack of studies that comprehensively analyse the factors determining social stratification and social mobility in education and their interrelationships.

Social stratification exists in higher education, as it does in society as a whole. Unequal opportunities to study are not only present at the time of the decision to study and the attempt to enter higher education, but much earlier, even at school (e.g. due to the fact that the level of achievement of students differs according to their socio-economic context, place of residence), and possibly even at the earliest age, from the very start of the education system (e.g., the decision to attend, or access to a kindergarten can start to shape inequalities in the education system, as children begin to develop cultural and social skills in kindergarten, which are the basis for further schooling, and for the development of the social networks they have acquired, which can make it more difficult for those who do not attend kindergarten to catch up from the start of formal education). It is therefore important to analyse the path towards higher education of persons from socially vulnerable groups who have successfully achieved higher education studies.

It is important to analyse not only the differences in students' learning outcomes, which determine their access to education, but also the resources of the person that are more difficult to observe and measure - the social, cultural, economic context and institutional set-up. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1977) was one of the first to put forward the idea of unifying structuralist and phenomenological approaches to social phenomena in sociology through *habitus* and *disposition*. *Habitus* reflects the transfer

of objective structures into subjective patterns of an person's actions and thinking. Dispositions show patterns, positions, the relationship between the individual and the structure in the social field. Bourdieu (1984) and Putnam (2000) have also put forward the concepts of social, cultural and economic capital, emphasizing that the life chances of individual social groups can be determined not only by objectively acquired human capital, but also by social and cultural objects, interactions and relationships that are independent of individuals. There is a lack of evidence in the field of sociology that reveals the role of social, cultural and economic capital in social mobility in education. There is also a lack of knowledge about the practices of those who have succeeded in higher education, and what environmental factors helped them on their path to higher education. Concepts of cultural capital and habitus allow us to analyse the "soft" factors related to access to higher education, which include not only the officially visible parameters of accessibility (e.g. statistics representing the accessibility of education), but also the aspects related to the person's behaviour, practices, norms and the social environment. It is also important to pay attention to the institutional environment that determines the choices persons have in the education system.

Taking into account the aforementioned aspects, the scientific problem of the dissertation is the unequal representation of all social groups in higher education studies in Lithuania; unequal access to higher education for all social groups in Lithuania.

The aim of this dissertation is to investigate the successful paths of socially vulnerable groups towards higher education and to identify the institutional and subjective conditions that facilitated their access to higher education.

Dissertation objectives:

1. To systematically analyse the conceptualisation and interconnections between the phenomena of social stratification and social mobility in the education, as portrayed in the scientific literature, and to highlight their potential limitations;
2. To review different theoretical approaches to the phenomenon of social stratification and social mobility in the education system;

3. To analyse the features of the institutional structure of the Lithuanian education system and to identify stratifying aspects based on the theoretical approach of institutional analysis;
4. To investigate the path towards higher education of socially vulnerable groups in the education system, their social, economic, cultural capital and their development, as well as the circumstances of their decision to study.

Thesis statements:

1. In examining stratification in higher education, it is important to reveal the adaptation strategies of socially vulnerable groups to the field of education by analysing the development of their and their families' social, cultural and economic capital. Such an analysis reveals the conditions and factors necessary to achieve higher education and to help socially vulnerable groups succeed on their path towards higher education.
2. Social stratification in education is maintained through symbolic constraint, which manifests itself in: the underestimation of a person's learning potential by others, bullying and rejection by peers, and the forms of social control exercised by the field of education (structuring of time at school, rules, sanctions and incentives, the behaviour of teachers and administrators, career guidance, institutional rules).
3. If the person's social, cultural and economic capital is different from the requirements of the educational field, the person can achieve higher education if their environment (family, friends, relatives) has attitudes favourable to learning and the person himself/herself actively tries to fit in the educational field.

1. RELEVANCE OF THE DISSERTATION WORK

It is noted that the thesis provides in-depth insights into how socially vulnerable groups succeed in accessing higher education. The dissertation research analyses the consistent path of persons in the field of education. The dissertation allows us to reveal why people from socially vulnerable groups decide to study, how they adapt to the demands of the educational field, and what helps them on their path towards higher education. It is important to note that the thesis analyses the life path of persons in the education system until they enter higher education. The situation of persons in higher education is not analysed, as the study aims to find out how persons get to higher education. The thesis also provides new insights into the social stratification of different groups in society and how it can decrease. The dissertation study analyses the life experiences of persons aged 19-29 (i.e. persons born between 1993 and 2003). The significance of the analysis of this generation is that it has undergone the transformation of the democratic education system in Lithuania, with the introduction and adoption of legislation regulating the Lithuanian education system based on principles of democracy and nationality, the new content of education. The dissertation also contributes to the scientific knowledge on social, cultural and economic capitals, the consistent process of their formation, the ways of symbolic constraint that support stratification in the education system, and possible strategies for overcoming it.

2. THEORETICAL APPROACH TO THE DISSERTATION

The theoretical approach of E.Ostrom, S.Crawford's *institutional analysis* and P.Bourdieu's *capital, habitus* and *field* theoretical approach has been chosen to analyse the successful paths of socially vulnerable groups towards higher education. Elinor Ostrom and Sue Crawford's (1995) institutional analysis approach describes institutions as generally accepted rules, norms or strategies that create incentives for certain behaviours to recur in certain *action situations*. The *action situation* (the person's choices in the education system) is revealed by seven types of institutions according to the institutional analysis approach: 1. position, 2. boundary, 3. authority, 4. aggregation, 5. information, 6. payoff, 7. scope (Polski, Ostrom, 1999). This theory allows for a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon of social stratification in the education system, the choices of persons in the education system, by identifying which actors are active in the education system (i.e., which actors are institutionally determined by the education system itself, e.g., persons with special needs, gifted children), what rights and obligations they have in the education system, what positions can be taken in the education system (e.g., what formal criteria need to be met in order to qualify for the position of a student), which actions can be taken by actors (e.g. what actions the actors can take (e.g. which educational programmes to choose) and how their choices relate to possible outcomes in the education system (e.g. whether choosing to follow a vocational training programme will still allow them to pass matriculation exams and qualify for university), what is the level of control that actors have over their actions (e.g., the extent to which actors are in control of their own choices (e.g. when they can choose their own learning programme), what information is available to actors (e.g. whether students are informed about the financing options for studies, their risks and their benefits), and the costs and benefits that actors may incur in making a decision (e.g. what are the costs of studying and the benefits of studying).

Bourdieu's theoretical approach of *capital, habitus* and *field* emphasises that persons act in certain fields and that their actions are structured by their *habitus* and *dispositions*. *Field* is a system of objective, historically formed

relations between positions based on certain forms of power (capital). Actors are socially constructed and act within the framework of the field, relying on the capitals they need to be effective in a given field (Bourdieu, Wacquant, 1992). Agents' strategies depend on their position in the field, i.e. their position in the sharing of specific capital, and on their perception of the field, which depends on their position in the field determined by their attitude towards the field (Bourdieu, Wacquant, 1992). The capital held, its structure and *habitus* differ between the members of different social classes, as people build their vision of the imagined future according to their current class position (Dumais, 2005). Persons with similar inherited or family capital have more or less similar possibilities in terms of the trajectories they can follow (Bourdieu, 1984).

One of the fields is the education system. Bourdieu (1973) argued that educational institutions reproduce social inequalities by creating a particular environment in which the most valuable form of capital is the cultural capital. The higher one rises in the field of education, the more one needs cultural capital that corresponds to the field of education and to general cultural norms (Wacquant, 2003). Persons striving for academic success in the field of education are confronted with a selective and often hierarchical institutional conditions in the education system (Alexiadou, 2015). Researchers (Alanen, Siisiäinen, 2016) highlight the duality of the social field of education, which both reproduces social inequalities and has the potential to be emancipatory, through educational content that is close to real life and universal pedagogy. While Bourdieu (1973) emphasises the factors that determine the behavior of persons, which are shaped by the social structure, he also recognises the possibility for persons to choose their own path in the educational field. In any social world, those who are dominated can always claim some power, since belonging to the field by definition means that anyone can produce effects in it (Bourdieu, Wacquant, 1992). Bourdieu (1973) points out that even with the cultural capital required by the field of education, a child's chances in the educational system also depend on the school.

These theories are complementary in that they interpret the phenomenon of inequality in education in different ways and emphasise different causes: individual choice and socially reproduced differences in cultural capital.

According to the theoretical approaches adopted, persons' achievement in higher education is determined by:

- the absence of physical, economic, legal and psychological constraints, which results in a wide range of logical choices for the person, as well as the person being fully informed about the benefits and costs of the choice of higher education, valuing the benefits to be gained in the long term more highly than those that are currently available (the perceived lifetime payoff of higher education), access to such a social environment that encourages the acquisition of higher education (a person is expected to acquire higher education);
- the ability to acquire the missing cultural capital, to change one's *habitus* and to adapt to the requirements of the *field* of higher education (acquiring cultural capital that is valued in this field).

3. DISSERTATION METHODOLOGY

In line with the aim and objectives of the dissertation research, an empirical study was conducted. The methodology used in the dissertation research follows. The research design of this dissertation is based on an inductive methodological approach, which assumes that the research result is an extension of an existing theory. The dissertation research is based on qualitative inquiry, which is characterised by a process of data induction that generalizes the data collected in the field of research. In order to achieve the aim of the dissertation, a content analysis of the documents (legislation) and a content analysis of the data gathered from semi-structured interviews with socially vulnerable groups were conducted. The content analysis of the documents was aimed at identifying the formal paths of access to higher education and analysing the features of the institutional conditions of the Lithuanian education system. For this purpose, the official legal acts of the Republic of Lithuania regulating the actors of the education system, their opportunities and constraints, costs and benefits, the boundaries of their activities, the levels of the education system and the requirements for reaching the different levels of the education system (up to higher level), the documents regulating the aids for students were analysed. The legislation was analysed using the axial coding method of document content analysis, following the theoretical approach of institutional analysis by Elinor Ostrom and Sue Crawford (1995). This approach was chosen because it allows for an objective analysis of formal institutions, how they structure the set of choices of persons through the activities that are permitted and prohibited for persons.

Another method used in the dissertation research is content analysis of data collected from semi-structured interviews with socially vulnerable groups. The aim of this part of the dissertation research is to identify the paths of persons from socially vulnerable groups in the education system and the process of development of their social, cultural and economic capital. To achieve this, semi-structured interviews have been conducted with people from socially vulnerable groups who have been successful in accessing higher education. The interviews were conducted according to interview guidelines developed by the researcher based on Pierre Bourdieu's

cultural capital, *habitus* theoretical approach. The participants were chosen on the selection based on selected criteria. Selection criteria: persons are: from families where at least one parent does not have a higher education qualification; the informants themselves have attained a higher education qualification (studying or have completed their studies), are aged 19-29 years (born 1993-2003) and meet at least one of the following criteria for a socially vulnerable group in education: coming from a distant rural area; having a disability; coming from a low-income family; from the national minorities. A total of 21 semi-structured interviews have been carried out (interviews lasted between 45 and 100 minutes). It is noted that only 3 informants were representing persons with disabilities or from national minorities in the dissertation research because it was difficult to find representatives of these social groups. The small sample of participants of these social groups in the study does not allow to draw detailed conclusions about the path of representatives of these social groups towards higher education, their position in the education system. The data array collected during the semi-structured interviews was analysed by qualitative content analysis using the principle of open coding to extract sub-categories and categories emerging from the data array and to categorise, compare, conceptualise.

4. DISSERTATION RESEARCH RESULTS

The empirical study of the thesis has led to the following results, which are discussed below.

The theoretical reviewing of the scientific literature analysing social stratification and social mobility in the education system, reveals:

1. Social stratification can be measured in terms of various aspects (education, income, employment, social, cultural, economic capital; measured in subjective or objective criteria); stratification in the education system is linked to institutional rules, the school environment (type of school attended, schools' social composition, teachers' behaviour and attitudes, routines, norms, emotional environment, support in the educational process and in studies), access to information about studies and financial support, opportunities for extracurricular activities, financing and the cost of living while studying, and the person's living environment and the access to social, cultural, educational services in it. It is also related to the person's family context (socio-economic background, access to learning opportunities, involvement in children's learning, parental attitudes and values), the learners' own attitudes and perceptions of their own learning opportunities, uneven parental involvement in their children's education, financial barriers, cultural and linguistic barriers. Reducing social stratification requires ensuring opportunities for social mobility through accessible education.
2. There is a lack of knowledge about the process of social mobility in the education system and the factors that promote it.

An analysis of the institutional conditions of the Lithuanian education system suggests the following:

1. Higher education in Lithuania can be achieved through different paths (a continuous path - immediately after completing secondary education, or after vocational training alongside secondary education, or after completing vocational training after secondary education, completing secondary education in an adult school, additional work experience, volunteering, or basic military training). Special education programs in general education prolong the path to higher education, as it requires additional time to complete general education programs.

2. Choices in the education system are constrained by: place of residence, the school network, fees for certain education services, age, learning achievements, aptitudes, special educational needs, language, health, financial resources;
3. Opportunities to become a student are limited by: an person's learning achievements, aptitude, motivation, previous learning experiences and financial resources. It is also constrained by the costs associated with: personal initiative, information-seeking skills (e.g. interest in vocational guidance services, social support opportunities), necessity to achieve a high level of learning achievement, financial/administrative literacy (the ability to assess the grants and loans available to students in vocational education and training, and to assess one's ability to access them, as well as to fill in the paperwork needed to access them); and access to higher education is also limited by the rules governing the process of applying for admission to university (e.g. exams can only be retaken after one year, meeting certain academic requirements for entry, i.e. sufficiently high exam results).
4. The pursuit of higher education is also supported by: accessible information on career and learning opportunities, learning and financial support conditions, support from career specialists and social educators in choosing a learning path, social support for learners, soft loans for students, and facilitated admission for persons with congenital or acquired disabilities.

The empirical research of the dissertation has identified the process of capital development of socially vulnerable groups, the motives for choosing higher education:

1. Their path to higher education was mostly continuous (i.e. without breaks between formal education and studies). Critical points in their biographies that led the informants to change their path in the education system were related to: family circumstances (death of one or both of the parents, divorce, change of residence), employment of parents/guardians/carers, taking a child into care. As well as the circumstances of the educational establishment (e.g. changing schools due to bullying) or the availability of schools, changes in the school network.

2. Members of the family of the socially vulnerable groups who had achieved higher education had low levels of social, cultural and economic capital, but their families had attitudes favourable to learning.
3. The social, economic and cultural capital of those in socially vulnerable groups who have achieved higher education was different from that of their peers at the beginning of formal education and did not meet the requirements of the educational field. The educational field demanded from persons: acceptable norms, active participation in classes, effort to study, improvement in learning, good studying results, observance of school rules and regulations, sociability.
4. The field of education, the environment, the family supported social stratification in education through symbolic constraint:
 - a. The education field controlled the informants through: time structuring at school, rules, sanctions and incentives, behaviour of teachers and school administrators, vocational guidance, institutional rules.
 - b. The informants were controlled by their peers through: bullying, exclusion. The informants' environment in some cases had low expectations of them, did not believe that the informants could achieve anything.
 - c. Forms of social control used in the family include: banning the child from attending extracurricular activities or going out with friends or from going to school events, giving ultimatums, and controlling the child's homework. Such social control reflected a lack of confidence in the person's ability to learn and restricted certain practices of persons in relation to the development of social capital.
5. Informants also faced specific challenges due to their family's low income and living in a remote rural area. Those who grew up in low-income families faced financial challenges (lack of resources for education, not being able to pay for their own studies if they did not get a state-funded study place; lack of resources for personal needs), lack of resources prevented them from having the same leisure time activities as their peers, most of them started to work while still studying in school (during summer vacations), they needed financial support from the state in order to be able to study, and they were often felt underestimated by

others. Those who grew up in remote rural areas experienced challenges in education due to lack of social, cultural services, more frequent need to change class or school due to shrinking school networks, poor public transport links, and fewer non-formal education opportunities than in urban areas. Informants highlighted that remote rural areas have an unfavourable social environment, that classmates have lower career expectations when attending schools in remote rural areas, and that some informants subjectively perceived the quality of education in schools to be poor.

6. The person had to restrict themselves in order to adapt to the demands of the educational field, control their behaviour in order to meet the demands of the educational field, hide their social origin so that it would not betray their otherness from their peers, demonstrate their worthiness to occupy a high position in the educational field through their social activity, trying to keep up with their peers, feeling the norm of scarcity (matching their needs to the opportunities available to them), and practicing a certain attitude, appropriate to the field of education (psychologically pushing themselves to participate in various activities, convincing themselves that studying is beneficial).
7. People from socially vulnerable groups who had achieved higher education reacted to symbolic constraint with the following strategies: distancing themselves from it (e.g. not communicating with peers, truancy, etc.), rebelling (e.g. dressing in a defiant manner, confronting teachers, etc.) or adapting to it. The strategy of adaptation to the educational field is revealed by the process of development of social, cultural and economic capitals:
 - a. Social capital is developed by: through socialising, forming a network of close, long-term friends and gaining their support (e.g., friends encouraged them to communicate with others, to express their opinions, to join social organisations); through close relationships with family members (brothers, sisters, relatives), teachers; through participation in social activities, extracurricular activities, by making use of the existing social infrastructure (social organisations, other organisations where informal learning can take place, e.g. the police; day-care centres, students' parliament). Also by engaging

- hobbies with their parents/guardians. In the process of developing social capital, persons' psychological resilience and responsibility were manifested, which could support the person to adapt to the educational field;
- b. Economic capital was developed: through friends sharing their economic resources (e.g. friends' family inviting the child to go on holiday together, buying books, etc.), through engaging in work activities while still studying at school (e.g. during the summer holidays), through financial literacy (e.g. saving, prioritising purchases), taking advantage of informal financial support from those around them (relatives, teachers) (e.g. waiving of club fees); taking an interest in and making use of available financial support opportunities (e.g. social grants, study loans, additional financial support from some higher education institutions).
 - c. Cultural capital was developed: through studying, attending cultural institutions, attending events with friends, favourable attitudes of friends (according to the informants, friends supported them through encouraging them to learn, to get to know themselves, their own inclinations), using the cultural resources available in their environment (libraries, music/art schools, clubs, museums, cultural centres etc., music recordings, instruments available at home), reading books, drawing, attending extracurricular activities, music/art schools, attending usually free cultural events and institutions available in their place of residence. According to the informants, they were motivated to attend extracurricular activities by various aspects: the example of others (e.g. attendance by friends), encouragement from others; the desire to develop their interests; the possibility of obtaining certain benefits or symbolic capital (e.g. peer recognition). The informants felt that the family had a favourable attitude towards the development of cultural competence: the family was usually supportive of their cultural inclinations (finding a way to provide musical instruments for the child; attending the child's concerts, exhibiting his/her drawings, providing funds to go on excursions organised by the school), encouraging them to attend extracurricular activities, or at least supporting their own initiative in attending

the extracurricular activities they wanted to attend, creating the conditions for their learning, and having high expectations for their learning results. They wanted the child to do well in school because they saw education as the only way for children to improve their social position. According to the informants, in order to achieve high results in the field of education, they made considerable effort in their studies (e.g. extracurricular activities, preparing for exams, participating in academic contests).

8. Persons from socially vulnerable groups who had reached higher education, had already adapted their capital to the demands of the educational field at the end of their formal education, and had similar attitudes to their peers, i.e. they were good students, wanted to study.
9. Persons from socially vulnerable groups who had achieved higher education made the decision to continue their education beyond formal schooling and to study in higher education. According to the informants, this decision was based on the following motives: the need for self-fulfilment, improvement, the desire to work in a meaningful and interesting job, professional aspirations (e.g. career opportunities), the desire to broaden their perspectives, the desire for high salary, the desire to prove their ability to learn to others, the desire to overcome a certain stigma (social control), and the desire to get out of a negative environment in which some of them were raised and to become independent. The decision to continue their education was based on: positive role models, favorable conditions of admission, the availability of financial support, the possibility to study free of charge, and the organisation of higher education institutions (e.g. accessibility of studies for people with disabilities). The motives for choosing a specific profession through which to pursue their desire to study were: the desire to develop hobbies and strengths; labour market needs.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The dissertation analyses the social mobility of people from socially vulnerable groups in the education system, and the results of the dissertation allow us to identify aspects of the education system, the educational institution, the neighbourhood, the social network, and the family, which help people from socially vulnerable groups in the education system to achieve high results despite the risks they may face. Therefore, the author of the dissertation provides recommendations to education policy makers on how to improve the Lithuanian education system in order to ensure equal opportunities in the education system and to increase the accessibility and inclusiveness of higher education.

Recommendations for education policy makers and practitioners:

- Maintain the accessibility of cultural institutions (libraries, cultural houses), social institutions (day-care centres, youth centres, social welfare institutions), formal and non-formal education institutions (music/art schools, non-formal education groups), services (e.g. amateur music collectives), and non-governmental organisations (e.g. Riflemen's Union) in distant rural areas, as they make it possible for people from socially vulnerable groups to volunteer, make social contacts, and get the help they need;
- Continue providing free school meals and learning supplies, as this motivates children from low-income families to go to school;
- Expand career guidance by helping students to identify their strengths, informing all students about the conditions for admission to studies, the criteria for gaining extra points for entry to higher education, the conditions for taking the matriculation exams (e.g. the possibility of adapting them for people with disabilities), the opportunities available for financial support, financing studies, and adapting studying conditions for people with disabilities, and increasing financial and administrative literacy to make it easier for people to take advantage of these opportunities;

- Develop an empathetic attitude among teachers towards all pupils, as it is important that teachers do not exclude socially vulnerable pupils, that teachers are friendly, that they adapt their teaching methods to the needs of the pupils, and that teachers believe in their potential to succeed;
- Maintain financial support opportunities for students (soft loans to cover tuition fees or the costs of living, social grants) and consider less strict conditions for their loss, as the social grant may be the only means of livelihood for a student from a low-income family; and strict limits on when the social grant can be revoked above a certain income threshold discourage the students from earning additional income (maintaining the poverty trap); maintaining benefits for children in care as a means to encourage them to learn and study;
- Encourage higher education institutions to develop additional financial support measures for high-achieving students from socially vulnerable groups who have not received a state-funded study place, such as additional grants to cover all or part of the tuition fees;
- Develop a positive microclimate in educational institutions, based on mutual respect among members of the school community and the involvement of students in the decision-making process at school;
- Introduce additional measures to help those who are socially vulnerable groups in the field of education due to multiple simultaneous risks (e.g. children in care living in distant rural areas; children of low-income families living in distant rural areas).

Keywords: socially vulnerable groups, higher education, cultural capital, education, stratification, social mobility.

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Doktorantūros studijų metu ji buvo įsitraukusi į Lietuvos socialinių mokslų centro Sociologijos instituto veiklą, pvz., buvo jo organizuotos ISA RC19 tarptautinės mokslinės konferencijos „Challenges to social policy in the Covid-19 and (post)Covid recovery period: implications, solutions and innovations“ organizaciniame komitete.

A. Dilytė-Kotenko mokslinio pranešimo pagrindu Lietuvos nacionalinio radijo ir televizijos puslapyje buvo išspausdintas mokslo populiarinimo straipsnis „Nelygybė universitetuose – kodėl daliai aukštasis mokslas prieinamas sunkiau nei kitiems?“. Be to, ji viešino savo atliktų tyrimų rezultatus Lietuvos socialinių mokslų centro Sociologijos instituto mokslo populiarinimo leidinyje „Socialiniai tyrimai trumpai“.

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During her doctoral studies, Asta Dilytė-Kotenko carried out science popularization activities, for example, the web page of the Lithuanian National Radio and Television published the article on the basis of her scientific report called “Inequality in universities - why is access to higher education more difficult for some than for others?”. She also publicized her study results in the publication of the Institute of Sociology of the Lithuanian Centre for Social Sciences called “Social studies in brief”, which is dedicated to the popularization of science.

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