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Variations on Modernisation: Technological Development and Internationalisation in Local Swedish School Policy From 1950 to 2000

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ABSTRACT

Since WWII, Sweden has had an international reputation for being modern and progressive, with schooling that provides equal opportunities for all children. Analysing local enactment of the national pursuit of modernisation in two contrasting municipalities, this paper offers new perspectives on Swedish education history beyond the image of schooling as a uniform national project. The concepts of technological development and internationalisation are applied to capture the ideas and visions inherent in this modernisation. The study demonstrates, through the example of the rural municipality of Tierp and the municipality of Stockholm, the complexity of the modernisation process and the interplay between divergent interpretations of national reforms and local enactment of modernisation.

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Introduction

After World War II (WWII) the Nordic countries¹ gained an international reputation for being among the most modern and progressive in the world. The so-called “Nordic model” was coined to capture the Scandinavian quest for cohesive solutions, underpinned by the willingness of employers and trade unions to find compromises in line with Keynesian economic policy and the commitment to a strong welfare state: “The overarching values were equality—understood as equality of justice, solidarity, social security and social mobility” (Telhaug, Mediås, & Aasen, 2006, p. 249). For a long time, the Nordic countries were governed by the Social Democrats. In Norway and Sweden in particular, they remained in power for decades, led by the prominent statesmen Einar Gerhardsen and Tage Erlander. It was in these countries too that the nation state’s role became strongest, informed by a widespread belief in rational social planning rooted in a positivistic scientific tradition (Telhaug et al., 2006). Although similar in some respects to other Nordic countries, Sweden alone succeeded in staying out of WWII, giving it an economic advantage in the immediate post-war period. The rapid expansion of Sweden’s welfare system at that time meant that living standards were soon among the highest in the world (Byström & Frohnert, 2013).

In ensuring the equal distribution of life opportunities, schools became a central institution within the emerging modern Swedish welfare state. Nordic countries regard comprehensive education as an “extension of the state’s duty to provide equal opportunity for all members of society” (Telhaug et al.,

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¹These are Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland, and Iceland.

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2006, p. 251); in Sweden, this was reflected in the slogan “A school for all”. According to the Swedish School Commission of 1946,

The decisions that will be taken on this issue [i.e., the reconfiguration of the Swedish school system] will be of fundamental importance to the continued progress of our society and will, in a considerable period of time, put their mark on our society. (SOU 1948: 27, p. 10, authors’ translation)

These political initiatives and the development of a strong nation state with a comprehensive welfare system consolidated the image of Sweden and the other Nordic countries as relatively homogenous, with small regional or social variations in terms of educational provision. As Larsson, Letell, and Thörn (2012) have shown, this self-image has been reproduced internationally and nationally—not only in Swedish school policy rhetoric but also in research. In line with this thinking, contemporary studies of Swedish school policy have largely treated schools as a core national project, affording limited opportunities to test assumptions of homogeneity and/or increased decentralisation in Swedish school policy (Román, Hallsén, Nordin, & Ringarp, 2015).

National school reforms implemented in Sweden since the 1960s have related almost exclusively to strengthening the equality of Swedish schools. The most extensive reforms were enacted in the early 1990s, when local autonomy and control were augmented through decentralisation and deregulation. Unlike the mid-twentieth century reforms, which were rooted in social democratic values, equality across Sweden’s geographical regions was now expected to benefit from more liberal values such as freedom, choice and individualism (Telhaug et al., 2006). The points of departure for the reforms in the 1990s, as well as for the ones in 1960s, were that equality is desirable and that political decisions can support these goals. In many cases, it was specifically stated that rural parts of the country needed to be prioritised by political decisions if they were to “catch up” with more urban areas of the country (often characterised as more modern and proactive) to create a more equal and homogeneous school system. In this context, modernisation is defined as a linear movement from something culturally defined as “traditional” to something considered new or modern within the same culture (Stephenson, 1968). Linked to the reform history of Sweden and the priority of equality, this “new” is expected to promote increased harmonisation by reducing regional disparities within the country’s borders in the longer term.

For present purposes and in line with the definition above, “modernity” is further understood as an unfinished project that may therefore relate to different time periods as a vehicle for visions and ideas of a future society. Although Swedish education has engaged with the international policy arena for a long time (cf. Landahl, 2015; Lawn, 2014; Pettersson, 2008; Waldow, 2008), the post-WWII period marks the beginning of an intensified transnational exchange with regard to education policy (Nordin & Sundberg, 2014). The transformation of the Swedish school system that occurred after 1950 as part of the more general process of societal modernisation can in many ways be seen as an opening of Swedish society to the outside world (Román et al., 2015)—a process facilitated by technological development and labour migration. Television, radio and later information and communication technology (ICT), along with a more heterogeneous workforce, brought the “outside world” to people in new and more direct ways than before. In that sense, technological development and internationalisation can be seen as fundamental to understanding the role of education in Sweden’s societal transformation from the 1950s onwards (Almqvist, 2006; Román, 2014; Román et al., 2015). Pursuing this line of thinking, the concepts of technological development and internationalisation are deployed here to capture some of the ideas and visions that informed political decision making during the two different periods of reform. Throughout the post-WWII period, considerable resources have been invested in major reforms to increase the use of modern technology in the Swedish school system. These efforts relate in part to efficiency and a desire to increase productivity, as well as to enhance equality, especially in terms of rural opportunities. In relation to the connection between schools and surrounding society, there is a double motive for introducing modern technology. First, these efforts relate to striving for modernity, being at the forefront of development, and preparing the ground for a future society. At the same time, there is a concern

to accommodate a changing outside world and societal pressures on the school system (Cuban, 2001; Hallsén, 2013). A similar doubleness of motive is also apparent in the tendency to internationalisation, as internationalisation is a matter of being proactive, taking advantage of opportunities, and preparing organisations and students for an emergent globalised society. At the same time, schools must cope with a society in which internationalisation and globalisation become increasingly significant, with direct impacts on communities and schools—for example, through immigration (Nordin, 2015).

Against this backdrop, more research is needed on how welfare states, like Sweden, have acted historically to improve the preconditions and performances of rural schools in order to avoid large discrepancies between centre and periphery. The purpose of this article² is to contribute to such a research by analysing how the national striving for modernisation is enacted in two Swedish municipalities, exemplifying the urban versus rural Sweden, during two periods of educational reforms.

The article is divided into four sections. An outline of the methodological approach is followed by some comments on the method, material, and case municipalities. Two empirical sections follow; the first focuses on technological development and internationalisation during the Swedish school reforms of the 1960s while the second examines the 1990s. The final section discusses the results of the analyses and their theoretical implications.

Policy Enactment in Municipal Contexts

Following the Swedish tradition of Dahllöf (1967), Lundgren (1972, 1979), and Englund (1986, 2005), curriculum theory (CT) provides a fundamental point of departure here. This approach emphasises the importance of studying education in its socio-historical context, taking account of school practices and administration as well as school politics. The Nordic strand of CT has traditionally used three levels of analysis—national, programmatic and classroom—focusing on the interplay between these levels within and between specific socio-historical contexts. Irrespective of methodology, the emphasis has mainly been national, reflecting the fact that this strand of CT in many ways developed in parallel to the emergence and evolution of the comprehensive school system in the Nordic countries. Over the last decade, a growing number of publications have broadened the analysis of Swedish school policy enactment to include the transnational level (e.g., Forsberg & Pettersson, 2014; Nordin, 2012; Pettersson, 2008; Ringarp & Waldow, 2016; Román et al., 2015; Sivesind & Wahlström, 2016) in what has been described as a methodological shift towards a transnationally oriented curriculum theory (see Nordin, 2012).

However while curriculum studies over the past few years have widened the analysis to include the impact of globalisation on national curricula (cf. Anderson-Levitt, 2008), and the field of curriculum research itself has become more internationalised (cf. Autio, 2014), little attention has so far been paid to the local arena where multiple and sometimes contradictory policies are enacted (Jarl, 2012; Nordin, 2015; Román et al., 2015). Among relevant studies in other Nordic countries, Coninck-Smith, Rosén Rasmussen, and Vyff's (2015) extensive historical research analysed the Danish school as a municipal concern, as well as the introduction of new technologies. The study reveals a much more polarised political debate between strivings for standardisation on the one hand, and affirmation of diversity on the other hand, than in Sweden, although continuously emphasising that everyone should be included on equal terms. In the field of economics, Borge and Rattsø (1993) compared the reallocation of resources between small and big municipalities in Norway. Their result showed that there is no simple causality between municipal size and the way resources are

²This article is written within the project "Who has govern the school?" funded by the Swedish Research Council. The project is focus on the balance between national and municipal school policy during the period of 1950 to 2010. Other members of the project are PhD Henrik Román, Uppsala University (project leader) and PhD Johanna Ringarp, Stockholm University.

reallocated, and that analysing local differences are crucial to understand the ways national policies are enacted differently at local arenas.

The few studies of local policy enactment of the comprehensive school curriculum in Sweden relate mainly to the 1990s and 2000s (cf. Jarl, 2012; Lundahl, 2002; Quennerstedt, 2006; Rönnerberg, 2007; Skott, 2009). This temporal focus can be explained by the major national reforms during the 1990s, involving a shift of responsibility and mandate from state to municipal level.

To illuminate the mutual impact of national decisions and associated local actions, we defer here to the concept of “policy enactment” (Ball, 1993; Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012). This concept serves to highlight the impossibility of predicting how national modernisation efforts will translate in local contexts, or the effects of national decisions when implemented in municipalities with differing conditions and needs. The focus of this analysis, then, is the encounter between national policy and local context—that is, how the local is portrayed at national level and influences national initiatives and decisions, and how national policy is interpreted, translated, reconstructed and remade in local settings, with different discourses, values and resources (Ball et al., 2012). This approach does not seek to compare the results of municipalities’ modernisation efforts but rather aims to reveal variations in the shape of enactment in an urban and a rural municipality during two different periods of reform.

To capture the processes of interpretation and materialisation that constitute local policy enactment in a Swedish context, where equality always has been a high priority in education policy, we also employ the concept of “geographical justice”.

Geographical Justice

The concept of “geographical justice” (see Ringarp, Román, Hallsén, & Nordin, 2017; Román et al., 2015) captures the processes of modernisation as expressed in this case through technological development and internationalisation. Geographical justice refers to the social science concept of “spatial justice” used to capture spatial and geographical aspects of differing human social conditions and societal efforts to equalise these differences (Clement & Kanai, 2015; Soja, 2010). Following Roberts and Green (2013), we view educational reforms as political expressions of such an ambition. In line with social scientists’ increased interest in analyses of “space” and “place”, we argue that studies of the geographical distribution of educational resources should take account of the places where these resources are used and acted out—in this case, the municipalities. For the purposes of the present analysis, geographical justice is understood to comprise two aspects. The first of these is *municipal strategies and/or initiatives*—that is, how municipalities relate to national educational reforms; how and why they adopt and/or obstruct them; whether they take initiatives on their own; and, if they do, to what extent these initiatives harmonise with the national reform agenda. The second aspect is the *municipality as a geographical entity*, referring to the municipality as a place with a specific history and characteristics. In this regard, the analysis addresses how the municipality as a place for education has changed over time, as well as the kind of education offered in connection with a particular municipal vision.

The concept of geographical justice therefore invites both a spatial and a temporal analysis of how and why municipalities act out visions of modernity as places in their own right rather than as mere executors of national policies. This relates to the doubleness discussed above in the motives for introducing modern technology and for internationalisation. Municipal actions are simultaneously reactive and proactive as politicians try to balance internal and external policy pressures in order to maintain public legitimacy (cf. Waldow, 2012).

Two Reform Periods: The National Context

The analyses here extend across two major periods of Swedish school reform after WWII, one centred around 1960 and the other around 1990. Both periods emphasised the role of technological development and international exchange in building an equal society and offering equal

opportunities to all children (e.g., Almqvist, 2006; Nordin, 2015; Román et al., 2015). We use the term “reform periods” to capture the process of policy enactment from its initial phase of major investigation, through planning/experimentation, and ending in realisation (Ringarp et al., 2017). The first reform period lasted for more than thirty years, encompassing extensive investigations in the 1940s, planning and experimentation in the 1950s, and realisation of those reforms in the 1960s and 1970s. The second period partially overlaps the first; when new investigations were conducted in the 1970s at the outset of the second reform period, this simultaneously marked the beginning of the end of the first reform period. The second reform period followed the same cyclic pattern as the first, with an initial phase of investigation followed by planning and experimentation in the 1980s prior to realisation in the 1990s.

During the first reform period, Swedish society was characterised by a strong conviction concerning the possibility of “social engineering” (Forsberg & Pettersson, 2014; Lindblad & Wallin, 1993), and close cooperation was established between the state and the research community (Husén, 1989; Marklund, 2008). The scientific achievements of the time led to a very positive view of the future, reflected in the following excerpt from the memoirs of Tage Erlander, the Swedish Social Democratic Prime Minister between 1946 and 1969:

In science, medicine, and technology almost incredible things happened. We thought more than realised that in the world opened to us, man would have the opportunity to lead the struggle against poverty and destitution to definitive victory. One had to go back to Galileo and Newton to find a counterpart. (Erlander, 1976, p. 26, authors’ translation)

A 1955 conference at the cinema Rigoletto in Stockholm³ attended by about 500 politicians, union leaders, industrialists, and academics became an important driver for the societal implementation of these new scientific and technological achievements (Erlander, 1976). In this process of modernising Swedish society, education played a major role. The School Commission of 1946 laid the foundation for the realisation of nine-year comprehensive schooling, and in 1962, it advanced three reasons for reforming the school system. The first was that offering all citizens nine-year schooling would foster democratic ideals. A second reason was economic; as Sweden had not been directly involved in WWII, its economy had flourished, resulting in increased demand for an educated workforce. The third argument was formulated as a matter of justice. In implementing nine-year comprehensive schooling, Sweden for the first time ensured access to a good education for children throughout the country, even in rural areas. For that reason, the comprehensive school reform of the 1960s has sometimes been referred to as a “rural reform”. Technology was seen as central to this quest for national equality, and audiovisual aids were considered crucial in fulfilling the political vision. In the government bills proceeding the reform (SOU 1946:72; SOU 1948:27),⁴ radio and film were identified as major technological aids in combating geographical injustice in education as well as in the process of implementing the reforms (cf. SOU 1948:27).

In the 1970s and 1980s, there were recurring calls for increased decentralisation and deregulation, and the ensuing school reforms of the 1980s and 1990s emphasised the importance of local actors, including politicians, administrators, and school personnel (Ringarp, 2011; Román et al., 2015; Rönnberg, 2007). During this reform period, the Swedish education system underwent a profound reconfiguration in response to wider societal changes (Carlgren & Klette, 2008), also referred to as a “change of political system” (cf. Englund, 1995). These changes harmonised the Swedish educational system with the wider societal process of reconfiguring the public sector according to market principles such as flexibility, efficiency, and adaptability (Imsen, Blossing, & Moos, 2016; Wahlström, 2009). The earlier idea of a uniform Swedish welfare state, referred to as *Folkhemmet* (the people’s home), was now considered rigid and ill-equipped to meet emerging global and market-oriented challenges, and several reforms were initiated in response to increased demands for

³Known as “the Rigoletto conference”.

⁴Projectors, gramophones, and typewriters are also mentioned as important technological aids.

decentralisation. At the beginning of this period, the administrative map was redrawn, and the number of municipalities was reduced from 2,501 (around 1950) to 282 in 1974.⁵ School-related issues were among the main arguments for merging the municipalities and forming new administrative units. Other important reforms included the municipalisation of teacher and school leader employment, changes in the system for government funding, and the introduction of governance by objectives rather than content. This led to the decentralisation of Swedish schools in the early 1990s (cf. Jarl, 2012), permitting so-called “free schools” to operate under the same economic conditions as municipal schools in 1992. This in turn helped to strengthen the market-oriented rationale that equated schools with any other type of business. Investors would invest in schools to compete for profit in a free market.

In 1994, a new comprehensive school curriculum was launched, informed by the new principles of governance emphasising prescribed objectives and learning outcomes rather than learning processes. These reforms reconfigured the roles and relationships of actors involved in education in sometimes contradictory ways, increasing their freedom to choose and organise education while standardising goals (cf. Román et al., 2015; Wermke & Forsberg, 2017). In this redistribution of responsibility from the central state to municipalities, schools and teachers became decentralised agents. Like the previous one, this reform period was characterised by optimism, owing mainly on this occasion to globalisation and the “Internet revolution”. The image of Sweden as a modern and proactive country was evident in visions linked to the emergence of ICT. In February 1994, the right-wing Prime Minister Carl Bildt gave a speech at the Royal Swedish Academy of Engineering Sciences,⁶ in which he declared that Sweden should be a world leader in the everyday use of Internet technology:

We will see a development that we cannot yet foresee, much less understand. The change that lies ahead of us in the coming decades will be far more radical in nature and character than we now realize. ... Nostalgic cries to return to what once was are nothing but a siren song that will lead to destruction. (quoted in Swedish by Karlsohn, 2009, p. 31, authors’ translation)

That speech came to be seen as marking the start of an intense period of development and modernisation. Education and schooling were identified as especially important, both for users of hardware and in the dissemination of new technology knowledge and skills. In the second half of the 1990s, two major national initiatives sought to stimulate increased use of ICT in schools. Between 1995 and 1999, the Knowledge Foundation financed a project in which more than half of the country’s municipalities participated. In phasing out that project, the government launched a new major initiative called ITiS (IT in School), which lasted from 1999 to 2002 and was expected to reach all schools in Sweden. Although the municipalities had assumed much of the responsibility for schools in the late 1990s, central government investments like this one emphasised the need to prioritise technological development and use of ICT.

Although based on different rationales for supporting educational equality, both reform periods were characterised by the optimism associated with notions of modernity.

Two Case Municipalities

To assess the idea of a homogenous Swedish educational system with small differences in local policy enactment, Tierp and Stockholm were chosen as exemplars of urban and rural municipalities. The two differ in size, geographical location, school tradition, and political majority and can in some respects be considered opposites. In 2016, the municipality of Stockholm had a population of 935,619 inhabitants spread over an area of 187 km² while Tierp had 20,744 inhabitants in an area of 1605 km².⁷ As the capital of Sweden, Stockholm has a long tradition of varied schooling, including

⁵In 2018, there are 290 municipalities

⁶Known as “Carl Bildt’s IT speech”.

⁷Municipal statistics from SCB; “Folkmängd i riket, län och kommuner”, 31 December 2016.

private/independent schools. Although the city has some large industries, particularly in the field of high technology, it is above all a centre of commerce and administration. In terms of politics, power has shifted over time between socialist and non-socialist majorities. The population is well educated, although unevenly distributed as compared to other Swedish municipalities. In 2016, 40% of the adult population had at least three years of post-secondary education.⁸

In population terms, Tierp is a much smaller municipality than Stockholm. Located in central Sweden, it is close to the cities of Gävle and Uppsala and about 150 km north of Stockholm. Despite its close proximity to larger university cities, Tierp is located in a rural part of Sweden. Prior to 1974, when national reform reduced the number of municipalities, Tierp consisted of seven municipalities. Its population has remained stagnant since the 1960s, and it is politically very stable, with an unbroken socialist majority since the municipal merger in 1974. In comparison to Stockholm, Tierp exhibits a more even socioeconomic distribution, with a limited number of wealthy inhabitants. In 2016, around 14% of Tierp's adults had three or more years of post-secondary education.⁹ Most of the municipality's residents are employed in farming and industry. It is worth noting that in 2014, all 11 schools in Tierp (one of which is an upper secondary school) were municipally run; at that time, Stockholm had 121 independent comprehensive schools and 71 independent upper secondary schools (Román et al., 2015). Even this brief comparison of municipal data confirms that contextual factors are likely to substantially influence the process of policy enactment at local level.

The present analysis is based on an extensive three-year examination of official school board and education committee minutes¹⁰ from these municipalities' archives and databases for the period 1950–2000.¹¹ In the case of Stockholm, annual reports published by the municipality were also included.¹² To capture municipal visions of the modern in terms of technological development and internationalisation,¹³ we searched for policy initiatives related to modern technology, international exchanges between cities and/or schools, and international student programmes. While it is impossible to capture every aspect of this complex policy area over two reform periods in a single article, the examples cited here illustrate the characteristic ways in which the two municipalities pursued modernisation.

The next two sections examine municipal strategies and initiatives related to technological development and internationalisation during the two reform periods in relation to their respective contexts.

Technological Development and Internationalisation in the First Reform Period

Radio English as a Political Equality Strategy

The introduction of nine-year comprehensive schooling for all posed political challenges, one of which was the decision to make English a mandatory school subject. Since 1939, the introduction of English as the “first foreign language” had been trialled in Swedish schools. In 1950, the Swedish parliament decided that English should become mandatory as part of the experiment in uniform schooling in some Swedish school districts. Introducing English as a mandatory subject thus became integral to the state's ambition to provide all its citizens with a more uniform and equal education.

⁸SCB's register Befolkningens utbildning, version 2017-01-01.

⁹SCB's register Befolkningens utbildning, version 2017-01-01.

¹⁰Focusing on official documents means focusing on what school boards and education committees had agreed on, leaving out much of the negotiation and political struggle.

¹¹During the 1952–1974 period, Tierp consisted of seven municipalities: Tierps köping, Tierps landskommun, Söderfors, Västland, Österlövsta, Hällnäs, and Vendel.

¹²Annual reports were only available in the case of Stockholm and enabled an overview that would have been difficult to achieve if only minutes had been included in the examination.

¹³Technological development and internationalisation are used here as intertwined concepts that together capture visions of a better future inherent in the notion of the modern.

In Stockholm, there was no difficulty in meeting the demand for qualified English teachers, as the municipality had been involved for some time in experimental and developmental language teaching projects and so adopted a proactive approach to the national reforms. For example, when English was introduced as a mandatory subject at grade 4 in the new comprehensive school curriculum (Lgr 62), courses in English teaching methods were arranged in Stockholm. These courses formed part of an extensive developmental programme for teachers between 1954 and 1964, comprising around 400 courses on various topics.¹⁴ In 1967, a special unit called Pedagogiskt Centrum (Pedagogical Centre) was established to take charge of the ongoing professional development of teachers. Stockholm was well equipped in terms of organisational resources, and Pedagogiskt Centrum also played an important role in the development of language teaching.¹⁵

While Stockholm had ready access to qualified English teachers and even participated in creating the foundation for national guidelines, the initiative presented more of a challenge in the Tierp region. In seeking to promote geographical justice in schooling, English education over the radio (so-called “Radio English”) was seen as a means of strengthening English language education in rural Sweden, where there was a lack of teachers with the requisite skills (SOU 1944: 22; SOU 1946: 1). This programme was developed as a series of correspondence courses that even unqualified teachers could deliver. However, there was widespread anxiety in the Tierp region about implementing a reform that would make English mandatory, and doubts were raised, both by school board members and by teachers themselves.

Despite these doubts, the municipalities acted, and in 1951, Tierps köping was the first of the seven municipalities (that later merged to become Tierp) to introduce English at grade four.¹⁶ The other municipalities followed gradually, and once Västland introduced English at grade five in 1954–1955, students in all seven municipalities had access to some form of English teaching. However, along with differences in the pace of reform and the starting grade at which English was offered, there were also major differences in the availability of qualified teachers. To compensate for the lack of qualified personnel, schools in Tierp started to use the resources offered by Swedish Radio in the mid-1950s. However, despite assurances from Swedish Radio that teaching through Radio English could be delivered by non-qualified teachers, several municipalities and teachers hesitated. Radio English courses were then introduced only gradually in Tierp—first as complements in the absence of qualified teachers and later as voluntary resources in all seven municipalities.

Although national provision of English teaching in the form of radio programmes was designed to strengthen education in rural Sweden, Tierp’s school board minutes shows that teachers in the municipality who lacked competence in the subject also lacked the confidence to guide teaching based on the radio programmes.¹⁷ In addition, there were references to more general problems related to the fact that teachers were responsible for recording radio broadcasts and programmes. This caused organisational problems because, for example, teachers needed to leave the class to make the recordings.¹⁸ Tierp adopted a reactive and accepting approach to the national requirements for mandatory English instruction, and despite the problems that arose, the correspondence courses offered by Swedish Radio helped the Tierp municipalities. However, attracting qualified teachers continued to be a struggle, which worsened when the new curriculum (Lgr 69) was to be realised, as English was now to be introduced at grade three.

While Stockholm had good access to qualified teachers and an organisation that helped to meet new strategic challenges, the Tierp region struggled to meet the minimum provisions prescribed in the national curriculum. The issues around English teaching illustrate how regional differences, which the national reforms partly were intended to compensate for, could rather increase when the reforms were enacted in local contexts.

¹⁴Stockholms skoldirektions årsberättelse, 1965

¹⁵Stockholms skoldirektions årsberättelse, 1967

¹⁶Tierps köpings folkskolestyrelse, 1951

¹⁷Hällnäs kommunstyrelse, 1956

¹⁸Tierps skolförbunds styrelse, 1966

Location and use of Audiovisual Centres

In 1956, the first audiovisual centre (AV-Centre) was established in Stockholm. The city had long been at the forefront in the use of technological aids in schools, and films were shown regularly as an element of school education. Stockholm was presented as a national exemplar in this regard (SOU 1946:72), acknowledging how the city's proactive approach sometimes even anticipated national reforms. However, initiatives of this kind are not always beneficial, as technology develops rapidly, and the future can be difficult to predict. For instance, as an early adopter of film for educational purposes, Stockholm installed a certain type of film projector in all of the city's major schools as early as the 1920s. Later, however, this initiative could not be usefully exploited, as the availability of suitable films was very limited.

In the late 1950s, Stockholm employed a part-time audiovisual consultant, a sound technician, and a film technician.¹⁹ In the 1960s, about 600 programmes were produced each year and then copied and distributed to teachers in the regions requesting them.²⁰ Stockholm took pride in being a leader in the use of technological devices, and the 1964 annual report declared that the city's tradition of using new technology in schools was probably the longest such tradition in the world.²¹ Stockholm therefore had great confidence in its position as a leader in this area and had a well developed organisation for both producing and distributing radio programmes and films for pedagogical use. As well as bringing the world to students by showing them countries and cultures they would not otherwise have known, these programmes also became part of increased Nordic cooperation—for instance, the films produced in Stockholm were used when teaching Swedish in Danish schools.²² This technological development also meant that members of the Stockholm school board travelled around the world to keep up with the latest developments in the technological sector. When the comprehensive school reform was formally introduced in Stockholm on 1 July 1962, the school board declared confident that Stockholm was well prepared, especially mentioning the extensive investments made in school buildings and technological equipment.²³ This self-image of a progressive city in an educationally progressive country was also confirmed internationally. In Stockholm, a school called Eiraskolan (the Eira school) was redesigned as a model school welcoming international guests to take part in regular teaching based on the new national comprehensive school curriculum (Lgr 62). During the 1965-1966 school year, around 100 international guests visited Eiraskolan, and international visits peaked in 1974, with 1,381 visitors from around the world.²⁴

In Tierp, the attitude to the new technology demanded by the new Lgr 62 curriculum could be described as acceptance rather than enthusiasm, for economic and personal rather than pedagogical reasons. In its minutes from 1966, the school board of Hällnäs noted that despite harsh economic realities, they were “forced” to ensure that teachers had the necessary equipment to implement the methods prescribed for comprehensive school. However, demographic conditions meant that the Tierps municipalities found it difficult to establish a supportive infrastructure of their own and instead depended on cooperation with larger neighbouring municipalities such as Enköping and Uppsala. In contrast to Stockholm's well-developed infrastructure and experts to facilitate the use of new technology, Tierp had to rely largely on the initiatives of individual teachers with a special interest in these matters. Individual teachers also indicated that they had difficulties in meeting the new curriculum requirements, and that the municipality's technological equipment was too limited. Partly in response to this criticism, the Tierps school board began to investigate the possibility of establishing a centrally located film centre to serve all of the region's municipalities. However, the plans were never realised, as some municipalities considered them too costly.²⁵ Instead, a new

¹⁹Stockholm skoldirektions årsberättelse, 1958–1959

²⁰Stockholm skoldirektions årsberättelse, 1964

²¹Stockholm skoldirektions årsberättelse, 1964

²²Stockholm skoldirektions årsberättelse, 1958–1959

²³Stockholm skoldirektions årsberättelse, 1964

²⁴Stockholms skoldirektions årsberättelse, 1967

²⁵cf. Vendel skolstyrelseprotokoll, §163, 1967

agreement was signed with the AV-Centre in Uppsala. This exemplifies how the rural municipality of Tierp, sought assistance from nearby municipalities such as Uppsala and Enköping in the enactment process and in pursuit of meeting the national requirements. Stockholm, on the other hand, had a more proactive enactment process against the national directives, where international influences were significant.

Technological Development and Internationalisation in the Second Reform Period

Decentralised Strategies for Modern Technologies

From an international perspective, Sweden was an early adopter of ICT and was long considered a forerunner in this area. Computerisation of working life in general began at the outset of this second reform period, but although “Computing” (sv: *databelhandling*) was mentioned as part of the technology curriculum in 1969 (Lgr 69), schools lagged behind society in this regard. In the mid-1970s, there was increased political pressure to consolidate the use of computers in Swedish schools, and experimental activities were initiated. In 1980, the National Board of Education decided on a programme of “Computers in school”, and computing was more prominent in the curriculum of 1980 (Lgr 80). However, evaluations from the late 1980s noted that teaching in schools was generally too focused on hardware while the *use* of computers remained a neglected area (Riis, 2000). By the end of the reform period, several investigations conducted in the 1990s (cf. SOU 1994:118 and SOU 1994:45) had exerted a significant influence on the vision for ICT in the schools. It was anticipated information technology would have a huge impact on schools and pupils; as with the introduction of radio and film to schools in the middle of the century, there was again talk of a paradigm shift (Hallsén, 2013). Along with decentralisation and deregulation, the new autonomy of the municipalities made it difficult to drive education-oriented ICT strategies at the national level by the end of this reform period. Nevertheless, state authorities invested huge sums of money on the school’s IT development and stressed that “each municipality develops a strategy for the use of ICT and its expansion in schools” (SOU 1994:118, pp. 9–10, authors’ translation).

By the late 1970s, schools in Stockholm were technologically well equipped, and teachers there enjoyed good conditions for using technological material in their teaching. However, in one survey in the late 1970s, both an external evaluator and the teachers themselves noted that, in practice, the use of the technological equipment was relatively limited.²⁶ In 1985, a group within the Stockholm school board was tasked to formulate an action plan for the use of computers in the city’s schools. Their report (covering the period 1986–1991) was published in 1986 and stressed the importance of municipal action on this issue, in part because the government had not provided sufficient funding or guidance to realise the vision of increased computer use in school. The report emphasised Stockholm’s position in relation to other municipalities in Sweden, including a sense of national responsibility in this matter.²⁷ This report again illustrates Stockholm’s proactive stance with regard to national initiatives. Based on a strong confidence in their own ability in relation to new technology in schools, the Stockholm board adapted and translated national policy in accordance with local needs—a strategy that was also deployed in the earlier reform period. In Stockholm’s case, the decentralisation of authority and power that characterised this reform period effectively meant a shift in power.

In Tierp, strategies related to modern technology were less obvious than in Stockholm during the same period—in fact, there is no mention of “modern technology” or “computers” in the school board’s overall plan of operations for the period 1986–1989.²⁸ However, this does not mean that nothing was done to address these issues, as some local school-based initiatives (such as purchasing technology or teacher participation in continuing education) are mentioned in the documents. Tierp

²⁶Stockholms skoldirektion, 1977

²⁷Stockholms skolor – ledningsgruppen för undervisning om och med datorer, 1986

²⁸Tierps Skolstyrelsens verksamhetsplan 1986–1989

participated in national technology initiatives and received a state subsidy through the national initiative ITiS.²⁹ The money was spent on various projects that were designed locally by teachers and, in some cases, by students. These focused mainly on making the computer a natural part of schoolwork and on enabling students without a home computer to use one at school. In some cases, the importance of increasing computer usage among girls was also stressed. In their evaluations, the teachers who participated in the ITiS project in Tierp said that they found it largely successful in terms of its positive influence on both teachers and students. However, at several schools, there were many problems related to technological hardware and to teachers' skills. A lack of computer technological support was noted, requiring teachers to work overtime and set other subjects aside; as a consequence, many teachers assigned a lower priority to technology projects. Some teachers also believed they had insufficient knowledge of ICT to deliver good computer education, recalling similar arguments and approaches in the previous reform period.

Although both municipalities implemented initiatives, these examples illustrate a radical difference in both priority and attitude. While the well-resourced municipality of Stockholm placed strategies for modern technology at the top of the political agenda, these were almost a non-issue at school board meetings in Tierp and were addressed on a case-by-case basis if at all. In Tierp, technological development during this period was more localised at school and teacher levels. This means that an individual teacher in Tierp could very well have had equal or sometimes greater opportunities to develop their teaching through technology if they so desired.

Contextualised Visions of Decontextualised Education

Before the introduction of comprehensive schooling, Stockholm was already a prominent user of new technologies as part of its strategic vision to become an attractive municipality in terms of both educational and life opportunities. The AV-Centre,³⁰ established following the comprehensive schools decision during the first reform period, continued to oversee the technological development of schools in Stockholm during the 1990s. The Centre was also available (at a price) to other municipalities and independent schools and was involved in international projects. For example, it was assigned national responsibility for a newly established EU organ promoting astronomy education and interest in scientific studies. The Centre's activities were financed by schools and classes subscribing to its programmes and technology. In 1997, the Centre's main focus was the supervision of teachers' and students' video recording and editing activities. The Centre also produced films of its own, some of which were used as teaching materials in schools. Another of its activities was to provide films for schools. In this regard, Stockholm also employed a film teacher in the late 1990s to plan and coordinate these activities.³¹ However, as in the previous reform period, it was up to individual schools and teachers to make use of these opportunities, and as in the earlier period, extensive intra-municipal differences remained.

During the same period, it was noted that the pace of ICT development had increased significantly and that this would soon mean "a whole new way of looking at teaching".³² Political opinion in Stockholm was consistent with the view expressed at that time at the national level (SOU 1994:45; SOU 1999:63) that ICT had now become an integral part of everyday life. Consequently, politicians in Stockholm stated that further technology training for teachers would no longer be prioritised, given the opportunities to upskill in their everyday work and the availability of free, short online courses.³³ However, this move should not be taken as a diminution of ambition in relation to ICT; on the contrary, it indicated a shift of political attention from basic skills for individuals to

²⁹Barn och utbildningsnämnden, Tierp 2000

³⁰Later, due to reorganisation, the AV-Centre evolved into Mediateket, today responsible for distributing technology to Stockholm's schools.

³¹Arbetsmarknads- och utbildningsnämnden, 1997

³²Arbetsmarknads- och utbildningsnämnden, 1997, p. 45, authors' translation

³³ARUN, 1998

the expansion of ICT infrastructure. In 1997, politicians in Stockholm stated their intention to develop the world's largest intranet for education, which could also connect to the Internet.³⁴ In shifting the focus of its political strategy from the individual to the strategic level, Stockholm confirmed its willingness to invest in the pursuit of its stated goal.

In Tierp a learning centre (*lärcentrum*) was initiated in 1994. One of the main arguments in its favour was that municipal efforts to raise the level of education would benefit local inhabitants by providing opportunities for distance learning. For that reason, new technology in the form of computers and Internet connectivity was central to the project. However, beyond helping students to achieve municipal education goals, the proposed centre also embodied the aspiration to increase overall technological knowledge levels in the municipality. The potential benefits of investing in technology to increase the municipality's internationalisation, attractiveness, and inter—and intra-municipal cooperation were also stressed in the application to Uppsala County Administrative Board for grants to fund construction of the learning centre.³⁵ In this application, which was then passed on to the Ministry of Education, the importance of accessible distance education was stressed, with reference to the importance of raising the “extremely low transition rate from upper secondary school to the university college, especially in Tierp”.³⁶ Another expectation related to the proposed centre's potential to develop and supplement distance learning courses in Swedish, so facilitating immigrants' entry to the labour market.

The learning centre development illustrates Tierp's pragmatic attitude to the introduction of modern technologies, mainly in response to existing challenges such as low education levels, immigration, and the need to attract new inhabitants and companies rather than any abstract or visionary thinking. It is worth noting one somewhat paradoxical consequence of establishing a learning centre in Tierp; the investment in technologies that enable communication and cooperation around the globe led to diminished cooperation with municipalities such as Sala, Katrineholm, and Ljusdal, from which Tierp had previously sought support in educational matters.

Variations on Modernisation: Concluding Remarks

Firstly, the present inquiry confirms the importance comprehensive schooling was thought to have in the modernisation of post-WWII Sweden—a process permeated by political visions of a homogenous society, with equal educational opportunities for all citizens. However, local policy in two different municipalities, representing the rural and the urban Sweden, reveals a more heterogeneous picture, where historical, political, cultural, economic, and personnel conditions influenced differing enactments of national visions prescribing equality, discussed in this concluding section as variants of modernisation.

Visionary Modernisation with a Global Orientation

During the first reform period, Stockholm had already established itself as a pioneer in comprehensive education, offering a wide range of educational opportunities. Although nationally governed, Stockholm displayed considerable self-confidence that sometimes made it difficult to distinguish between municipal and national agendas, which often resembled each other in terms of bold visions and powerful initiatives. The municipal ambition to be a driver of educational policy and practice seems to have remained constant over the two reform periods, although with an increased global orientation in the latter period. During the first reform period, Stockholm had already established itself as a global policy actor, participating in international conferences and other events. In post-WWII Sweden, Stockholm effectively became the representative of the newly launched

³⁴Arbetsmarknads- och utbildningsnämnden i Stockholm, 1997

³⁵Länsstyrelsen Uppsala län, 1994

³⁶Länsstyrelsen Uppsala län, 1994, authors' translation

comprehensive school system, attracting visitors from all over the world. This municipal context could therefore be described as global, and the strategies that Stockholm employed to strengthen its position within that global and highly competitive context could be characterised as visionary.

However, our findings indicate that a pioneering approach does not necessarily mean undisputed success. For instance, Stockholm repeatedly made costly investments in technologies that could not be used as intended because of some incompatibility with the surrounding environment; lacking both knowledge and technological capacity, the municipality could not respond appropriately. The rapid pace of reform in Stockholm meant more successes as well as more failures, if at a cost that was affordable to the larger municipality.

Stockholm's pursuit of modernity has certainly impacted both on its international reputation and on national policy development and could be described as visionary modernisation with a global orientation. However, a rapid pace of reform combined with a large and increasingly heterogeneous population has also contributed to increased segregation in the municipality. So, although Stockholm has been perceived as a proactive driver of visionary modernisation during both reform periods, intra-municipal differences in relation to equal distribution of life opportunities remains an unsolved political challenge.

Pragmatic Modernisation with a Local Orientation

During both reform periods, Tierp's pursuit of modernity has been far more reactive than Stockholm's in relation to both national policy decisions and overall societal development. During the first reform period, the introduction of comprehensive schooling was handled primarily within the framework of the existing school organisation. Although the municipality tried to comply with national guidelines, these efforts often encountered material and personnel challenges. Nevertheless, this lack of resources meant that Tierp developed an ability to formulate pragmatic solutions, often in close cooperation with surrounding municipalities. In many ways, Tierp's local orientation means that the surrounding labour market has provided the main reference point for political decision-making on internationalisation and technological development. Unlike Stockholm, school board agendas often ignore invitations to participate in international activities such as the five-yearly Nordic school meetings, which are not considered particularly relevant and may appear only in the form of brief notices, with no followup by the board.

However, the case of Tierp illustrates how later pursuit of modernity and reduced proactivity may also have benefited the municipality. While Stockholm may have served as a national role model, Tierp had the advantage of being flexible and able to identify pragmatic and cost-effective solutions. In some respects, Tierp is therefore more compatible than Stockholm with its local context and is therefore better prepared for regional collaboration. The result thus supports the study by Borge and Rattsø (1993) that there is no obvious relationship between size and success when it comes to policy enactment at the local level.

Geographical Justice in Different Spatiotemporal Contexts

This article references the introduction of modern technology and internationalisation to illustrate the differing approaches of two municipalities to modernisation during two periods of reform. Granted the study's limited range, the results shed light on the inherent complexity of modernisation and how local conditions influence how national reforms are enacted in geographically distinct settings. The municipalities were selected less for their adequacy as comparable units than for their distinctness in a country where national policy prescribes equal distribution of education as an imperative across the board.

Our findings indicate that equality in education does not necessarily depend on policy standardisation; rather, it seems that municipal characteristics and strategies can remain stable over time, despite societal changes or shifts from central governance to decentralised governance by the

municipalities. At the municipal level, geographical justice becomes a question of balancing external and internal demands to ensure that local politicians can maintain public legitimacy (cf. Borge & Rattsø, 1993; Waldow, 2012). As municipal contexts differ, so must the solutions and therefore the local variants of modernisation. Given that Sweden has 290 municipalities, these results are necessarily incomplete and should be followed up by additional studies to capture a fuller national spectrum of local variations.

Looking ahead, this study also sheds some light on the renewed political debate around the need to centralise Swedish comprehensive schooling as a means of increasing equality and improving learning outcomes. However, our results suggest that, despite aspirations and political initiatives in support of geographical equality, there is no “one-size-fits-all” solution. Irrespective of governance system, geographical conditions will always influence how educational policy is enacted at local level. Unless this factor is taken into account, politicians will continue to wonder why implementation of national curricula always produces different variants of modernisation when filtered through radically different spatiotemporal contexts.

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