



## Education and Schooling in Society: Spatial Accessibility and Social Justice (Editorial Commentary)

František Križan<sup>1</sup>, Silvie Rita Kučerová<sup>2</sup>, Janetta Nestorová Dická<sup>3</sup>, Michala Sládeková Madajová<sup>1,4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Regional Geography and Regional Development Faculty of Natural Sciences, Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia, [frantisek.krizan@uniba.sk](mailto:frantisek.krizan@uniba.sk), [michala.sladekova@uniba.sk](mailto:michala.sladekova@uniba.sk)

<sup>2</sup> Department of Geography, Faculty of Science, Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem, University in Ústí nad Labem, Czechia, [silvie.kucerova@ujep.cz](mailto:silvie.kucerova@ujep.cz)

<sup>3</sup> Institute of Geography, Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice, Košice, Slovakia, [janetta.nestorova-dicka@upjs.sk](mailto:janetta.nestorova-dicka@upjs.sk)

<sup>4</sup> Institute of Geography, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava, Slovakia, [geogmada@savba.sk](mailto:geogmada@savba.sk)

### Abstract

*This editorial commentary introduces the thematic issue Education and Schooling in Society: Spatial Accessibility and Social Justice, which focuses on the geography of education and the spatial dimensions of educational inequalities. The contributions in this issue analyse the historical and contemporary dimensions of educational inequalities, focusing on the spatial accessibility of educational institutions, school choice, demographic change, suburbanisation, parental involvement, and regional disparities in educational attainment. The editorial identifies three cross-cutting themes emerging from the contributions: the persistence of historical path dependencies, the growing mismatch between educational infrastructure and societal dynamics, and the role of education as both a mechanism of social mobility and a potential source of social and spatial inequalities. The thematic issue highlights the importance of geographical perspectives for understanding educational processes and for developing more equitable, inclusive, and place-sensitive educational policies.*

### Key words:

geography of education,  
spatial accessibility,  
social justice,  
educational inequalities,  
school infrastructure,  
educational policy

Education constitutes one of the key pillars of social and regional development. Nevertheless, its accessibility and quality remain markedly differentiated across space and among social groups. Although educational systems are frequently declared a public policy priority, empirical evidence indicates persistent inequalities in access to education, shaped by demographic, economic, cultural, and geographical factors. In response to these challenges, the editorial board of *Geographical Journal* (*Geografický časopis*) has prepared the thematic issue *Education and Schooling in Society: Spatial Accessibility and Social Justice*, aimed at stimulating discussion on the relationship between education, the spatial organisation of society, and social justice. The selected contributions are published in Issues 2 and 3.

The individual studies share a common grounding in the geography of education, a perspective that emphasises how spatial conditions fundamentally shape educational processes, institutions, and inequalities. Education should therefore not be understood as a homogeneous system, but rather as a dynamic structure formed by historical development, current political decisions, and the everyday practices of actors operating within specific places and regions.

The thematic section opens with a historical-geographical analysis by D. Guriňák and A. Švecová, who examine the development of the nursery school network in former Czechoslovakia during the period 1945–1989. The authors demonstrate that significant regional disparities emerged and persisted even

under conditions of centralised planning. Historical legacies thus continue to shape the current structure and regional inequalities of pre-primary education.

Building upon this historical context, several contributions analyse contemporary processes of differentiation within educational systems. P. Meyer highlights the dynamics of primary school choice in Czechia, manifested in increasing differentiation between schools and potentially contributing to the reproduction of social inequalities. School choice thus appears not only as an individual parental strategy, but also as a dynamic process with substantial implications for the differentiation of the educational system itself.

One of the central themes of the thematic issue concerns the accessibility of pre-primary education facilities. J. Výboštok and F. Križan analyse the accessibility of nursery schools in Bratislava and identify so-called “childcare deserts”. Their findings reveal that even under conditions of relatively sufficient overall pre-school capacity, substantial intra-urban inequalities in accessibility persist, disproportionately affecting socially disadvantaged groups.

The study by Q. W. Ahmed and A. Rönkä addresses the social and cultural dimensions of education and examines cooperation between families and schools in rural Pakistan. The findings indicate that socio-economic marginalisation, gender norms, and low levels of parental education significantly constrain parental involvement in the educational process.

Simultaneously, the lack of trust between parents and teachers exposes broader structural barriers hindering the implementation of inclusive and equitable education.

A broader demographic and societal perspective is provided by the analysis of B. Šprocha, who examines the transformation of Slovakia's educational structure among the population between 1991 and 2021. The results document a substantial increase in educational attainment, while also highlighting persistent, and in some cases deepening, regional disparities that may constrain the development potential of certain territories and reproduce existing inequalities.

In another case study, A. Majerík, J. Výboštok, and A. Švecová analyse the accessibility of nursery schools in the suburban hinterland of Bratislava. Using detailed spatial data, they reveal a mismatch between the dynamics of residential suburbanisation and the development of social infrastructure in suburban regions. Suburbanisation therefore creates not only new residential spaces, but also new forms of inequality in access to essential services.

The need to anticipate future developments is further emphasised in the study by J. Nestorová Dická, L. Novotný, L. Pergi, and M. Kulla, which models future demand for school capacities within the Košice urban region. Combining demographic projections with investment scenarios, the authors demonstrate that suburbanisation processes and new investments may substantially alter the spatial distribution of demand for educational infrastructure. The contribution highlights the importance of demographic forecasting and investment impulses for the strategic planning of educational infrastructure.

Issues of accessibility are also critically examined in the study by M. Sládeková Madajová and M. Šveda which focuses on the comparison between normative and functional catchment areas of nursery schools in Slovakia. The results show that administratively defined catchment areas often fail to correspond to actual commuting patterns, leading to spatial mismatches between the supply of and demand for education. This discrepancy underscores the need to combine multiple planning approaches and better reflect the population's real spatial behaviour.

Finally, D. Dvořák analyses spatial inequalities in access to foreign language teaching at the lower secondary level in Czechia. While English language instruction has become almost universal, the provision of additional languages varies considerably across regions, settlement sizes, and school types. The dominance of German and Russian, combined with the limited availability of other languages, reflects not only historical ties but also differing school capacities and institutional profiles. The study therefore demonstrates that place of residence shapes not only access to education, but also its content, thereby extending debates on educational justice to include the dimension of curricular accessibility.

Through these thematic contributions, *Geografický časopis / Geographical Journal* advances the geography of education as an interdisciplinary field of research while simultaneously offering an analytical framework for understanding one of the key challenges of contemporary society – unequal access to education. The principal shared findings of these contributions may be summarised as follows:

*Temporal continuity and historical legacy.* Several contributions suggest that regional disparities in education cannot be understood as accidental outcomes of contemporary development. Historical path dependency plays a crucial role, shaping the spatial distribution and accessibility of schools, as well as the access of different population groups to quality education. These differences manifest themselves not only quantitatively, for example, in school capacity, but also qualitatively and structurally, including the availability of foreign language teaching and specialised educational programmes.

*Mismatch between infrastructure and societal dynamics.* The authors repeatedly point to a growing mismatch between the rigidity of educational systems and the rapidly changing nature of society. This contradiction is evident, for instance, in migration processes, where suburbanisation and population shifts towards urban hinterlands occur more rapidly than the public sector can respond with adequate educational infrastructure. Attention is also drawn to the long-term neglect of spatial planning and demographic forecasting, as well as to the persistent tension between administratively defined school catchment areas and the principle of parental school choice.

*Education as an instrument of (in)justice.* Several contributions concur that educational systems in Slovakia, Czechia, and the broader international context frequently fail to fulfil their role as instruments of social mobility and opportunities for upward social advancement. Instead, schools often contribute to the preservation and deepening of social and spatial inequalities rather than to their mitigation and reduction.

Spatial inequalities in education are therefore reproduced and intensified across time and hierarchical scales.

Taken together, these contributions confirm that education is a socio-spatial phenomenon operating across multiple scales – from local communities to national and global processes. The geography of education thus provides a framework linking the micro-level experiences of pupils, parents, and teachers with the macro-level dynamics of policies, demographic trends, and economic structures. Contemporary research demonstrates that such interconnections are crucial for understanding both the reproduction and the mitigation of educational inequalities.

From a practical perspective, research in the geography of education highlights that effective educational policies cannot be universal; they must instead reflect regional and local specificities. The spatial accessibility of schools, pupil mobility, socio-economic conditions, and cultural contexts fundamentally shape the educational opportunities available to students. Consequently, the geographical perspective on education represents an essential tool for policymakers seeking to create a more equitable and inclusive educational system.