



Transformation of extracurricular education in post-Soviet countries: from universal access to inequality

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ABSTRACT

Broad access to educational services and a universal enrolment policy were declared crucial elements of the Soviet extracurricular education model. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the process of transforming the Soviet model of extracurricular education began. This process included changes in management and financing mechanisms, the structure and scope of the network, and content and ideas. These changes have had a significant negative impact on the equality of opportunities for children in terms of participating in extracurricular activities.

The main purpose of this paper is to analyse the above-mentioned inequality in different aspects: territorial, gender and socio-economic. We are also interested in the representation of this problem in the educational policy agendas of post-Soviet countries. We use three data sources: regulation documents, national and departmental statistics, and semi-structured interviews with leading experts and heads of national organisations of extracurricular education in all 15 countries of the former Soviet Union. In addition, we identify common and specific features in the structure and factors of inequality in extracurricular education in post-Soviet countries. Despite the general increase in inequality, we observed increased client orientation and inclusivity in the extracurricular sector. We also note the trend of expanding access opportunities in some countries. We discuss the role of extracurricular educational inequality as a part of broader educational and socio-economic formation and development of inequality in the post-Soviet space.

1. Introduction

Today, the topic of inequality occupies a central place in the educational policy of modern states and in the education research agenda (Kurakin, 2020). In many ways, this is expressed as educational inequality, and it has been actively studied in modern education studies (Coleman et al., 1966; Dietrichson et al., 2017; Sirin, 2005). Educational inequality has many aspects: the uneven distribution of educational resources (Colclough, 2012), territorial inequality (Amini & Nivorozhkin, 2015), relatively new digital inequality (Stern, Adams, & Elsasser, 2009) and class inequality (Bourdieu, 1977). The challenge in ensuring equality of educational opportunities relates not only to the sphere of morality and justice; it is also, to a large extent, a question of the economic well-being of countries (Yang & Qiu, 2016). Ensuring equal access to education for all children, regardless of their families' social, economic and cultural statuses, is considered a critical goal of education in the modern world (UNESCO, 2016).

Inequality in extracurricular education is a significant research topic focused on the inequality of access and the peculiarities of children's participation, depending on children's level of education, income and territory of residence (Lareau & Weininger, 2008; Lareau, 2015). Studies have found that children from low-income and less-educated families are less involved in extracurricular activities (Covay & Carbonaro, 2010; Bennett, Lutz, & Jayaram, 2012). By engaging in such classes, they are likelier to participate in school-based programmes, while their peers from middle-income families are more involved in the system of classes (activities) outside school, as their choices are not conditioned by territorial factors (Kosaretsky, Kupriyanov, & Filippova, 2016). Inequality itself, in the context of extracurricular activities, is associated with various factors (territorial, socio-economic and informational), which, due to the non-mandatory and non-guaranteed nature of this type of activity at the level of national legislation, create additional risks in terms of social stratification (Snellman, Silva, & Putnam, 2015; Weininger, Lareau, & Conley, 2015). At the same time, extracurricular

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education is considered from the perspective of its potential to expand access and create an inclusive educational environment (Schaefer, Simpkins, & Ettekal, 2018).

We use the term “extracurricular education” to level out the definitions of relevant practices in different countries. By extracurricular activities, we mean classes that are not mandatory according to state educational standards and are not included (in terms of content) in school curricula. We do not consider tutoring or clubs. Extracurricular activities in our research include sports, arts and crafts, science, STEM and robotics, tourism and eco-literacy programmes, and professional programmes provided by railways and marine companies. These activities are conventional for the extracurricular sector and are considered educational (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Ivanov, 2021). Primarily, we consider inequality in extracurricular education at the country level as including differences in access to services and coverage of activities. Since extracurricular education sector data are collected in a smaller volume and have country-specific characteristics, cross-country comparisons are available only for the main parameters (extracurricular activities enrolment rate, including participation rate in school-based and community-based activities; number of private providers of extracurricular activities including participation rate in such activities; gender and territorial distribution of children’s participation in extracurricular activities).

The potential of extracurricular education in overcoming social inequality is also considered in the context of its impact on academic performance and school dropout rates, the socialisation of schoolchildren and the development of social skills (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). At the same time, the peculiarities of the formation and manifestation of inequality in extracurricular education are not fully known. It has a little-studied connection with the structure, regulation and transformation of national extracurricular education sectors. Meanwhile, these studies have a two-sided value, allowing one to see, on the one hand, a significant but often hidden part of educational inequality, and on the other hand, to use the knowledge gained for a deeper understanding of the functions of educational systems.

There are several studies on the topic of overall educational inequality during the Soviet Union era and right after it (Eklof et al., 2004; Konstantinovskiy, 2008). The issues are relevant in the post-Soviet transition, which exacerbated the problem of social stratification during this time of institutional turbulence (Kosaretsky, Grunicheva, & Goshin, 2016). The study of transitional processes in extracurricular education in post-Soviet countries is also crucial to the development and education of children (Chankseliani, 2017). Extracurricular education in post-Soviet transit, however, has been poorly studied, especially regarding the analysis of data from different countries (republics). Nevertheless, we see that at the national level, there are studies describing the system of extracurricular work in historical retrospect (Belyaeva, 2009; Jautakytė, 2013; Kestere, 2017), as well as its changes and reforms (Akhundov, 2020; Bykovskaya, 2018). An important focus is the quality of extracurricular education and teacher training (Bykovskaya & Karichkovskaya, 2013; Khamraeva, 2016; Buraga, 2017; Abizada et al., 2020), as well as accessibility and inclusion issues (Mansurova, 2018; Musneckienė, 2020; Cosumov, 2021). Research is most often carried out in national languages or in the format of dissertations (Kenzhebekov, 1994; Tuloberdiev, 2019; Moldaliyeva, 2022), which makes it difficult to access them as sources of information.

In our work, the problem of inequality in the extracurricular education sector in the post-Soviet space is considered for the first time. However, we want to study only the dynamics and changes that have occurred in the system of extracurricular education during the transition from the Soviet model to the pre-2022 situation. When defining inequality, we are interested in and mostly consider changes in coverage, content, inclusiveness, serviceability and payment.

Characterising and studying these processes focusing on educational inequality will improve our understanding of how educational systems are functioning, especially in the extracurricular education sector. It seems that measuring the inequalities and finding the differences or similarities in the organisation of the extracurricular education sector might explain the possible reasons for the gap in the accessibility of extracurricular activities and the growth of inequality.

Considering the challenges mentioned above, the former Soviet Union provides a valuable opportunity for such research. First, the Soviet model was highly institutionalised (Ivanov, Kupriyanov, & Kosaretsky, 2021), resulting in a high level of data collection on extracurricular activities, providers and participants. Secondly, these countries offer a unique natural experiment, as the system of extracurricular education was once unified across all 15 republics. We now have the chance to observe how the sector has evolved in response to decisions made in each country after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The main focus and question for us lie in the changes in the systems happening throughout the last 30 years. At the same time, the Soviet educational system was a big part of its ideological agenda (and future “path dependence”), and a better understanding of the processes here is crucial. Our research is exploratory and mostly intended to create a basis for future research on post-Soviet extracurricular education, as this is almost completely ignored in current post-Soviet studies.

2. Methodology and data sources

In our work, we used quantitative data analysis (i. e. the statistical analysis of data on educational organisations) and qualitative analysis of sources, in particular, a content analysis of educational policy documents (concepts and strategies), an analysis of legislation in the field of extracurricular education and expert interviews with the sector specialists.

Our analysis covers all 15 countries formerly part of the Soviet Union. We rely on a significant body of data obtained from various sources (legislation and strategies of countries, national statistics of organisations of children’s extracurricular education, expert interviews with leading specialists of national extracurricular education sectors). At the same time, we identified a lack of data and limited opportunities for comparative analysis and substantiated the prospects for developing a system of comparative studies of inequality in extracurricular education.

The basis of our research includes 57 unstructured and structured interviews with experts in extracurricular education — heads and deputies of national centres (organisations) of children’s extracurricular education, heads of regional organisations of extracurricular education, including private sector organisations, as well as national experts (researchers) in curricular and extracurricular education; we also include advisers and specialists of national authorities in our expert pull. These experts were selected because of their positions, readiness to talk about the national education sector, and professional experience, which led them to reflect on the state of extracurricular education. The experts came from all 15 former Soviet republics. Unstructured and semi-structured interviews were conducted between October 2019 and December 2021. Anonymity and the non-use of interview materials outside of analysis and compilation were the conditions for conducting the interview. Country cases were prepared based on the interviews. These profiles were used for further communication with experts to clarify information and to supplement materials from open sources (e.g. publications in the media, official statistics and statistics of organisations and national ministries).

To track the changes from very late in the Soviet period through the period of transition, and to compare this the situation 30 years from the collapse of the USSR, we analysed the statistical collections of the Soviet period issued by the State Statistics Committee of the USSR and the

Republican Statistics Committees in 1988–1990.¹ We also used post-Soviet period of national statistics data in extracurricular education, departmental statistics data (unpublished sources of ministries, departments of education and science of the former USSR countries, and collections and presentations of national centres of extracurricular education). The period of post-Soviet statistics we used for the analysis is 2018–2020. A cumulative assessment is used for several parameters, including limited statistical data and expert assessments.

To analyse regulatory frameworks and national policies, we used texts of constitutions and laws on education to find information about the rights to education and leisure, laws on children's rights, family codes and national strategies and concepts for the development of education, extracurricular education and upbringing. There were about 90 national legal documents. This information allowed us to understand the situation with equity in access to extracurricular activities. The main goal was to identify approaches in the regulation of extracurricular education.

Conducted interviews, regulatory documents² and statistics were systematised using qualitative comparative analysis (Cilesiz & Greckhamer, 2020), which is a case method that allowed us to record and compare existing results and trends (a quality date that answers “What?”, “Where?”, and “How?” questions about the system) in a complex configuration, which is the national system of extracurricular work. As a result, country profiles were prepared.

It is important to emphasize that the purpose of our study is not to create a typology of countries in the context of the transformation of extracurricular education, but an interpretive study that includes a territorial and comparative study (Bereday, 1964). The common (Soviet) heritage (model), as the starting point of the study, makes comparison and analysis of differences convincing (Bray, 2004; Steiner-Khamsi, 2009). The refusal of creating a typology in the direction of comparison; comparison and identification are the classic approach for comparative studies, including for studies of post-Soviet countries (Silova et al., 2007). Unlike the creation of a typology, the identification and description of trends based on a variable-oriented approach, generality takes precedence over complexity and allows us to test hypotheses arising from the theory (Ragin, 2014). At the same time, we would like to emphasize that the so-called case-oriented approach, which allows you to create a typology of countries, is also a useful tool for facilitating historical interpretation and determining important causal factors. Such an attempt to determine the models of transformation of the Soviet system was made, and allows us to assess the vectors of

changes in the context of the search for national identity of systems and the modern attitude to the extracurricular time of the child (Ivanov, 2022).

In particular, we were able to fix and systematise the external contextual parameters of the national extracurricular education system (the regulatory framework and the funding structure) and unify the results for subsequent correlation (Stevenson, 2013). Within this study, the QCA elements used primarily allowed us to classify, evaluate and compare various supranational aspects of the extracurricular education sector that do not have the established tradition and approaches of description and analysis as a system. The comparisons and analyses were based on profiles³ that include the following elements: regulation, coverage and accessibility⁴, infrastructure and network of providers, personnel, financing and content.

3. Soviet system of extracurricular education: background information

In the Soviet period, the coverage of extracurricular activities was an essential part of state policy, recorded at the level of Union legislation and conceptual documents, starting in the first years of the existence of the Soviet state (Ivanov, Kupriyanov, & Kosaretsky, 2021). Beginning with the forced measure of the “exclusion of spontaneous socialisation” and Stalinist militarisation, gradually, the system became friendlier to children, offering types of extracurricular activities that differed in both format and content.

By the end of the USSR (1984-1991), the system of extracurricular education was a complex set of elements in which a diverse set of formats (types of activities) of interaction with children and adolescents was provided at the state level. We can say that technical elements (infrastructure or regulatory [normative] frameworks) and content properties (mission, goals, objectives and the content of classes) were significant for the Soviet model of extracurricular education. Indoctrination was its key feature: the model provided for children's inculcation with certain ideas about morality, the rules of human community and the development of their specific character traits, habits and tastes, as well as physical qualities according to the Moral Code of the Builder of Communism. The unshakable goal of the Soviet model, since the time of the founders of the party and the state, was the universal coverage (enrolment) of children.

General accessibility was also important in the Soviet system. Education was free of charge, and the main directions of extracurricular education were maintained throughout the entire period of the system's functioning. The basic directions included children's art schools (music, choreography, and art), tourist stations, naturalist stations, children's and youth sports schools, pioneer camps and stations for young technicians. These formats could be replaced and supplemented by programmes and clubs provided by the Pioneers Palace, schools and the Soviet Voluntary Society for the Promotion of the Army, Aviation and Navy. There were also mandatory formats that were implemented by the

¹ Data from the Soviet period were taken from official statistics volumes: USSR: State Statistics Committee of the USSR (1990). In *People Education and Culture*, p. 219. Azerbaijan: State Committee of Statistics of Azerbaijan (1990). *National economy of the Azerbaijan SSR in 1989*, pp. 132-136. Armenia: State Committee of Statistics of Armenia (1990). *National economy of the Armenian SSR in 1989*, pp. 131. Belarus: State Committee of Statistics of Belarus (1990). *National economy of the Belarusian SSR in 1989*, pp. 119. Georgia: State Committee of Statistics of Georgia (1990). *National economy of the Georgian SSR in 1989*, pp. 237. Kazakhstan: State Committee of Statistics of Kazakhstan (1990). *National economy of the Kazakh SSR in 1989*, pp. 175. Kyrgyzstan: State Committee of Statistics of Kyrgyzstan (1990). *National economy of the Kyrgyz SSR in 1989*, pp. 110. Moldova: State Committee of Statistics of Moldova (1990). *National economy of the Moldavian SSR in 1989*, pp. 126. Russia: State Statistics Committee of the USSR (1990). In *Education. Children's Extracurricular Organizations and Children's Participation in Extracurricular Activities in Soviet Russia (RSFSR)*. In *Social Development*, pp. 242-243. Tajikistan: State Committee of Statistics of Tajikistan (1990). *National economy of the Tajik SSR in 1989*, p. 96. Turkmenistan: State Committee of Statistics of Turkmenistan (1990). *National economy of the Turkmenia SSR in 1989*, p. 110. Ukraine: Ministry of Statistics of Ukrainian SSR (1990). In *Education and Culture*, p. 180. State Committee of Statistics of Uzbekistan (1990). *National economy of the Uzbekistan SSR in 1989*, pp. 112-124.

² The list of used regulatory acts is available via the link: <https://ioe.hse.ru/ds/postsovieteca>

³ All the country profiles are accessible via link: <https://ioe.hse.ru/ds/postsovieteca>

⁴ We are defining “Accessibility” as an overall equality of opportunity for children with different socio-economic status, gender, birthplace, content preferences, etc. to participate in extracurricular activities. We are using the term “inclusion” separately to speak exactly about access for children with disabilities.

Pioneers⁵ and Komsomol⁶, with an extensive network of extracurricular organisations and state standards for providing children and adolescents with many sports and cultural and educational activities. Along with the Communist party's regulation mechanism and the extracurricular education sector's development, there were tools to support public bottom-up initiatives that had the ability to develop and eventually become interregional or even federal.

In general, Soviet extracurricular education was a project that involved the total presence of the state and society in the child's life, primarily in education, which makes it a rather unique and interesting case. The study of extracurricular education in post-Soviet countries is a valuable opportunity for comparative analysis, partially due to the previous presence of the common Soviet system in all 15 countries, which had clear elements and objectives (Kupriyanov 2016). This shared foundation provides a solid base for comparative analysis, as the institutions and processes established during the Soviet era serve as a starting point for understanding the current state of extracurricular education in each country. Although these countries underwent 30 years of independent development, they have maintained systems of extracurricular education that have preserved some of the characteristics of the Soviet out-of-school time organising. The study of these systems allows us to observe the path-dependence of institutional changes while also considering the influence of various external and internal factors on sector transformation (Ivanov & Kosaretsky, 2021; Ivanov, 2022).

This project was implemented within the framework of special institutions based on the functional capabilities of the system of activities and the planned result. The Soviet model remained monolithic in terms of its main characteristics (Janmaat & Piattoeva, 2007; Kargina, 2013; Zajda, 2014; Kupriyanov, 2018). Its main elements continued to support the functioning of the system, even with a change of priorities in the final years of the Soviet state and during the formation of post-Soviet countries (Lobanov, 2009; Abdullaeva et al., 2020; Bogdanova, 2021). Despite the fact that the system was influenced with political and socio-economic changes in the USSR, its basic structure and goals remained unchanged throughout the Soviet period (Kupriyanov, 2015). Thus, the Soviet system of extracurricular education proved its extraordinary strength and integrity (Pustovit, 2013; Pavlov & Buylova, 2014).

4. Limitations

Prior to the results exploring and discussion, we want to point out a number of study limitations. According to some experts participated in our research, it is necessary to consider the inflation of the data and the contributions (i.e. the level of children's enrolment in Soviet and modern data) of the library network related to extracurricular work with children. This means there is a possibility of bias due to the counting system used in the Soviet era and the present day. For instance, in our analysis of statistical books, we encountered rare cases in which the same child can be counted 2–3 times instead of just once. Unfortunately, it is impossible to calculate systematic error (and we do not think it is significant); however, readers should be aware of this possibility.

It is important to consider that the patterns and trends that we

⁵ All-Union (USSR) Pioneer Organisation named after V. I. Lenin is mass children's organization in the USSR. Children of 9–14 years old participated in this organisation; they were called the 'pioneers'. Pioneer Organisation provided after-school activities that can be attributed as volunteering and leadership activities. It also provided programs and activities in specialised centers (Pioneers Places).

⁶ All-Union (USSR) Leninist Communist Youth Union. Children and young people of 14–28 years old participated in its activities. This organisation was called "Komsomol" in everyday life. This organisation provided activities in specialised centers (Pioneers Places) and in "Dvortsy kul'tury" (in Russian "The Palace of Culture) or art centers launched and financed by local and regional enterprises and companies.

discover often do not apply to all the countries described, as shown in the text. In situations in which we had the opportunity to provide specific information on certain countries, we attempted to do so. However, there is some information about the Soviet period that is impossible to collect now. A link to all our country reports and documents used is attached to the study; unfortunately, the information is only available in Russian.

Considering what has already been said, we also mention our general concerns regarding the data. For instance, it is impossible to double-check information from Soviet documents and experts' country reports. However, our experts acknowledge these documents as valid and we attempted to avoid any conflict of interest regarding the above-mentioned interview-based country cases as much as possible. We also tried to find any information regarding the enrolment data during the Soviet period that would contrast ours in the scientific publications about that time; however, there were no such publications (therefore, we are introduce this data into academic discussion for the first time). In sum, we understand and accept in advance all the validity concerns, but we are still willing to share our dataset because of its unique nature and its usefulness. To the best of our knowledge, no similar datasets on extracurricular education exist or have been gathered and stored in a single place.⁷

5. Results

5.1. Children's enrolment and participation in extracurricular activities

The education system after the collapse of the USSR changed from total exclusion to gradual integration of people with disabilities into public life (Shayakhmetova & Yusupov, 2013), and later to a broader inclusion. At the same time, in the first post-Soviet decades, many people with disabilities, including children, were more deprived when many specialised and boarding schools were transformed or closed, meaning that the results of the Soviet system's changes were quite contradictory. Extracurricular activities, which included both traditional (standard) educational programmes (e.g. sports, arts, tourism and science) and clubs (e.g. reading clubs, aircraft modelling and radio engineering), were provided everywhere: the network of providers of extracurricular services included specialised organisations (e.g. music and choreographic schools), educational supermarkets (e.g. Pioneers Palace), as well as spaces for after-school meetings and club work. For example, about 6.5 thousand rooms were available through the housing bureau⁸ to be used for educational and extracurricular activities by the end of the USSR. Universal coverage (enrolment rate) was proposed to ensure child and adolescent energy release through positive activities (Kupriyanov, 2016).

An essential characteristic of the coverage or involvement of children was year-round accessibility: according to official statistics, in the late 1980s, children's summer camps covered more than 50% of school-age children, had an extensive network, which, unlike scouts' sports camps, and were transformed into a type of sanatorium complex (Abashkina, 2013). The camps were free of charge for families, with a standardised programme and length. The camps were educational and health-improving institutions in the USSR intended for the temporary stay of pioneers (this is why the camp was deemed a "pioneer") and other schoolchildren aged 7–15 years. Pioneer camps were organised during school holidays by trade unions, Komsomol, economic (business)

⁷ Furthermore, we are willing to cooperate (i.e. provide it and help with the translation) with anyone who would like to analyse our data with the different or deepening research questions.

⁸ The Housing Bureau or "ZhEK" (in Russian) was the territorial executive body of the housing and communal services during the Soviet period, located in adjacent territories and managed by the district housing administration and local self-government bodies.

organisations, collective farms, state farms, public education and health system authorities and committees on physical culture and sports. Universal coverage, as an essential characteristic and element of the Soviet model of extracurricular education, was not absolute. By the end of the Soviet state's existence, the coverage of extracurricular activities was about 75% (1989). As we can see from Table 1, the level of participation varied in different republics. All extracurricular programmes were unified and standard in all 15 Soviet republics (Kupriyanov, 2015). This was provided for and ensured by the USSR's Academy of Pedagogical Sciences' Research Institute on Childhood and pioneer organisation (Kar-gina, 2013).

The available data allowed us to establish the following trends of the key features of the development of extracurricular education after the collapse of the USSR: the forced rejection of the universal coverage (children's participation) that was the basis of the Soviet model and the loss of the "supremacy of upbringing" (i.e. indoctrination) (Kupriyanov, 2016). We also highlight the transformation of the institution into the institutionalised sector, characterised by the absence of the system's own explicit goals and objectives and the absence of new strategic vectors. Infrastructure transformation is also important, as evident in the emergence and strengthening of a stand-in (school), the privatisation of extracurricular activities and the increasing role of the families' lifestyle associated with national traditions.

As our data show, the processes after the collapse of the USSR led to a decrease in the enrolment of extracurricular activities in almost all post-Soviet countries. We also see a pattern of noticeable differences in the accessibility of extracurricular education, depending on the urban or rural areas. It allows us to consider the barrier of territorial accessibility to extracurricular education as one of the key trends for most post-Soviet countries. The main providers of extracurricular activities are located in urban areas, in large cities and in capitals, especially in Central Asian countries. In rural areas, specialised providers of extracurricular activities were largely closed due to financial unprofitability after the collapse of the USSR. Nevertheless, access to extracurricular activities has been maintained due to the growth of schools' function as a provider of extracurricular activities. During the Soviet period, extracurricular activities were widespread in the rural areas due to the network of the pioneer organisation, rural clubs (cultural centres of collective farms) and rural libraries (Toatov, 2013; Kometchikov, 2014). At the same time, market elements and the diversification of extracurricular activities' providers led to the customisation of extracurricular activities, increasing the quality of extracurricular educational services and the competitiveness of the extracurricular environment. There is also the development of inclusion as a separate and significant area of the element of education, including extracurricular activities.

The decline in enrolment after the collapse of the Soviet Union was due to socioeconomic factors. We cannot discuss about a decrease in families' requests for education or extracurricular education, as such studies have not been conducted yet. However, we can assume that the adverse external circumstances faced by states after independence did not contribute to the prioritisation of extracurricular education in either the family or state agenda. Inflation, economic crises and budget cuts led to a cut-back in the network of extracurricular education organisations. In fact, a crisis in the sector's infrastructure formed a significant part of the Soviet model of children's organised extracurricular time.

For example, in Latvia, due to a significant reduction in the financing of teachers' salaries, the number of municipal extracurricular educational organisations, or organisations of interest, has dramatically decreased. At the same time, in Lithuania, the number of non-formal education schools and organisations supplementing formal education has increased significantly. This is due, in particular, to the development of the lifelong learning approach in state educational policy and the introduction of a voucher system for co-financing extracurricular services. A similar situation is observable in Estonia, where the number of schools of interest has more than doubled from 2009 to 2018.

The growth of organisations and, consequently, the very

development of the sector began at the end of 2010. As a result of optimisation, the number of extracurricular organisations has decreased in countries that are part of the South Caucasus (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia). For example, in Armenia, the so-called Pioneers Palace (specialised children's centres for extracurricular activities and out-of-school clubs where work and programmes were managed by the Pioneers organisation during the Soviet period⁹) was given to the Armenian Apostolic Church, and in Azerbaijan, there was a reorganisation that dismantled the Soviet approach to the creation of organisations according to the content and format principle, reducing providers, coverage and, more importantly, the availability of organisations themselves. Similar processes are occurring in Georgia, where school clubs are being created. These clubs offer free classes in various fields: sports, art, film industry, debate, journalism, history, astrophysics, chemistry and programming. The Soviet format of The Pioneers Palace is preserved under a new banner (e.g. hobby centres in Estonia, children and youth centres in Latvia, school clubs in Georgia and children educational centres or centres for children's creativity in Kyrgyzstan) with unique ideological content: replacing Soviet indoctrination are the formation and development of national identity and multiculturalism through programmes on the acquisition of cultural and historical heritage, the creation of new cultural values, and the reconciliation, integration and socialisation of children and youth of different nationalities¹⁰. These processes are typical for all post-Soviet countries, except Belarus and Turkmenistan.

Partial compensation for the network reduction and enrolment rate occurs, among other things, due to the emergence of new players—the private sector, commercial and charitable organisations. Private organisations "catch" high socioeconomic status families and urban residents who can afford to pay for school subjects, foreign languages, and early development activities. The non-profit sector of extracurricular education sometimes takes the form of the "Soviet network" of thematic organisation, for example, a network of ArMath centres in Armenia or club American Corners in Georgia.

In Central Asia, a high level of coverage has been preserved only in Kazakhstan, where this indicator is critical, as it has been mentioned in the national education system's strategy (general accessibility of extracurricular education is one of the key goal on national strategy). In Kyrgyzstan, since the early 2000s, there has been an expansive increase in coverage (enrolment rate) from the current level of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, which is around 10% coverage, to 60% for one of the poorest post-Soviet countries. The growth in the number of providers is connected with the demand from society and with the work of the teacher's professional community, which offered extracurricular activities to the state as alternative tools for individualisation and the development of cultural identity.

The reorganisation processes also affected Uzbekistan, Belarus and Moldova. Nevertheless, these processes were not accompanied by an increase in coverage (participation rate) in every country.

However, in Belarus, the opening of new facilities took place in villages to solve the problem of the availability of extracurricular activities after the collapse of the USSR. In Moldova, the reorganisation in 2007

⁹ The Pioneers Palace (house) is an out-of-school children's institution in the USSR that provides extracurricular activities (in Russian, "kruzhki"), clubs, and other artistic groups; the methodological service of the pioneer organization operated in these centers. Since the 1990s, these places have transformed into organisations for children's extracurricular education and Centers (Palaces) of Children's and Youth Creativity.

¹⁰ For example: National policy framework document "Education Development Framework 2014–2020" in Estonia (Saeima, 2014) or goal 4, "The formation of spiritual and moral values among schoolchildren within the framework of the modernization of the public consciousness of 'Rukhani Zangryu' and the culture of a healthy lifestyle" in Kazakhstan (Government, 2018).

Table 1
Enrolment Rate of Children's Extracurricular Activities (ECA) in the USSR and post-Soviet periods.

	Children of school age, 1989	ECA enrolment rate (ECA public providers); %, 1989	Children of school age, 2019	ECA enrolment rate (incl. school-based and public providers), %, 2019	Absolute enrolment rate of children in ECA, 1989	Absolute enrolment rate of children in ECA, 2019	Absolute dynamics	Real drop in ECA enrolment, %
Azerbaijan	1,400,000	61	1,657,000	19	854,000	314,830	-539,170	63
Armenia	600,000	63	380,000	30	378,000	114,000	-264,000	70
Belarus	1,500,000	89	1,193,000	91	1,335,000	1085,630	-249,370	19
Georgia	900,000	55	609,000	15	495,000	91,350	-403,650	82
Kazakhstan	3,200,000	90	3,400,000	83	2,880,000	2822,000	-58,000	2
Kyrgyzstan	900,000	74	1299,000	62	666,000	805,380	139,380	21
Latvian	400,000	84	217,000	54	336,000	117,180	-218,820	65
Lithuania	500,000	84	325,000	66	420,000	214,500	-205,500	49
Moldova	700,000	72	333,000	60	504,000	199,800	-304,200	60
Russia	20,400,000	90	16,500,000	71	18,360,000	11,715,000	-6645,000	36
Tajikistan	1,300,000	60	2,109,000	11	780,000	231,990	-548,010	70
Turkmenistan	800,000	64	1,400,000	25	512,000	350,000	-162,000	32
Uzbekistan	4,700,000	59	6,283,000	15	2,773,000	942,450	-1,830,550	66
Ukraine	7,100,000	93	4,211,000	88	6,603,000	3705,680	-2897,320	44
Estonia	200,000	87	155,000	85	174,000	131,750	-42,250	24
								44*

* Average decrease in enrolment rate in % considering population changes.

led to a significant reduction in the range of extracurricular activities. After 1991, in Russia, the network of extracurricular education organisations (mainly municipal and single profiles) also declined. At the same time, state-based and free-of-charge modern centres of extracurricular education are being created in some regions, including nationwide networks such as Quantorium, Sirius, and Centres of Innovative Youth Creativity. In Ukraine, local authorities treat extracurricular education with low priority—this sector does not receive funding and loses out to other interested parties (e.g. schools and pre-school organisations), often leading to a shortage in funds and other material resources for the development of extracurricular education providers. This approach to financing leads to the termination of certain activities, which at the same time does not affect the positive dynamics of the expansion of extracurricular education organisations' networks, which is also associated with a high level of activity in the professional community.

The emergence of various extracurricular education programmes based on museums and galleries is essential. The expansion of the provider network is significant compensation for reducing the Soviet infrastructure, encouraging enrolment in extracurricular activities. It is necessary to appreciate the contribution of the school-based segment of extracurricular activities to the significantly high enrolment rate. School-based extracurricular activities comprise more than 50% of all offerings. During the Soviet period, extracurricular or additional activities at school were not widespread. According to various official statistics, the share of such programmes ranged from 2 to 10%. The rest of the activities took place outside of school. The emergence of private organisations and school-based extracurricular activities could not smooth out the drop in coverage (Table 2), which somehow affected and continues to affect the general accessibility of extracurricular activities as well as the development of the sector, including the content and formats that preserve the Soviet paradigm.

6. Content of Children's Extracurricular Activities

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent transformation of the Soviet model of extracurricular work illustrate the patterns of the path dependence characteristic of post-communist transitions (Knight & North, 1997). In this regard, changes in the content of extracurricular activities, or rather, their conservation, are of particular interest. On the one hand, during the Soviet period, content was connected with ideology and was determined by the goals and objectives of communist education. On the other hand, it was diverse and, at a particular stage of development, flexibly reacted to changes in the external context and technological and social development tasks. Hence, an additional

Table 2
Children's enrolment rate of extracurricular activities (ECA) and distribution of enrolment rates by different providers.

	ECA Enrolment Rate, %, 1989 (out-of-school ECA organizations)	ECA enrolment rate, %, 2019 (incl. school-based and private providers of ECA)	School-based ECA, %	Out-of-school ECA (public sector), %	Out-of-school ECA (private sector), %
Azerbaijan	61	19	37	33	≈ 30
Armenia	63	30	35	60	5
Belarus	89	91	41	49	10
Georgia	55	15	80	10	10
Kazakhstan	90	83	62	29	9
Kyrgyzstan	74	62	34	62	4
Latvia	84	54	41	22	37
Lithuania	84	66	42	28	≈ 30
Moldova	72	60	55	42	≈ 3
Russia	90	71	42	56	2
Tajikistan	60	11	57	41	2
Turkmenistan	64	25	60	33	7
Uzbekistan	59	15	60	38	≈ 2
Ukraine	93	88	38	60	≈ 2
Estonia	87	85	24	20	56

perspective of studying the extracurricular education sector arises—the processes of content transformation after a common ideology where a single model ceased to exist, the technological development of countries became asynchronous, and the social and socio-cultural development of countries went partly on divergent paths. At the same time, we must consider the general discourse about the content of education, in particular, higher and general education, which is considered in a global or globalist framework: what changes could be made in the content of education to respond to global challenges (such as technological change, digitalisation and ecology), in frequency, and in turn, address the problem of “21st-century skills”. Moreover, in this regard, it is crucial that national systems of extracurricular education take this agenda into account.

In the Soviet period, the content of extracurricular activities was highly institutionalised—these activities were implemented by a vast network of providers determined by the relevant law's regulatory framework (Aniskov, 2020). The content was determined with the extracurricular organisation's programme and independently developed

by the staff. Therefore, the programmes' profiles were defined, which acted as benchmarks. The corresponding provision indicated that classes could be conducted end-to-end both according to programmes of one or two profiles and environment (such as aesthetics, theatre, art, music and sports). It was assumed that extracurricular activities, being a fundamental means of the communist education of students, were designed to develop students' interest in science, modern technology, experience, research, innovation and invention (Sushchenko, 1986).

The balance of content trends in the post-Soviet space correlates with the set formed during the Soviet period. Of course, this "sustainability" is associated with a high level of infrastructure development, which results in a meaningful field despite a significant reduction in the 1990's. The central content of classes for the 30 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union was preserved: sports, music, technical creativity, and tourism and environmental activities. These were established as core activities during the 1980s that supported the formation of young individuals and used popular approaches of the time that were common in the scout movement, as well as the ideas of the "environment as a resource of experience" developed by Dewey (1958).

At the same time, there are no accurate and comparable data on the distribution of specific directions or their demand. The distribution of organisations was carried out according to the Soviet state's standards. At the same time, the analysis shows that the most popular activities are sports. In countries in the Caucasus region, the prevalence of sports programmes is a regional feature. However, in the Baltic region, such specifics are art-related programmes. There is no obvious pattern in other countries. At the same time, art and related areas (e.g. music and painting) are generally the second most-popular area of study. Scientific and technical creativity, which has been actively developed in recent years, is significantly represented in Ukraine and Russia. The peculiarities of choosing a direction can be explained by the habits or traditional strategies of families (based on parents' experience) and regional and national socio-cultural factors; for example, in Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia, sports, arts and tourism activities were most common during the Soviet period (Kupriyanov, 2015). We observed similar trends in the Russian regions of the North Caucasus. The spread of art activities can be explained by families' desires to increase the level of social and cultural capital of their children (Reeves, 2015).

If we look at gender preferences, there is not much data – we can only use rare national statistics and *expert estimation*. In Armenia, there is a clear bias towards sport among boys (about 78%) and in the direction of artistic development (art schools, music and choreography schools) among girls (about 64%). A similar situation has developed in Latvia, where about 67% of girls choose extracurricular classes in music, choreography, theatre and arts and crafts, and about 61% of boys choose sport classes. Sport dominates among boys in Kyrgyzstan (about 60%) and Lithuania (almost 65%). From the general distribution point of view, we see that sports and scientific and technical directions are "assigned" to boys, whereas artistic, to a greater extent, to girls. It can be assumed that this distribution reinforces stereotypes of gender preferences, which, however, do not apply to such areas as environmental studies, ecology and tourism.

As we can see, in the modern – post-Soviet – situation as a whole, the "track" of the "old" content of extracurricular activities remains. On the one hand, this may indicate the inertia of the extracurricular education system and its conservatism. On the other hand, it is also essential to take into account that the content areas that made up the "basic package" of the Soviet period are common and traditional, in general, for extracurricular activities, regardless of the country specifics and approaches of the sector (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006).

An important feature of the transformation of extracurricular education in some countries of the former Soviet Union is the return to the indoctrination and politicisation of extracurricular programmes. This trend is most noticeable in Russia, Belarus, Azerbaijan and Tajikistan, where the formats and content of extracurricular education do not limit the development of soft skills, but include the development of state-

oriented civic values in standard extracurricular programmes and special extracurricular programmes (e.g. patriotic clubs and the revival of pioneer and quasi-pioneer organisations).

7. Children's access to extracurricular activities

Accessibility issues, primarily territorial and financial issues, were a vital element of the Soviet model, where all classes, except for music schools, were free. A distributed network of providers provided territorial accessibility to organisations and extracurricular activities, which included both state organisations and those with a social and cultural orientation at private enterprises and collective farms. The same approach to accessibility in a socialist state was not considered in the context of the market, i.e., the system could afford not to think about the costs of providing access, for example, in particular remote territories.

There are no data on territorial accessibility in the Soviet period. Indirectly, the high level is indicated by the prevalence of the activities of the pioneer organisation, which, among other things, supervised extracurricular activities in specialised organisations or compensated for their absence. Essential to ensuring the availability of extracurricular activities are a developed library network and a network of cultural centres and clubs. Extracurricular activities were also offered in packages—from sports and artistic orientations to scientific and technical creativity and tourism. The collapse of the USSR led to these networks undergoing the most significant reduction.

It is important to consider differences in the territorial accessibility of extracurricular activities in the countries of the former Soviet Union, including from the standpoint of general urbanisation processes (Table 3). In most countries, coverage in a city significantly exceeds that in the countryside. Tajikistan is an exception. A relatively balanced picture is observed in Kazakhstan and Latvia. In rural areas, a marked reduction in the network of extracurricular education organisations was observed to the greatest extent. Analysis of the structure of extracurricular education shows an increase in the number of classes based on schools (but outside the framework of the main programme), which reduces the risks of inequality in rural areas and even allows the development of new areas, such as programming and robotics.

An analysis of the legislation of post-Soviet countries shows that in all countries, the right of children to extracurricular education or development (beyond the framework of training in basic educational programmes) is guaranteed directly (with reference to the right to extracurricular education or access to certain extracurricular activities) or indirectly (through the right to rest, structured leisure and creativity). There are written rights to scientific, technical and artistic creativity, participation in cultural, sports and social life and other rights, through which they are realised in one way or another through participation in extracurricular education. These children's rights are relatively homogeneous across all countries of the former Soviet Union. It can be explained both by the common historical past (experience and unified model of extracurricular education) and, in particular, by the post-Soviet states' involvement in global processes, for example, through participation in international declarations (The Convention on the Rights of the Child or the European Convention on Human Rights), which were ratified during the period of democratisation of post-Soviet countries because of their strong movement towards European integration, i.e. liberalisation and modernisation of socio-economic institutions.

At the same time, guarantees of the right to extracurricular education and free extracurricular education are not legally fixed in any of the countries that made up the former Soviet Union. There are different examples of regulating the availability of extracurricular activities, including on a free (budget) basis for citizens. Thus, the state establishes a preferential procedure for using services in cultural, sports and fitness organisations in Azerbaijan and Belarus. At the same time, the right to free extracurricular education is indirectly provided for all interested persons in Azerbaijan, Moldova and Ukraine. In general, the financing of

Table 3
Territorial accessibility of children's extracurricular activities.

Country	Urbanisation (CIA World Factbook, 2020), %	Urban children	Rural children	Relative ECA enrolment in urban areas (% of urban children enrolled)	Relative ECA enrolment in rural areas (% of rural children enrolled)	Difference in ECA access in favour of urban areas (%)
Azerbaijan	56.4	934,548	722,452	25	11	14
Armenia	63.3	240,540	139,460	43	08	34
Belarus	79.5	948,435	244,565	97	67	31
Georgia	59.5	362,355	246,645	18	11	7
Kazakhstan	57.7	1,961,800	1,438,200	82	84	-2
Kyrgyzstan	36.9	479,331	819,669	≈100	36	64
Latvia	68.3	148,211	68,789	43	77	-33
Lithuania	68	221,000	104,000	80	37	42
Moldova	42.8	142,524	190,476	≈100	22	78
Russia	74.8	12,342,000	4,158,000	63	96	-33
Tajikistan	27.5	579,975	1,529,025	18	08	10
Turkmenistan	52.5	735,000	665,000	38	11	28
Uzbekistan	50.4	3,166,632	3,116,368	27	03	24
Ukraine	69.6	2,930,856	1,280,144	≈100	26	74
Estonia	69.2	107,260	47,740	93	66	27

extracurricular education is carried out primarily at the expense of local budgets, which also becomes a significant factor in the shortage of resources.¹¹ Paid services provided by the public and private sectors can compensate for limited offerings. At the same time, the countries differ significantly in these indicators. Experts (participated in our research) estimate the share of commercial services in the public sector of extracurricular education from 0% to 45% (depending on the country). In turn, the share of services in the private sector (mostly paid with a small part of charitable funds) ranges from 2% to 76% (on average, about 21% in 15 countries). Obviously, in the paid segment of extracurricular education, mainly children from financially prosperous families are represented. The fee barrier is one of the leading barriers to access to extracurricular activities for all countries part of the former USSR.

An essential characteristic of the post-Soviet transformation of extracurricular education was the emergence of a system of state co-financing of extracurricular activities. Vouchers are designed to increase the availability of extracurricular activities and provide a superb choice of direction and format, implemented not only by the public, but also by private organisations. This tool makes it possible to increase competitiveness within the sector, which leads to an increase in the quality of extracurricular activities. Thus, in Russia, customised or voucher financing is mentioned among the mechanisms in the Concept (strategy) of the Development of Children's Extracurricular Education. It is assumed that participants in extracurricular education will be assigned a certain amount of funding (the size of a personalised obligation) and transfer these funds to an organisation or individual entrepreneur running the chosen activity. In Kazakhstan, in 2020, the National Ministry of Education and Science began the introduction of voucher financing in the field of education, which, in turn, encouraged the growth of private organisations and increased the accessibility of STEM education programmes. The voucher system operates in Lithuania. At the same time, at the end of 2019, the Lithuanian government announced a new approach to distributing the 'student basket' of non-formal education in 2020. It was reported that funds would not be allocated for extracurricular activities in sports, dance and art. Money

¹¹ The issues surrounding financing models for the extracurricular education sector are not part of this study. Moreover, we believe it is important to note that compensating for the lack of financial resources through targeted subsidies or grants increases the accessibility of extracurricular programs. We identify positive examples of such tools in Russia, Azerbaijan, and Uzbekistan, where the practice of government or presidential grants is widespread. In Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, where a number of programs are implemented with the support of the grants from the European Union (EU). The integration of these three countries with the EU has led to a significant modernisation of national extracurricular education systems.

for the nonformal education of children will primarily be allocated to children with special educational needs, those who receive social benefits, and scientific, technical, engineering groups and art classes. As noted, the problem may be that this initiative restricts access to some non-formal education programmes. At the same time, municipalities can adjust the allocation of funding to meet local needs and demands. The transition to the voucher system is laid down in the education development programme until 2030 in Uzbekistan, where significant transformations have been taking place in the extracurricular education sector since the change of government in 2019.

Finally, gender accessibility of extracurricular activities also cannot be assessed in the post-Soviet transition: there is no data on the Soviet period. At the same time, we see (Table 4) that gender differences in access to extracurricular activities vary significantly by country and by region, although the average level in all 15 post-Soviet countries is almost ideal—49.5% for boys and 50.5% for girls. At the same time, in the Caucasus (Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia), there is greater participation of boys—on average 66%. The same situation was observed in Turkmenistan. In the Baltic countries (Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia), girls are more involved in extracurricular activities—with an average participation rate of 57%. We record the same level in all 4 Central Asian countries (except Turkmenistan). There are also slightly more girls in extracurricular education in European countries (Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine) – 54% on average.

Measures to ensure the territorial accessibility of extracurricular education at the national level are planned to ensure this type of education in Russia, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan (in national concepts and strategies for developing education). As for expanding the financial accessibility of extracurricular education, for example, free lessons will continue to be supported in Georgia, especially in sports and art; state funding for active recreation of schoolchildren in summer and winter camps will continue. There are also "narrowly focused" or targeted support tools, for example, within the framework of the target programme "Teaching national, string and wind instruments" in music and art schools, implemented by the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of the Republic of Armenia, where reimbursement of tuition costs for students from these schools throughout the country is provided.

The issues regarding the accessibility of extracurricular education are fully reflected in strategic national documents (such as concepts and strategies). Many countries have declared measures to increase the territorial accessibility of extracurricular education. Thus, in Kazakhstan, conceptual approaches to the development of additional education for children, among the mechanisms for the development of extracurricular education for children, has recorded an increase in the coverage of children with extracurricular education, especially in rural

Table 4
Gender equality in children's access to extracurricular activities (ECA).

	Boys (general population)	Girls (general population)	Percentage of boys involved in ECA	Percentage of girls involved in ECA	Inequality in favour of boys
Azerbaijan	873,548	783,452	25	12	13
Armenia	198,182	181,818	36	23	13
Belarus	613,874	579,126	80	100	-20
Georgia	319,000	290,000	19	11	08
Kazakhstan	1,716,832	1,683,168	79	87	-8
Kyrgyzstan	662,235	636,765	56	68	-12
Latvian	110,888	106,112	44	64	-20
Lithuania	166,463	158,537	52	81	-30
Moldova	172,130	160,870	46	75	-28
Russia	8,470,803	8,029,197	72	70	02
Tajikistan	1,072,636	1,036,364	10	13	-03
Turkmenistan	706,931	693,069	30	20	10
Uzbekistan	3,203,098	3,079,902	10	20	-10
Ukraine	2,156,854	2,054,146	74	100	-26
Estonia	79,757	75,243	79	91	-12

areas, and the development of distance learning for children from rural areas. The concept of development of the public education system of the Republic of Uzbekistan, until 2030, provides for an increase in the number of activities in the regional children's centres, or "Barkamol Avlod," including robotics and programming. In Russia, the federal project "The Success of Every Child" framework is being implemented to create new places of additional education, including in rural areas. In Latvia's Sustainable Development Strategy for 2030, various measures are proposed to ensure affordable education in all age groups.

The general accessibility of extracurricular education is highly integrated into the current educational agenda. Moreover, there is reason to talk not about individual projects but about the institutionalised nature of initiatives in this direction, which is associated with the essential characteristics of the development of the sector in all 15 former Soviet republics, even where post-Soviet transit has led to a significant reduction in coverage, accessibility and the network of extracurricular education organisations.

8. Inclusion and inequality in the extracurricular education sector

Considering the inclusion and transformation of the extracurricular sector towards greater inclusivity is a difficult task. On the one hand, Soviet society was relatively homogeneous, which created the external attributes of including all children in its environment and context. On the other hand, in Soviet system of extracurricular education, the focus was on children from disadvantaged families (prevention of possible antisocial actions) and gifted children (the search for talented children was one of the crucial goals and functions of the system). Children with disabilities were isolated. At the same time, the state system tried to provide them with extracurricular attention through institutional mechanisms, for example, the All-Union Society of the Blind and the All-Union Society of the Deaf, but these cannot be considered inclusive practices.

Inclusive accessibility of extracurricular education is ensured in the Baltic region and Central Asian countries by granting children with special needs the right to actively participate in creative and social activities. These rights are fixed in the laws of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia and in the legislation of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. In Kyrgyzstan, the state promotes social adaptation and integration of children with disabilities, orphans and children left without parental care, indirectly ensuring the right to access extracurricular education. In Uzbekistan, the state provides free extracurricular education for children with physical, mental, sensory or mental disabilities in state specialised educational organisations.

Ensuring the inclusion of extracurricular education is enshrined in the particular laws on extracurricular education in Ukraine and

Tajikistan. Thus, in Ukraine, the state provides conditions for out-of-school education for persons with special educational needs, considering their individual needs, capabilities and abilities. In Tajikistan, the state ensures the education and upbringing of children from low-income and large families, disabled children, orphans and children deprived of parental care. In particular, with the support of the UNICEF Children's Fund, 20 innovative laboratories have been created based on extracurricular education organisations that focus on the participation of children with disabilities. In Belarus, out-of-school education organisations for children and youth are implementing some programmes, including educating and protecting children's rights and legitimate interests in socially dangerous situations. Inclusion is becoming an essential direction for the development of extracurricular education in Russia, where methodological and logistical resources and foundations are being created.

At the same time, data on inclusion in extracurricular education have not been collected in all countries. This means we cannot make cross-country comparisons for this indicator. At the same time, experts note that schools, as new and essential players in the extracurricular sector, largely compensate for the unwillingness or inability of specialised organisations of extracurricular education to expand the inclusion agenda.

Strangely enough, the crisis and the forced rapid transition to the remote mode during spring lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected a significant part of the child population, their interests, and the needs and plans of parents, became necessary for increasing the inclusiveness of extracurricular education (Morelli et al., 2020). In 2020, the authorities in most post-Soviet countries (except Belarus) closed out-of-school education organisations and schools to prevent the spread of COVID-19 infection. Public sector organisations were given direct instructions or recommended to continue classes remotely.

According to experts, the lockdown of the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic affected about 19.1 million school-age children involved in extracurricular activities (about 75% of all school-age children in 15 countries of the former Soviet Union) (Ivanov, Kosaretsky, & Belonogova, 2021). Distance learning programmes in different countries were available to 50–70% of children attending clubs and activities. In some states, coverage has significantly decreased (Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan). The availability of distance extracurricular education was determined: Do families have the ability to connect to the internet and the appropriate equipment or not? At the same time, according to many practitioners, online education has become an excellent opportunity to make educational resources, events and competitive events available to more children, including in rural and remote areas, as well as to increase the inclusiveness of extracurricular education itself, which is still an exceptional characteristic to a greater extent. The lockdown experience of providing online programs has been kept the countries that have methodological and staff resources (Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan,

Russia). In general, this direction is now fragmented and implemented at the families' request.

9. Discussion

Accessibility (first, territorial and financial accessibility) was a vital element of the Soviet extracurricular education model. All activities, except for music schools, were free. It was not a market approach but a system that could afford not to think about the costs of providing access, for example, in particular remote territories. The collapse of the USSR has led to the most significant reduction in these networks. However, against the background of a decrease in general accessibility, there has been an increase in inclusion (launching programmes for children with disabilities). At the same time, inclusive approaches to education are currently being consolidated at the legislative level, which was not the case in the Soviet period. This is a compelling point because traditionally, the sectors' transition to the market ideology leads to the fact that the process and results of education are built around the creation of a more hierarchical, status-bound, selective system. Such policies and practices of exclusion are tied to each other (Barton, 1999).

We see the patterns of the path-dependence characteristic of post-communist transit when we analyse the transformation of the Soviet model of extracurricular education (Knight & North, 1997). It gives rise to an additional perspective of studying the content of the extracurricular education sector—the processes of transformation after the shared ideology and the unified model have ceased to exist. It was and is hard to say whether these changes were good, but it is certainly important for the overall discussion about educational systems.

Thus, the main idea for discussion is a non-trivial contradiction: on the one hand, the coverage (enrolment rate) and general accessibility of extracurricular education are now lower on average than it was in the USSR, but at the same time, inclusivity or the level of educational inclusion and customisation or service-centred approach in extracurricular education have increased due to the emergence of specialised programmes and increased competitiveness within the sector. This issue is considered both from the general standpoint of the differences in the customer orientation of various economic formations and from the more specific ideological differences of the late USSR and modern post-Soviet bloc countries.

External factors, such as neoliberal reforms and globalisation of education, the political influence of large neighbouring countries like the European Union, Russia and Turkey, and the preservation of close professional connections among the countries' officials responsible for extracurricular education played a crucial role in shaping the extracurricular education sector of some countries. Meanwhile, internal factors like military and civil conflicts, expansive demographic growth or migration processes and the growing influence of religious organisations also had a significant impact on the systems.

We focus on the goals set for the education systems of the past and the present time, as well as, for example, differences in the social roles of different sexes, supporting children with disabilities, and the discipline methods imposed by different authorities'. Understanding the processes and differences in them, depending on the path chosen by a particular country after the collapse of the USSR, can become key to solving the most pressing issues of educational inequality and ways to combat it. Understanding the basic elements and characteristics of Soviet extracurricular education makes it possible to identify and analyse key changes in national sectors in the context of educational inequality.

The following paragraphs were added after the reviewers' comments, which we found important to consider. Even before the conflict between Russian and Ukraine, we were unlikely to make any predictions based on our data, but now, it is even more impossible. Obviously, the real disasters happening right now will have serious implications for different post-Soviet countries. However, continuing the general logic of our article, the most important thing for us is to discuss the future inevitable decrease in millions of children's access to quality

extracurricular education. The basis for such conclusions include various studies on natural and social catastrophes that disrupt the natural educational process.

For example, a study of the unforeseen closure of schools in Maryland due to snowstorms showed that each day of school closure led to a significant decline in children's math exam scores (Marcotte and Hemelt, 2008). Other types of more traumatic natural experiments include social catastrophes and terrorist attacks. These sniper attacks, which occurred in 2002 in three American states (District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia), led, according to researchers' estimates, to a 2–5% decrease in both reading and math skills (Gershenson and Tekin, 2018). The consequences of war are even more frightening to imagine, but it is already clear that they will be most traumatic for the least protected groups, such as children from low-income families and children with special educational needs. Of course, the war will also affect the erasure of the "Soviet path," even where it was previously preserved, but this is a question for a separate study that would be unethical to pursue at the moment.

10. Conclusion

The post-Soviet transition has not radically changed the situation with inclusion in extracurricular education (i.e. it has not made the environment, content and formats inclusive for all children without exception). At the same time, in recent decades, we have recorded the emergence of a significant number of programmes for children with disabilities, which appear both in private (early childhood development) and in state organisations and which, due to changes in legislation and the emergence of national attitudes towards creating an inclusive environment, are developing this direction.

We can also say that the post-Soviet transition has led to more excellent serviceability and competitiveness of extracurricular programmes, which attempt to consider the needs of families and children and integrate them into the global and national education development agenda. In particular, co-financing instruments (vouchers) in Lithuania, Russia and Kazakhstan increase the orientation of the sector to the child and to the client, making programmes more attractive to children by responding more vividly to market changes.

We should note that the post-Soviet transfer of the extracurricular education sector is characterized by a kind of rejection of the "universality" of the accessibility of extracurricular activities: general guarantees are being reduced, states can no longer provide universal coverage (enrollment), i.e. not count the funds they spend on the sector. The "basic package" of the Soviet system of extracurricular education limited the possibilities of families' choice, but ensured territorial and financial accessibility, while minimizing, and in some years even leveling, the differences of families as well as their participation in the organization of child's after-school time. We can identify three general trends in extracurricular education in all 15 countries of the former USSR.

First, there is a "schooling" of the extracurricular education sector. This trend includes an increase in the share of school-based extracurricular activities. The reason is the reduction of the network of specialized extracurricular organisations, especially in rural areas, where school becomes the only provider. The school also compensates for the decrease in the number of extracurricular education's teachers. At the same time, "schooling" is also the formalization of activities and programs, the integration of extracurricular education into the school system, as the addition to school curriculum (extended schooling). Finally, resource deficits for the development of inclusiveness of extracurricular education are also compensated by the school more effectively, since inclusion in school education is a greater priority for national education systems.

Another trend is the privatization of extracurricular education. We can attribute to it the reduction of the network of extracurricular organizations, as well as the emergence of the private sector, which compensates in a number of countries for the traditionalism and

conservatism of the content and formats of extracurricular activities in public organizations. We should also mention the emergence of paid activities in the state segment, which reduces the accessibility of activities for families with low socio-economic status, who have financial and informational limitations for choosing programs. An important “outcome” of privatization is the strengthening of the role of the family in choosing activities, especially in urban areas where there are offers that are more diverse.

Finally, the third trend is the urbanisation of extracurricular education characterized by an increase in territorial inequality in the accessibility of extracurricular activities, a decrease in the quality of extracurricular activities in rural areas, where programs are implemented on a residual principle: in terms of resources and teachers. The development of content and formats, including inclusive programs, is shifting to the urban environment, where there are more resources and families’ requests for a variety of programs.

The peculiarity of these trends is that they are recorded in each of the countries of the former Soviet Union, but in varying degrees of severity. National policies are also aimed at reducing or responding to these trends, depending on local interests and national specifics.

We believe that future research in the sector may have significant scientific potential, in which the balance of marketability and “sociality” of extracurricular education will be the subject of study. For instance, trends in the commercialisation of extracurricular services, which increases the risks of inequality, are the key to the readiness of personnel for an “inclusive turnaround” and the adaptation of programmes to the individual needs of various categories of children.

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CRediT authorship contribution statement

Ivan Ivanov: Conceptualization, Methodology, Resources, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Roman Zviagintsev:** Formal analysis, Visualization.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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