1. The scenario

In Barcelona, the body with primary responsibility for informing families in their first entry to the educational system is the *Consorci d'educació de Barcelona* (CEB). This organ is responsible for the information to families that join for the first time the system (3 year old children), but also for those who have to join a new centre in the change to the secondary school (12 year old kids). CEB is the provider of the administrative process to do so.

Each year in the pre-inscription process, with the collaboration of Barcelona's Council, CEB launches a campaign that adds value to public education underlining some of their core values. This campaign goes further than giving information to the citizens but ensures that each interested person knows their rights, the game rules, the educational offering and the procedure until they formalise the matriculation.

This double dimension of the communication process that CEB does leads to two types of communication products, in addition to the communication process of the educational centres themselves:

A. Service information: the bare minimum that each family has to know in order to ensure the right to schooling all children on equal terms.
B. Institutional communication campaign in order to bring to light every public school as a quality, innovative and inclusive centre.
C. Presentation of the own character of each school, in which every centre opens their doors to make known its equipment, teaching staff and the education project to the interested families.

In relation to the service information (A), CEB team pools with the *Departament d'educació de la Generalitat* as the organ who owns the regulatory competence regarding the matriculation and pre-inscription processes. CEB has the duty to pass on the regulation information to the educational centres and families. Base on this information the website is updated, informative sessions to management and administrative school staff are called and all the mechanisms needed to the pre-inscription process are launched (active mailing and sms, virtual apps, administrative support, special needs attention staff, video tutorials in order to get easy the process, translation on-line services, etc.)

In relation to the communication campaign (B), the local government offers their advertisement resources (street advertisements, media and social networks) and creates with the CEB a claim around the shared vision that has to organise all messages. For example, lately has been used *"Barcelona és una bona escola"* (Barcelona is a good school), *"En educació fem equip"* (In education we're a team) and this year *"Ens apuntem al futur"* (We're joining the future). At the same time, CEB calls for open doors to families in every educational zone to present the functioning of the educational system, pedagogical keys, basic services as scholarships, cantine and welcome classrooms to those in need, and strategic guidelines of educational policies. The main goal is to introduce the neighbourhood families to all the public founded educational centres as equal centres that share projects.

Last (C) , schools have the autonomy to launch open doors days, to update the presentation of its project on social, posting advertisements on its school and to directly call families to put in value its school the way they choose to.

2. Information contents

The contents of the educational offer information is available on the CEB website:

https://www.edubcn.cat/ca/alumnat_i_familia/informacio_general_matriculacio/preinscripcio_info

There families can look up for:

- Key dates
- Requirements in every educational stage and criteria to access centres
- Centres offer:
    - A link to a centre guide in which you can find ownership, stages, offer, the project, the services, equipment and fees.
    - A searcher based on proximity to the postal code.
- Informative sessions schedule and open days.

This information is also available in leaflets (translated to the most used languages in our city) that are distributed among every centre, nurseries, libraries and other information points.

In the website you can find a FAQS that are:

- How can we do the on-line procedures?
- How can we know which is the offer of school places?
- What is the area of influence?
- How do the proximity criteria and the point system work?
- Why is it important to think well about the first option?
- What happens after we submit the inscription?
- Which is the necessary documentation?
- Can we be left without seats/vacancy?
- Associated centres follow the same procedure?
- What do we do if we don't have digital resources or we need help in this area?

Other contents are:

- Those addressed to low-income families that have the right to occupy a seat in a prevention program against segregation and can have free fees even in associated centres.
- Information about food scholarships and other educational scholarships.
- Information about fees payment and the procedures, even if they are optional (in relation to private centres provided by public funding that demands voluntary contributions) or those in relation to service use (food, outings, scholar material). It is requested to publish this information on the website centres, but it isn't mandatory so there are many gaps in this area.
- Information to those families with children with special needs, disorders or disabilities about the inclusive educational resources in ordinary schools and specific schools offer (paying attention to the difference among these two).

3. Information channels

CEB adapts messages and canals further than the general channels of information in order to ensure access to information. There are different channels: the website, the support to schooling office (4 offices in Barcelona, open all year in the main office of CEB and in the 3 districts with more demand and 5 temporal offices for the pre-inscription period in the other districts), telephonic attention (012 and 010) and telematic, open doors activities organised by the centres and centres websites and those of parent-teacher association.

On informar-se

edubcn.cat
Consorci d'Educació
de Barcelona

preinscripcio.gencat.cat
Departament d'Educació

Oficines de suport
a l'escolarització
(cita prèvia)

Informació telefònica
012 i 010

Activitats de portes
obertes, webs i xarxes
socials dels centres

Famílies
i AFA

Until the 2020-21 academic year, the information campaign didn't differ between recipient families, with the exception of those who benefited from the Program against school segregation (Pla de Xoc), who got specific information about their participation in the program.

In the 2020-2022 year, for the first time an specific informative campaign has been launched for families with vulnerable children, with the claim "Barcelona is an open school full of opportunities and diversity" where it clearly appeared three main messages:

a) Seat reservation
b) Free-of-charge
c) Special support from professionals

This leaflet is made in different languages and can be used as a graphic support when interviewing with the ones working in the support schooling offices. Indeed, families who have been detected as a special educational need receive a personalized letter that informs them of their rights.

The pre-inscription process requires the participation of a high and various number of professionals:

- Headmasters, tutors, nursing, pre-school, elementary and secondary school counsellors.
- Social educators that work in educational centres.
- Social workers in Primary Care.
- Primary Care professionals.
- Telephonic attention CEB.
- Educational inspection.
- Territorial coordination.
- Social integration specialists
- Specialists for social inclusion of Roma students
- Informants at School Information Offices

Personalization of the messages and adaptation to each family profile is guaranteed with the specific formation of all these professionals, in order to share the values of an inclusive, diverse school and the policies driven to improve on equity terms.

4. Focus on different contents particularly relevant for school choice

In Barcelona, as in Spain, the reasons given by families to articulate their choice of school are widely diverse, especially if we consider the differences between groups with different social profiles. In this sense, the most common arguments coincide with those widely highlighted in the literature on school choice. These are the distance from the school to the home, the school's educational project, the facilities (building, gym, patio, etc.), the reputation (frequently used as a proxy for the school's social composition), the ownership of the institution (public or private) or the existence of relatives or friends who send their children to one or another school. However, access to this information is highly unequal. Not all families have the same opportunities to learn first-hand about the school's project or the characteristics of the families that participate; in the same way that not all families value the same issues in the same way.

Next, we proceed to develop in greater detail the main axes of choice 'wielded' by the families:

1. **Distance**. Distance. The distance from the school to the family home is the main element pointed out by families when considering the different school options. However, both the extensive literature on school choice and the evidence collected allow us to establish substantial differences in terms of this indicator between families with different social profiles. While for those families of lower socioeconomic status this element is a cornerstone of the election process, families with a higher socioeconomic and cultural level expand the considered limits of it, prioritizing other aspects such as the school project or social composition. In other words, they will be much more capable of traveling a greater number of kilometres to choose the school that they consider to be 'the best'. In the same way, geographical and urban aspects such as the location of the school (it is very far from the city/neighbourhood centre it has a nearby green area, or it is in an area that is difficult to walking

access) are key aspects when assessing this 'distance'. Thus, this axe will continue to be important for all families, although its conception will be relative and will depend on other factors.

2. **Educational project and Innovation**. The educational project is a key element when considering a 'good' school, especially for middle class families. Even more so in a context like the current one, where through educational innovation projects, schools seek to differentiate themselves more and more from one another. However, the ability to know and understand the pedagogical and organizational aspects on which educational institutions are articulated and their effects on student learning is not distributed equally among all families. Once again, families with a higher social and cultural status will have access to more information on this type of issue, allowing them to better articulate their final decision. In addition, the different family profiles tend to feel more attached to different types of school projects. While working-class families tend to be more attracted to traditional pedagogies, which allow them to better monitor their children's learning process, middle-class families tend to opt for more innovative methodologies. Finally, at the level of the school project, all those elements that have to do with the 'philosophy of the school' must be considered. The opening of the schools to the territory, the frequency of extracurricular activities, the number and use of green spaces, the evaluation methodology, the perception of the use of the discipline or the prevailing conception of learning, among a long etcetera, are some of the main elements that families regard before materializing their choice.

3. **Infrastructure and facilities**. Facilities are one of the most attractive (or demotivating) elements of school choice. These represent the most visible dimension of the school. Thus, those newly created schools, with greater investment in infrastructure and with a greater number of services available (own swimming pool, gym, large and beautiful patio) will increase their desirability in the eyes of families, to the detriment of those older and more deteriorated institutions. Another aspect related to the facilities has to do with the size of the institution. Those smaller schools, with less groups, which generate a greater sense of 'closeness' will be better valued by families than those giant schools, full of children, which will be seen as more depersonalized.

4. **School ownership**. Spain has three types of educational institutions according to their ownership: public, concerted, and private. This differentiation already supposes a first level of stratification/separation. Only those families who can afford to pay the fee will be able to access a non-public school. In the same way, some families opt for concerted or private schools as a mechanism of social closure or distinction (in an attempt at upward social mobility). In addition, there are extremely inaccessible elite schools that guarantee a highly culturally and socially segregated environment. Finally, there is a long tradition of private or concerted religious schools. This aspect continues to be a key factor for some particular families.

5. **School composition and reputation**. School composition is an extremely important factor when it comes to arguing for school choice, although it is usually 'not very visible'. Under the label of 'reputation' discourses are often hidden around the profile of students enrolled in each school. So, although it is an element that is not usually made public, most families (and especially those with a higher social profile) select and reject possible options based on this. Other elements that emerge in discourses on school choice and that hide attributions to social composition are "school conflict" or "educational level", among other aspects.

6. **Relatives and friends**. The existence of friends or relatives who provide information and experience about a specific school is an aspect widely valued by families when choosing. This knowledge is what is known as 'hot information'. These aspects are widely relevant among migrant families with low social and cultural resources since they have no other means of accessing information about schools than their network of direct contacts. However, it is a resource widely used by all families, regardless of their social profile, and it gives us important clues about the processes of choice based on homophily.

7. **Schooling costs**. Beyond the ownership of the schools (public or private), the schools offer widely diverse catalogues of activities, a fact that implies additional expenses that are equally unequal. For example, the costs of materials, school colonies/camps, school excursions/trips or extracurricular activities can be a key factor that impacts families' decisions, functioning as an exclusion factor for those families with fewer socioeconomic resources.

4.1 quality:

Access to information on the 'quality' of schools is highly uneven and depends, in most cases, on the resources that the interested family can mobilize. In the context of Barcelona, the first aspect to consider is the lack of objective data to measure the quality of the schools. Likewise, families use other indicators as a 'proxy' of the quality of the school. We will deal with some of these below and they have to do with various aspects such as: the grades in the basic skills tests, the neighbourhood where the school is located, the ownership of the institution or its social composition.

The main source of information about the schools, their staff, their institutional project, and the activities they carry out is the website. This can vary enormously according to the school, offering more or less information and making it more or less interesting. In the same way, not all families have the same facilities to use technological resources and 'navigate' through these sources of information.

The second source of information (and one of the most important for many families) is the Open School Day (OSD). This element is crucial to understand the information 'gathering' strategies developed by families with different social profiles. While some families barely attend one single open day, others who visit more than ten schools. In addition, these families tend to collect and systematize the information received in these workshops (for example, building an Excel of pros and cons) and even request to visit the schools again if they think there is some information that they should compare. In fact, this higher socioeconomic profile of the family that "invests" more time in visiting and getting to know schools usually requests personalized interviews with those schools that they have liked the most. In other words, they organize a strategy composed by different phases of choosing and discarding.

An interesting aspect related to the 'open days' has to do with the unequal conditions that the different schools have when organizing these events. On the one hand, some schools can count on the fingers of the hand the number of families that attend, reducing their interest and effort to carry out an attractive and colourful act. On the other hand, some schools not only have extensive lists of attendees but also take advantage of these sessions to carry out an attractive 'staging' that emphasizes their uniqueness through a highly attractive demonstration. School Open Day are seen as a tool to empower schools, in line with the impulse of school autonomy. Its rapid diffusion in its subsequent years to the entire educational field had ended promoting competitive practices between schools in order to attract pupils, getting closer to its functioning as an educational quasi-market. Through the enactment in School Open Day, differentiation

between schools is intensified. Schools uses these activities to show the characteristics of the different school models in the organizational aspect (services, extracurricular offer, fees…), Differences in the educational project are also part of these presentations (pedagogical profile, educational project singularity, solidity and sophistication transmitted, results obtained…). And, finally, some information refers to social composition, such as the social sector to which presentations are addressed, the linguistic code used, the social profile of the attending public or the expected parental engagement.

The third element that works as a source of information has already been commented on previously: friends and relatives attending school in the neighbourhood/city. The use of first-hand information is key to understanding certain school choice processes.

Finally, there are resources (such as municipal schooling offices) that provide guidance and support for schooling processes. These 'offices' help families that require it, although their use is rather descriptive, and their incidence is usually quite limited.

4.2 test-score:

In Barcelona, as in the rest of the country, there is no public information (rankings, lists or similar) about the scores of the schools or their classification. However, the schools themselves use the information they have on some key indicators when it comes to 'selling' themselves better at the open days. As if it were a marketing product, these institutions use to attract more and better families both the results obtained in standardized tests (at the end of primary and secondary education) and the percentage of students who access Baccalaureate or University, among other examples. Families with a better socioeconomic status tend to value these aspects very positively and consider them a central aspect when defining the 'quality' of an educational institution (much more than aspects such as diversity).

4.3 reputation:

The reputation of schools is, to a large extent, a clear indicator of both its quality (including here all the aspects discussed above about educational innovation) and its social composition. This plays a fundamental role when families consider one school or another: those schools with the worst reputation will be the least desired and vice versa.

In this sense, for some years initiatives have been carried out that try to reverse the bad reputation of the most segregated schools in the territory. An example of this is the 'Magnet Program'. Through partnership strategies with institutions of excellence, the aim is to give a 180º turn to the school project and improve its desirability and, consequently, the number and profile of families that choose the institution. However, the results are ambiguous (some schools manage to make this change, while others do not) and this transformation is complex and requires the parallel application of other measures that promote balanced schooling in the territory.

5. Conclusions

Families obtain information mainly from official sources (schools and CEB) and from informal channels (other families, neighbours...). In Barcelona, available information about schools refers to issues such as the pedagogical project, the schedules and complementary services (extracurricular activities, dining services...). There is no official information on the quality, the educational level or the social composition of schools, but it is available to families through more informal channels or through the observation during the School's open days.

The increase in school autonomy in recent years has led to an increase in the willingness of schools to organise information campaigns (mainly, schools' open days) to showcase their school project in order to attract new families. During these open days, schools show the characteristics of the different school models in terms of organization -schedule, complementary services, direct and indirect costs-, in terms of pedagogical project -singularities of the project, results…- and with regard to the kind of families they address -according to the language code used or the social profile of families attending the event-. The diversification of school offer produces a kind of competition among school -to attract more and most advantaged families- and among families -to get a sit in most desired schools.

While schools focus their information events in showing their own and specific educational projects, the local authority aims at explaining the general school offer of the city and the administrative process that families have to follow to book a school sit for their children. More recently, CEB has included the fight against segregations as part of their information plans.

In this sense, the different axes of choice 'wielded' by families are in themselves a clear aspect that generates inequality and segregation. On one hand, families with less socioeconomic and cultural resources choose by distance and by the presence of peers and relatives in schools. On the other hand, families with a higher social and cultural status strategically select those schools whose educational project will give them greater guarantees of success and those whose social composition is more similar to them (white flight strategies). So, as long as there continues to be a high correlation between the social profile and the factors of school choice, an unbalanced distribution of students will continue to be produced and reproduced. This is precisely the reason why it is essential to break, through 'new' forms of information, with some of these trends.

In order to establish information policies that are effective in the fight against school segregation, it is necessary to establish differentiated information campaigns according to the target audience. This implies taking into account the different interests, realities and goals of the different groups of families that shape the school ecosystem of each city.