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sous la direction de  
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**Family capital and schooling.  
A study to Albanian immigrants in Greece**

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### **Abstract**

*In this ethnographical study the Coleman's theory on family capital is exploited in order to investigate the influence of the forms of capital of immigrant families that affects the schooling of their children. Specifically, this research focuses on two families of Albanian immigrants staying about twenty years in Greece and analyses the relationship between their physical, human and social capital and the educational route of their children. The analysis of the research data showed that the educational level of parents, their professional occupation in Greece, expectations for the future of the family's children, as well as their efforts to adapt and integrate into Greek society, contributed to the activation of family's capital in a such way that the educational course of their children was ultimately determined.*

### **Keywords**

Family capital, Albanian immigrants, Schooling

### **Introduction**

Since the fall of the regimes of actually existing socialism in Europe, Greece has constituted an entry country for immigrants. Two decades on, this has brought about her transformation into a contemporary multicultural society (Baldwin-Edwards, 2004; Cavounidis, 2002 ; King, 2002).

The first and largest wave of immigration to Greece, which began in 1991, comes from neighbouring Albania. The majority of immigrants living in Greece today and who correspond to about 65% of the total number of immigrants, are Albanian and are to be found dispersed throughout Greece (Lianos, 2001 ; Rovolis & Tragaki, 2006). First the Albanian men emigrate and then they bring over their wives and families and establish themselves virtually permanently in Greece. A large number of Albanian immigrant families have children who were born in Greece and followed the educational route which is determined by the Greek education system (Iosifides et al., 2007 ; Rovolis & Tragaki, 2006). The employment of Albanian immigrants in Greece is concentrated mainly in building work and agriculture and to a lesser extent, industry and tourism. In addition, quite a few immigrants have managed to create their own commercial and contracting enterprises (Labrianidis et al., 2004 ; OECD, 2005). Albanian families living in Greece function in an introverted, traditional way and follow a system of strict morals and customs, which are based on the cultivation and maintenance of family bonds of solidarity and mutual support (Iosifides et al., 2007).

This work constitutes an ethnographic study which makes use of Coleman's theoretical positions. More specifically, the object of this study is to trace the extent to which the different forms of capital which exist in the family (physical, human, social capital) affected the educational route of the children from two families of Albanian immigrants who have been living in Greece for almost twenty years.

### **Theoretical framework**

Coleman's approach to capital differs from Bourdieu's approach, as the latter analyses the contribution of education to the phenomenon of social reproduction (O'Brien & O Faithaigh, 2005). Coleman's theory clearly has structuralist roots, however it proves useful for the approach to and explanation of the way families which

follow traditional models and values function (Dika & Singh, 2002), which is the case with the families of Albanian immigrants who live in Greece (Iosifides et al., 2007).

A basic position of Coleman's theory (1998, p. 109) is that the social capital which exists in the family contributes to the shaping of the human capital of the next generation. In particular, family capital includes the following three, distinct forms of capital :

- Physical capital, which refers to the family's material wealth. This capital is determined by the parents' income, the possession of and means of acquiring the material goods which the family owns. In other words, it refers to the family's personal and real estate. The family's physical capital can aid the children's educational path in cases where money is available to bolster their learning efforts and face their learning difficulties (Coleman, 1988 ; Dika & Singh, 2002 ; Li, 2007). In Greece this takes the form of money spent on private tuition for the children.
- Human capital refers to the educational level of the parents and is linked to their ambitions for their children's future, as well as to their skills, knowledge and ability to set rules and follow particular strategies, through which the learning effort and path of their children are directed (Dika & Singh, 2002). The parents' human capital constitutes an important factor which can either support, or not, their children's learning efforts (Coleman, 1988). In particular, in the case of immigrants, a very important factor in the educational path of the children proves to be the parents' ability to use the language of the host country (reading, writing, speaking) (Li, 2007).
- Social capital is analyzed in the categories social capital within family and social capital outside family (Coleman, 1988). Social capital within family refers to the personal relationships which develop within the family between its members and especially to the existence of real communication between parents and children. This means that the parents should be actively involved with the child, helping him/her with school work, talking to him/her about his/her problems and experiences at school. Here the presence of the parents in the home is considered significant in the case where they really are involved with their child. In addition, the parents' ambitions regarding their child's performance at school, as well as the way the child spends his or her time at home, are fundamental aspects of social capital within family (Coleman, 1988 ; Dika & Singh, 2002). Social capital outside family is determined mainly by the parents' social relationships, but also by those of the child with members of the local community. In this case, it is interesting to trace the social relationships and contacts of foreign parents with locals, the parents' cooperation with teachers, their participation in school activities and school institutions, such as the school's parents' and guardians' association, as well as the development on the part of the foreign students of social relationships with their classmates (Coleman, 1988 ; Dika & Singh, 2002).

According to Coleman (1988) the most significant form of capital is social capital within family in the case where strong personal relationships between parents and children develop. This means that if parents don't develop strong relationships with their child, even though they may be physically present in the home, then this is not due to their educational advantages, in the case of educated parents.

## Methodology

The basic research question which concerns us in this study is : What is the effect of the different forms of family capital on the educational course of the children from two Albanian families, who have lived in Greece for about twenty years, and on whom our interest is focused ?

In the present study, the ethnographic method was used (see : Baszanger & Dodier, 1997 ; Cohen, Manion & Morisson, 2007 ; Emerson, 1995 ; Fetterman, 1998 ; Mertens, 2005), which considers social groups (in this case two families of Albanian immigrants) with a common culture, suitable for study (Creswell, 2011, p. 513).

In order to build up a detailed record of the beliefs, practices as well as the behaviours of the two families of immigrants, (in other words, to carry out ethnography), we planned and attempted to have a relatively long-term approach to them, for a period of about four months. We visited them on average once a week, for between two to three hours each time. Using the objective of the research as a basis, we used a set of popular forms of data collection, which are applied to ethnographic studies, such as semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, territorial cartography and content analysis (see : LeCompte & Schensul, 1999 ; Wolcott, 1999). During our frequent visits to the families' homes, we kept detailed notes on the issues which concern the various forms of family capital, the interaction between parents and children, as well as relationships with the social environment. In addition, we carried out semi-structured interviews and informal discussions with the parents and the children. In the latter case, we kept detailed notes after each discussion.

The research material that we collected was ranked and analysed as a small set of non-overlapping issues, in other words, into the three categories of capital : physical/economic capital, human capital and social capital.

Finally, we tried to record our analysis thoughtfully so that our impressions and conclusions could lead to new research dimensions and new questions, which could form the starting point for a continuation of the research (Creswell, 2011, p. 526).

### Basic characteristics of the two families of immigrants

The first Albanian family came to Greece in 1991 as illegal immigrants for economic reasons, and became permanently established in Patras. The family is made up of the two parents and their three children, two boys and a girl, 28, 24 and 17 years old respectively. The boys were born in Albania and the girl in Greece. Their immigration came about under the auspices of their family circle, which extended hospitality to them and looked after them during the first, difficult period of adjustment to a new life as immigrants. In Albania, both parents were farmers. In Greece, from the outset of their life as immigrants the father has done building and gardening work and the mother works in houses as a cleaner. The boys of the family studied at Vocational High Schools, night school in the case of the first, day school in the case of the second, and followed the specializations of electrician and refrigeration engineer, respectively. From their studies at the particular high schools, they acquired useful practical knowledge and skills which allowed them to practice the professions of electrician and refrigeration engineer. The girl of the family is a student in the second grade of senior high school. All the members of the family have been granted greek nationality and the boys did their military service in the greek army. The oldest

boy managed, through personal effort and without private tuition, to be admitted as a graduate of night school, to the Department of Electrical Engineering at the Technical Educational Institute of Patras. However he didn't continue his studies since the need to make a living forced him to choose work over his studies.

The second Albanian family also immigrated illegally to Greece for economic reasons in 1991. This family was made up, initially, of four members. The father, the mother, a girl and a boy who are today 26 and 24 years old respectively and were born in Albania. Before their immigration to Greece, the mother worked as a dressmaker in a state industry and the father as a builder for the state. When they came to Greece, they didn't have family to support them, but immigrated because they had been informed that there was work in the construction industry. Their first stop as immigrants was the city of Halkida. There the parents worked three shifts a day : the father as a builder and waiter, and the mother as a cleaner and kitchen help in a restaurant. The family remained together in Halkida until 1999. Then the parents separated. The father returned to Albania, taking with him the son. He started a new family there from which he acquired two more sons, 3 and 7 years old today. After the breakup of the family, the mother, with her daughter and her own mother, moved to Patras as they had family in the wider area. Here the mother worked as a dressmaker and cleaner in houses and shops. Today, due to the recession, work is limited and she concentrates on cleaning houses. Without any private tuition, the girl passed the university entrance exams, and was admitted to the Department of Business Administration at the Technological Education Institute of Patras, from which she has graduated. During her studies, as well as after her graduation, she worked on and off as an employee for mobile phone companies and as a waitress. Today she remains underemployed and in essence is unemployed. The boy of the family who lives with his father in Albania, is a graduate of the school of Architecture of the University of Tirana.

#### **Physical Capital, family environment and investment in educational goods**

Neither of the two families of immigrants we approached owns real estate in Greece. In their own country, they each have a house. The first family, which remains together, has invested a lot of the money they made in Greece in the building of a two-storey house in Albania. The second family has an old house in Albania which is in a bad state due to the separation of the members of the family, and is to be the son's. The father has created a business in his country, which is concerned with construction and commercial activities and as a result has made his own personal fortune with his new family. Despite that, he occasionally visits Patra to communicate with his daughter, but does not help his first family financially, and when he comes, he spends the night with another relative of his own.

Today's income for the immigrant families is 1,600 euros for the first, as three of its members are employed on almost a daily basis, and 600 euros for the second, where only the mother works. In the period prior to the economic crisis, the total income for the first family was over 3,500 euros a month and for the second, it approached 2,000 euros a month.

The houses of both families are to be found in downgraded working class neighbourhoods, on the outskirts of the city of Patra, where the building is disorderly and the houses old. In the area where the first family live, there are also a lot of other Albanian immigrants. In the neighbourhood where the second family live, there are

also a lot of gypsy families. Both of the families we approached live in old houses, only a few square metres in size, without central heating, and the rent they pay is. The first family's house is in better condition, since the members have the technical know-how and willingness to maintain it, having even installed air-conditioning. In contrast, the second family's home is showing the signs of wear. In these homes, there is only the necessary furniture. The cartography of the first family of immigrant's house reveals the existence of three bedrooms, a reception room, a very small kitchen and a WC. The second house comprises two bedrooms, a reception room a kitchen and a WC. The particular characteristics of the occupations of the members of each family are evident in the houses. More specifically, the first house is particularly well-equipped with electronic goods, among which a large Plasma TV, with all the latest technology, dominates the sitting room. In the second family's house there are three sewing machines two of which are of a professional type, revealing the mother's technical knowledge of dressmaking.

In the first family's house, with the exception of the daughter's school books, there is nothing to indicate their intention to invest in educational resources. This family had the means, if it so wished to invest in such resources since in the period prior to the economic crisis the members of the family were earning a lot of money. However, apart from building the house in Albania, they were interested only in acquiring material goods, such as various electronic items, three cars and two motorbikes, which seem to offer them social status among their fellow country men living in Patras. In contrast, in the case of the second family a lot of the money that was made through work during the time they lived in Halkida, was invested in learning resources. This tendency was continued by the mother after the immigrant couple separated. It is particularly characteristic that a large bookcase dominates the daughter's bedroom, and the bookcase is tightly packed with greek literature, a many volumed greek encyclopaedia, a large number of school reference books, books for learning the English language, as well as a lot of reference books concerning Business Administration. In addition, in this particular room there is a world map on one wall, as well as an organized study corner. Such a corner, or at least a space set aside for study, is missing from the house of the first family of immigrants. In fact, during our visits, we sometimes found the small daughter doing her homework in the kitchen or in the dining room.

### **Human capital and ambitions for the learning path of the children**

In the case of the first family of immigrants, both parents had attended school in their home country and had received their high school leaving certificate without however showing any intention of undertaking university studies. When they came to Greece none of the members of the family knew greek. They learnt the greek language mainly through their contacts with their greek employers. Today both parents speak greek fairly well, they can read with difficulty but they can't write greek at all. When they came to Greece the two sons were 8 and 4 years old respectively and attended greek schools. Due to the parents' inadequate knowledge of greek, they were unable to help them with their homework. This lack was made up for with the help of relatives' children who went to greek schools. Both parents told us that they wanted their children to study in order to have better luck than them, avoiding manual labour. However, the fact that their sons didn't manage to study in the end, doesn't bother

them. And this is because they believe that the children have achieved the goal which they taught them *'to become good people'*. Indeed the particular family follows a moral code which we saw they embrace and apply in their everyday life from the parents and children. The particular family was oriented towards securing its survival and its permanent establishment in Greece. So, through arduous work, to which the sons' efforts now contribute, they managed to acquire money, some of which has been saved and some invested, both in their own country, and in the purchase of material goods. The family's choices and ambitions change in the case of the daughter since it appears that with the granting of greek nationality, the battle for survival, establishment and integration in Greece, has been won on their part. It is characteristic that the integration of all immigrants is related to their gaining legal status in the host country, and to their integration into the labour market (Kasimati, 2006, p. 365). So, today they are investing money for their daughter in the following educational services, which it is hoped will secure her the necessary credentials to testify to her skills and education: a) in a private English school in order to learn that language and acquire the First Certificate in English. And b) from year two of senior high school, in a central tutoring school in Patras, in order for her to gradually prepare for, and ultimately succeed in, the Panhellenic entrance exams for higher education which will take place in the following school year.

Differentiation in the parents' own educational opportunities and ambitions existed in the second family of Albanian immigrants. Here both parents had graduated from high school in Albania and wanted to study in the Albanian university, but were unable to, for political reasons. This was because the Albanian political framework during the rule of Hoxha forbade the children of dissidents from following studies in tertiary education. In the discussions we had with him, the father mentioned with pride that he had been an outstanding student at school. His ex-wife, who had been a classmate, confirmed this. Through relatives, who had emigrated to Germany during the period of the Hoxha regime, he managed to secure a scholarship to continue his studies at a German university. However, the regime forbade him from leaving Albania, and as a result, he had to abandon his plans for university studies. The father's great love of learning is expressed as learning-worship, and is projected onto his two children. In particular, when the two parents emigrated to Greece in 1991 they didn't know greek but through intensive personal effort they quickly acquired both the spoken and written language. In this their interaction and the development of social relationships with Greeks in Halkida helped. In particular, the father, who speaks excellent greek and does not appear to be foreign, studied a lot in order to acquire the greek language, both spoken and written, in order to be able to help his children with their school obligations himself. The ambitions of the parents of this particular family for their children's education, and in particular those of the father, were exceptionally high and continue to be so even today. Apart from the fact that he demanded excellence from them, he tried to direct them in their educational choices so that they could secure a job with high social and professional status. Hence, he wanted his daughter to study to become a doctor and his son an architect. His ambitions were realized in the case of his son. However he continues to pressure his daughter to undertake postgraduate and doctoral studies in the area of her studies, in order for her to feel, as he himself and also his daughter emphasize, repeating his words *'useful for herself, the family she will have and society'*. In fact, the father claims that if his daughter



doesn't gain a doctorate, then she won't have achieved anything important as far as her education and the claim for a satisfactory career are concerned.

### **Social capital, social incorporation and participation in the children's education**

The participatory observation which we undertook, as well as our personal contact with the members of the two families revealed that they function based on traditional models. Family bonds are particularly strong and the 'kinship' proves to be a refuge in difficult times. Within these Albanian families there are clear hierarchical relationships, with their own cultural and communal moral rules (Markoukis, 2010, p. 189). The father is the leader and as far as the sexes are concerned, the oldest son comes after the father and has the next highest status in the family. The father appears to always make the decisions in the family. This doesn't change even after the separation of the parents, in the case of the second family, since the father continues to make decisions and to attempt to direct the educational choices of his children. In addition, although this particular father has created a new family in Albania, he visits Patra now and then to see his daughter and to guide her educational and social choices. Of course, this is helped by the comfortable financial position he has acquired due to the businesses he has in his country.

The cultural scene of the everyday life of the two families we observed is characterized by hard work to cover their basic needs. In particular, as far as the first family is concerned, the parents are away from the house almost all day due to work and they devote little time to communication with their children. Here the children's general respect for their parents ensures that the family functions well. It is characteristic that the money the members earn from their work is given to the father, who manages it, in consultation with them. However it appears that his word is final in the choices made. For example, the construction of the house in Albania is a result of his desire, while his children want to live in Greece. The interactive relationships between the parents and their children appear to be clearly differentiated in the case of the small daughter. Since the parents continue to work long hours and are unable to help with her learning effort we noticed that their role regarding the supervision and completion of her school obligations has been taken on by the first son. It is worth noting that the role of the 28 year old brother and 17 year old daughter of the family resembles the role of father and daughter.

In the case of the second family, during their residence in Halkida, and despite the absence of the parents from the house for hours on end, since they worked all day on three shifts, there was an intense interactive relationship of communication and supervision of the children as regards their school responsibilities. So, on a daily basis where the father returned home very late, he would wake the children and, performing the role of the tutor, examine them and check them regarding their preparation and consistency in their school lessons. In addition, he made a habit of getting the children to revise their lessons every morning before they left the house for school since he demanded excellence from them. Since the educational demands of the father on the children were high, they decided that the mother would give up her evening shift to help them with their school lessons. After the parents' separation the mother shouldered the responsibility of the paternal role for her daughter. In the case of the particular family, there was continual communication between the parents and the school, since they would go to be informed by the teachers of their children's progress.

In addition, they were members of the Parents' and Guardians' Association of their children's primary schools. Moreover, the mother and daughter mentioned to us a number of times that the father complained to the teachers when he thought his daughter's assessment to be unfair, since he wanted excellence for her. In contrast, the parents of the first family didn't visit their children's schools due to their linguistic inability to communicate with the teachers. In fact, as the oldest son mentioned to us characteristically : *'They have never come to my school. Not to register me, nothing...[]...We helped our parents with the language. Since, as children we understood more quickly and more easily....The roles changed a little'*. Here it is worth noting that the parents of the first family speak Albanian to each other and communicate in Greek with their children. Today in the second family linguistic communication between the members is only in greek. The mother admits that it is difficult for her to speak her mother tongue when she visits Albania to see her son. Her son himself, who visits Patra very often, to see his mother and his sister, told us *'It's really funny to hear Mum speak Greek to the Albanians and then translate her words into Albanian ...[]...When I want to tease her I speak Albanian to her for a long time and she gets confused''*.

Differentiation between the two families exists in how they make use of the children's free time during the parents' absence from the house. The children of the first family usually watch television or play outside in the neighborhood with fellow Albanian children. In contrast, in the second family, focusing their efforts on their school lessons, and in general studying books, was imperative for the children. And this was because they expected to be checked on their lessons by their parents whatever time they returned home from work. In addition, when the children finished their homework, they used their free time to play educational games together.

In the case of the first family social capital outside family was determined by the social relationships and contacts of the parents with relatives, and then with other Albanians living in Patras, only. Every year the parents participate in functions organized by their fellow countrymen's association and they themselves, as well as their relatives, arrange family get together on name days and holidays such as Christmas, 'Clean Monday' (the first Monday in Lent), and Easter. Unlike their parents, the children maintain social relationships with their fellow countrymen, relatives and fellow villagers, but they have also developed social relationships with the Greeks they met at school and also through their jobs.

As far as the second family is concerned, social capital outside family is determined by the maintenance of relationships with relatives, but their close social circle is made up mainly of Greeks. Apart from that, what is particularly characteristic is the mother's rich vocabulary, while her manner of speaking gives the picture of a particularly linguistically cultivated individual. Moreover the daughter, who is permanently established in Patras, has created and maintains broad social capital, mainly with Greeks who she met during her educational and professional course.

#### **Discussion and Concluding remarks**

The analysis of different types of capital in the families of Albanian immigrants we approached and observed, revealed the following :

- Despite the fact that the physical capital in the case of the first family is clearly greater than that of the second, since more individuals are working, it would appear that this wasn't a significant factor in determining the educational path of the

children. And this is because the money which the family earned through work was invested mostly in material goods and savings. In contrast, in the case of the second family there was a tendency to invest in educational goods, such as books, school reference aids, reading material and educational games. In other words, money was spent on acquiring educational resources which would assist the children's learning efforts.

- Social capital within family clearly influenced the children's educational choices and learning pathway. A characteristic fact is that in the case of the second family the following emerge : a) the devotion of more time on the part of the mother to helping her children with school work. And this a result of the deliberate decision to reduce her hours of work and consequently the supervision and checking of the children by the father, on their school obligations, regardless of the time he returned home ; b) The constant interaction of the parents with their children's teachers in order for them to be informed of their performance at school ; c) Social integration, following the parents' personal effort to learn and use the greek language proficiently. This allowed them to develop wider social relationships with Greeks and to participate in the activities of the Parents' and Guardians' Association at the Primary Schools where their children were pupils. Consequently, the second family's involvement in the educational processes, and their participation in decision-making concerning the educational choices of their children, seems to have shaped an educable environment, which had particular, positive results for the children's education, in comparison with the other family of Albanian immigrants. In the first family of immigrants there is a structural deficiency in its social capital (Coleman, 1988, p. 111) since the parents are, in essence, absent from their children's life, the interactions between them are limited. These particular parents didn't go to their children's schools to inquire about their progress since even today they cannot use the greek language with ease. In addition, the parents display a defensive communalism, which is defined by their maintenance of relationships only with relatives and fellow countrymen. The differentiated educational ambitions concerning the daughter can be interpreted by considering the fact that the oldest son has been socialized into the greek social reality and it seems that, within the hierarchical, traditional framework of his family, in effect he plays the role that the father cannot fulfill. So, he himself supports her as a father, keeping an eye on her and guiding her. In addition, this son, like his brother, has differentiated social and human capital to his parents, since he speaks the greek language exceptionally well and has become incorporated into greek society having served in the greek army and having created friendly and social relationships with Greeks. Consequently, we observe the confirmation of Coleman's position (1998) that the existence of social capital within family, which translates as real communication between parents and children, influences the educational course of the latter. We also see this in the second family of Albanian immigrants that we approached.

- Although the educational biography of the parents in both the families is apparently similar, the educational ambitions they had for their children and the effective learning of the greek language (speaking, reading, writing) on their coming to Greece, seem to have obviously influenced the educational course of their children. This is because the parents in the second family of immigrants, in contrast to those of the first, wanted, and managed to help their children effectively with their school obligations. In addition, although the parents of both families appeared to desire the

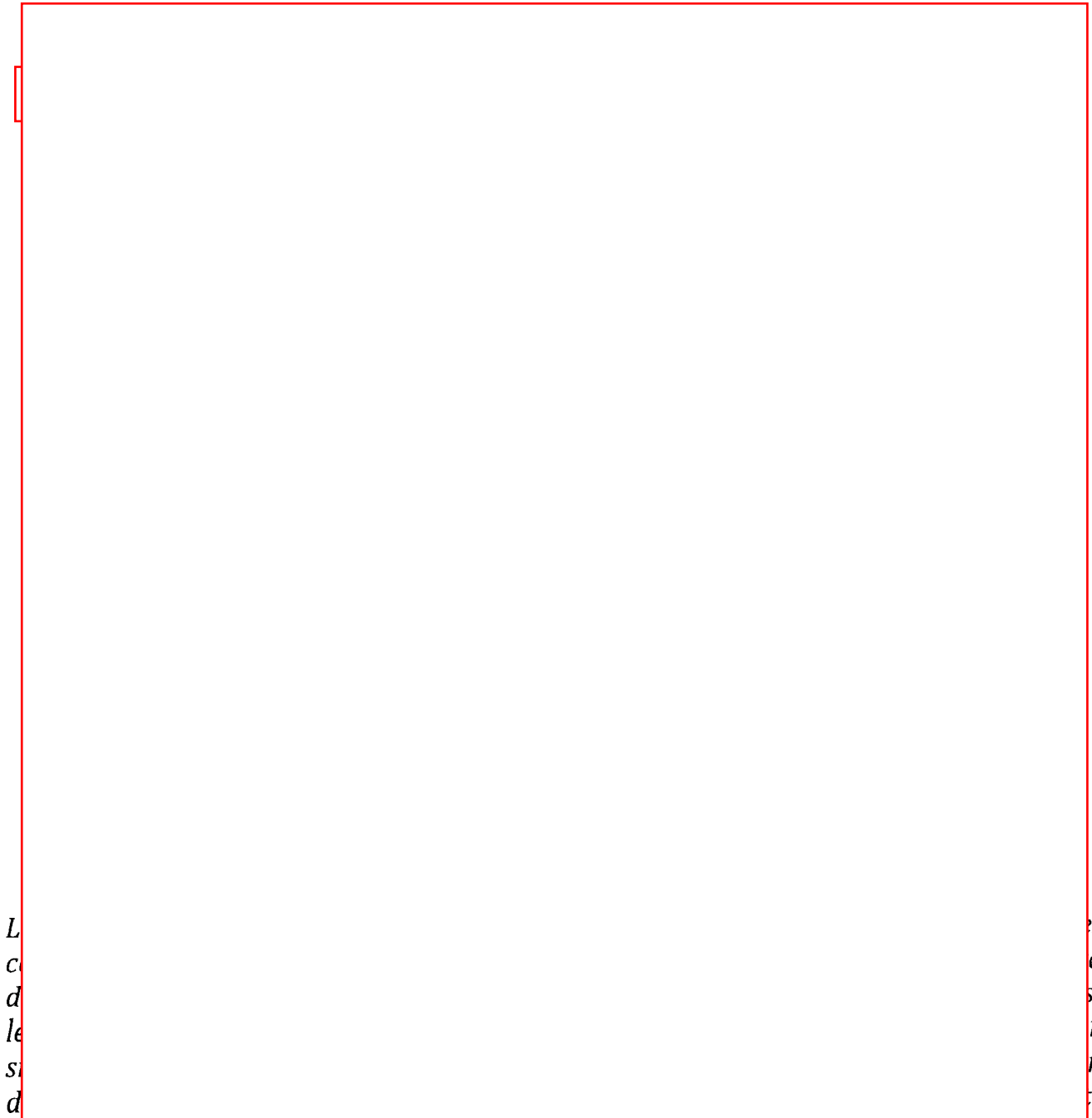
educational progress of their children, only those of the second family proved successful in the accomplishment of that goal. Here, the factor of the father's incomplete learning effort comes in, for even today he seeks to make his own educational dreams come true, through his children. In reality, his learning ambitions are being realized in the case of his son, who lives with him in Albania and is completing his studies in Architecture. In contrast, his ambitions remained incomplete in relation to his daughter, who studied Business Administration in Greek TEI, and not Medicine, as he had wanted. That's why he insists on encouraging her to continue her studies at a postgraduate level at least, in the area she chose to study.

Finally, it would be interesting to carry out research with families of Albanian immigrants who are greatly differentiated as far as the factors of human and social capital are concerned, in order to investigate the effect of their family capital on the educational course of their children.

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