

# **The Swedish Schoolhouse at the Centennial exposition in Philadelphia 1876 – World's Fairs and innovation in policy and practice**

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## **Introduction**

Well hidden between the trees of Central Park in New York, just next to the great lawn, is a building called the Swedish cottage. Before being moved here, this building was crafted in Philadelphia by Swedish craftsmen, from Swedish lumber, in 1875 and 1876. Today it serves as a marionette theatre. It is also possible to book it for birthday parties. It is visited by thousands of school children every year. Originally though, it was a Swedish schoolhouse that was displayed at the World's Fair exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876.<sup>1</sup>

How come Sweden shipped an entire schoolhouse to this exhibition? Did other countries send schoolhouses? Were they compared, were educational systems compared? What impact did the schoolhouse have on the visitors at the exhibition and back home?

An investigation of the Swedish schoolhouse in Central Park is also an investigation of the "exhibitionary complex" (Bennet 1995) and of the epistemology of the late 19th century international educational debate. The fashion of displaying entire schoolhouses did not last for long, and did not involve many countries, but it is a good focal point when trying to understand basic historical principles of comparative education; especially issues of policy transfer and the exchange of ideas, ideals and innovations.

## **The World's Fairs as spaces of future**

The purpose of this paper is to shed light on the relations between Swedish education and the international scene, but mainly in North America, when it comes to policy and practice formation. The field of study is the World's Fairs in the late 19th century. By looking at what Sweden displayed, and understanding how it was selected for the exhibits, it is possible to raise questions about cultural transfer. A special focus will be placed on the transfer of innovations and ideals. The World's Fairs are spaces where the future can be projected and from which ideas, models and ideals can be borrowed as arguments for changes in the present.

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<sup>1</sup> Also see: <http://www.centralpark.com/guide/attractions/swedish-cottage.html>

Even though the case in this paper is the Swedish exhibition and its recognition at the International Exhibition of Arts, Manufactures, and products of the Soil and Mine in Philadelphia 1876, the paper draws on research carried out on all six major World's Fair exhibitions between 1862 and 1878.

Contemporary education discourses are characterised by references to comparisons of national performance. This phenomenon, often treated as a novelty, has a long history, with its roots in the World's Fair exhibitions of the mid-19th century and science communities of the mid-20th century. Contemporary use of international large-scale assessments (ILSA), such as PISA and TIMSS, has created models or ideal images of school systems that receive much attention from countries around the world. From a policy perspective, the use of ILSA has become very important in administrative and political debates and even decision-making. ILSA represents what we can describe as new virtual policy spaces, which focus on exhibiting/visualising and comparing. This major feature of today's educational discourse has too often been studied as a contemporary feature, without considering the history of its formation. Looking deeper into the function of the World's Fairs, it will be possible to raise some more general questions that are also of interest from a contemporary perspective:

- Is the 'international' a significant influence in the production of national education policy? What can the case of Sweden at the World's Fairs tell us?
- When a system 'internationalises', which of its aspects are represented, how and why?
- In what ways has the 'national state' used comparisons and innovations to enable and to project itself as a state of modern education?

### **Perspective and theoretical framework**

Whereas early 19th century international comparisons were mainly found in travelling accounts, the second half of the 19th century offered new ways of comparison through international exhibitions (Dittrich 2010). The international World's Fairs were among the "few genuinely international cultural institutions" of their time. When opening the first World's Fair exhibition in London in 1851, Prince Albert of England declared the importance of education, but it was in London in 1862 that education first got its own department at a World's Fair (Dittrich 2010, p. 17). From the start, the international exhibitions contributed to make the comparisons between states, based around identity and production, increasingly transparent and organized. Together they constituted a new mode of production in education, parallel to that of schooling. The future was organized and turned into a display of required objects and techniques that put entire nations into an elevated, viewable space (Giberti 2002, Ekström 2010, Werner 2008). The kind of data, the actors and their positions and relations, the idea dissemination patterns, use of media etc. that we find when looking at the international exhibitions reveal the process of modelling and re-modelling of an ideal school system (Lawn 2008).

National systems have been regarded as internally constructed, with particular policies and politics. My approach rests on new historiographies in education, science and technology to create a novel interpretation which treats comparison and the cross border flow of data and expert actors, as the ways in which the national and the international have been closely interlinked (cf. Lawn and Grek 2012). The Swedish

historian Anders Ekström has described the late 19th century World's Fairs in general, as an "aggressive national, political and economic competition and battle ground, often formulated in war metaphors" (Ekström 1994, p. 23 transl. here). Klaus Dittrich describes the purpose of education experts, participating in the World's Fairs, as a combination of three conscious strategies. Firstly, they went transnational in order to appropriate foreign features for their own institutions, to learn from abroad. Secondly, they wanted to represent their own institutions and achievements on an international stage. Thirdly, they wanted to cooperate on the international level, transcending the boundaries of their own institution or nation-state (2010, p 37-38).

The exhibitions were also centres for national policy and power transfer. Robert W. Rydell (1984) shows how the World's Fairs performed a hegemonic function because they propagated the ideas and values of the country's political, financial, corporate, and intellectual leaders. The fairs offered these ideas along with "the proper" interpretation of social and political reality (see also Barth 2007). The hegemonic function was also associated with the evolution of consumerism and the role of new emerging media. Innovative ways of displaying, visualising ideals and models, as well as new ways of looking and perceiving (see especially Pred 1995, Giberti 2002, Ekström 2010), contributed to effective dissemination. Seeing was believing, but as this paper will show, there were many misunderstandings and/or biased interpretations of what was seen.

### **The growing importance of the schoolhouse**

Between the 1860s and the 1890s it was possible to find models of schoolhouses, school room interiors and students' work (writing, drawing, arithmetic etc.) at the world exhibitions of industry, art and culture held all over the world (cf. Kristenson 2005). In a few cases some countries chose to display entire schoolhouses. It seems as if Sweden made an extra effort to present entire schoolhouses, or up to full scale models thereof, at the London exhibition of 1871, the Vienna exhibition of 1873, and the Centennial exhibition of 1876. How can we understand this seemingly new interest in schoolhouses that appears in the late 19th century?

In Sweden, discussions about how to best build a schoolhouse increased in the decades when the primary school system, *Folkskolan*, was established (1840s – 1860s). For example, the Royal Academy for Liberal Arts arranged competitions for the best schoolhouse plans five times between 1839 and 1854 (Kristensson 2005, p. 55). However, the person who really managed to promote modernisation of the schoolhouse was a teacher of natural sciences Per A Siljeström (1815 – 1892). It is fair to say that in Sweden he laid the groundwork for new a schoolhouse standard based on modern architecture (cf. Kristensson 2005).

Siljeström was an explorer and when he was in his twenties he had been on a scientific expedition to the Norwegian highlands in the period 1838 – 1839. When returning home he started to work as a teacher in Norrköping and Stockholm. He also wrote textbooks on natural sciences and became increasingly interested in educational matters. During the 1840s Siljeström became involved in on-going discussions about the modernisation of the educational system that had started with the 1842 Act of Education. He started to travel and explore the international educational landscape. His commitment to the

modernisation of the educational system brought him to the United States of America. Travelling around in the states for a couple of months Siljeström wrote a book that consisted of two parts; one about education, the other about railway systems (Siljeström 1852-1854). The part dealing with the American school system is considered the first description of American education published in Europe, and it was translated by the quite famous translator and interpreter Frederica Rowan as: *The educational institutions of the United States, their character and organization* (Siljeström 1853a).

What especially caught Siljeström's attention in the USA was the organisation of the comprehensive school system, which contrasted with the tracked school systems of Europe (chapt 20). He was also fascinated by the report system and the system of statistics (chapt 20). Most of all, however, he came to admire the quality of the American schoolhouses. For Siljeström however, the quality of the schoolhouse was just a reflection of the quality of the education and a sign of respect for teachers and children. Following his observations in America he wrote:

Formerly too little importance was attached to the condition and character of the schoolhouse and the school-room. A miserable hovel, devoid of every convenience, and situated on a badly-selected and unattractive spot: a dark, gloomy and ill-ventilated room; benches to sit upon, which must have given the children some notion of the rack, and which could not but excite in the minds of school-boys the desire to wreak their vengeance in the form of every degree of injury which a knife can inflict on a wooden bench. (Siljeström 1853a, p. 207)

Siljeström clearly saw a relationship between poor standards in schoolbuildings and bad school discipline and learning. He was happy to see also that the Americans seemed to have realised this. He reports that in many American schools children had separate desks and chairs; which he relates to the abandonment of the Lancasterian system in America (p. 209). Even if he admitted that not every American school was of this great standard he claimed – and admired the fact – that every new school that was built had to follow a new set of high standards (p. 208).

When Siljeström returned to Sweden, this interest in modernising the schoolhouses came to occupy his work for some years.<sup>2</sup> It is clear that the Royal building plans for schoolhouses in Sweden (*normalritningar*) from 1865 bears the landmarks of Siljeström's school architecture and his basic arguments.<sup>3</sup> Some formulations are exact copies of Siljeström's writings (cf. Kristensson 2005, p. 60). However, compared to what we see in the Royal building plans, Siljeström, had placed a little more emphasis in his own writings on the value of choosing a good environment when building a new schoolhouse in a neighbourhood. He wrote:

If not daunted by the condition that has been mentioned, take a moment to follow me to a place considered a public institution /.../

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<sup>2</sup> He wrote a pamphlet *Skolhuset* in 1853 in which he argued, not least from a hygiene perspective, for modernisation of schoolhouses. He soon also published drawings/plans for how to build and furnish them (1856a, 1856b) – much of which came from America (only one desk and one chair was drawn in Sweden – by *Svenska slöjdföreningen*).

<sup>3</sup> This was a legislative document proclaiming that every new school building in Sweden should follow the standards set by this act.

What kind of arrangement can it be? I wonder whether it is a prison? We shall soon see. If we walk out on the street, where a single meeting produces a crowd, /.../ we come finally to the gate, which we enter. The first objects which meet our eyes are on the right side – latrines. On the left side, there are latrines of the dirtiest nature. Let us hurry past ... We are now in Nikolai Assembly Apologist School! For it is here - in a place where drifters shun to go – here, in the dirtiest and most horrible environment; it is here in the midst of an atmosphere of whorehouses, and it is here, I say, that the Assembly invites youth to acquire what one is accustomed to call "civic education". (Siljeström 1853b, p. 27, transl. here)

The poor environments and the poor conditions schoolhouses were built in, had according to Siljeström, not been such a great problem when the education was governed by the church:

As long as the morning glory of the Priesthood shone through the windows and contributed to mitigate schoolroom darkness and a close atmosphere, it was easier to keep spirits up, but since it is now important to make teachers independent of priestly influences it is necessary to ensure that schoolteachers can get on well in school. (Siljeström 1853b, p. 24, transl. here)

Siljeström argued that when more children, from younger ages and for a longer time, were expected to learn more, develop civic manners, we needed school buildings that manifested societal respect for the institution of education. In other words, the schoolhouse was a way of exhibiting a new perception of knowledge and education. Siljeström's writings showed that schoolhouses had for too long been allowed to objectify a poor past. Now it was time to let them materialise future hopes.

Displaying a pretty and healthy schoolhouse can thus be understood in relation to the societal embrace of the educational institution, which hitherto had been mostly a religious institution. This view illustrates how the intuition of education manifested its new social position in a new geographical position in the neighbourhood. If education was at the centre of the neighbourhood, in a good spot, it also became the intellectual centre. In an ambitious Canadian guideline on schoolhouse architecture from 1876, the deputy minister of education in Ontario, George Hodgins wrote:

#### **The Schoolhouse an Index of the Character of a Neighbourhood**

In many parts of the country there is a decided demand for better schoolhouses. The condition of a schoolhouse and the school in a neighbourhood reveals more of the character of that neighbourhood than is generally supposed. In many localities the people are abundantly able to build; but it is often the case in wealthy and growing communities that the schoolhouse is the last building reconstructed in such ample proportions and style as to be in harmony with the improved condition of the country. This does not show the true spirit of intelligence ... for an intelligent and far-seeing community will look first after the education of the children, and see that the necessary educational appliances of a good schoolhouse are amply provided. (Hodgins 1876, p. 10)

The interest in the appearances of the schoolhouse was clearly related to the material modernisation – here expressed as *school architecture* – that came with industrialisation. The joint material and cultural development was exemplarily displayed at the World's Fairs in their mixture of industry, art and culture (education).

The logic of industrial improvement moved into people's everyday lives and fostered both spectators and consumers (Ekström 2007, Pred 1995). Some spectators described the educational departments at the World's Fairs as the "industrialisation of education" (Synnerberg 1873).

### Comparing and competing with school systems and schoolhouses – London 1862 and 1871, Paris 1867 and 1878, Vienna 1873, Philadelphia 1876

"Spare no expense. Invite all nations on earth to take part by sending objects for display and by erecting buildings of their own. After six months, raze this city to the ground and leave nothing behind, save one or two permanent land-marks." (Paul Greenhalgh 1988, p. 1)

Where early 19th century international comparisons, as I mentioned mostly could be found in traveling accounts, the second half of the 19th century offered new ways of comparison and competition through international exhibitions (Dittrich 2010).<sup>4</sup> But how come, that a small country like Sweden, as one of very few countries doing that, chooses to compete with a schoolhouse at these World's Fairs?

#### From exhibition cases...

Being experienced in 'travelling with education' Siljeström was chosen to organise,<sup>5</sup> and at the exhibition present, the exhibition cases displaying Swedish education in London 1862.<sup>6</sup> At the exhibition in London 1862 there were no signs of any country displaying schoolhouses or even full-scale model thereof. However, Siljeström made sure his architectural plans of schoolhouses were displayed. He actually received a medal for excellence in the objects displayed at the Swedish exhibition room at the educational department of the London expo; including a drawing of a new elementary school, school furniture, maps and plans etc.<sup>7</sup>

Some of the things Sweden and Siljeström brought to London in 1862 were bought (or in other ways acquired) by South Kensington School Museum, for example Siljeström's book *Introduction to school-architecture*. After the next London exhibition, in 1871, the South Kensington School Museum in UK acquired almost all of what Sweden had displayed, from books to school models. In total, the South Kensington Collection includes more than 600 books, maps, plans, models and globes from the Swedish exhibition 1871.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> In Per A Siljeström's script "A contribution to the school architecture" (1856b), he presents drawings of schools and classrooms from his visits to America and England.

<sup>5</sup> Behind the people working at the Swedish exhibitions stood a national commission of selected experts that initially decided what to exhibit and to represent Sweden.

<sup>6</sup> London International Exhibition on Industry and Art (01 May 1862 – 15 November 1862)

<sup>7</sup> International Exhibition 1862 – Catalogue of Works of Industry and Art – Sweden (London: Clowes and Son 1862), 65; *List of prices won in London 1862* [Förteckning å de vid 1862 års allmänna industry- och konstexposition i London belönade utställare] (Stockholm: Isaac Marcus, 1863), 21.

<sup>8</sup> Catalogue of the Educational Division of the South Kensington Museum (London: Spottiswoode, Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1876)

National school museums collected much of their material from these international expos to use back home. That happened also in Germany, Denmark and Sweden (Fuchs 2005, Svenska skolmuseet 1908). Still, acquiring a country's full exposition as South Kensington did with Sweden in 1871 was unusual.

It has not been possible to find any pictures of an actual schoolhouse/large model from Sweden in the London 1871 exhibition, but the South Kensington school museum catalogue indicates that the museum acquired a schoolhouse and the contents of it.<sup>9</sup> We know that in London 1862 and in Paris 1867<sup>10</sup> the school departments were displayed in exhibition cases and in cabinets. In Paris 1867 a Finnish observer noted that only three countries chose to have a separate exhibition about education and folk culture (national clothes): North America, Prussia and Sweden. Sweden won the gold medal for their school interior and objects – which were considered "modern and fit to meet future expectations", but unfortunately these were exhibited in a building that was far too small and dark.<sup>11</sup> According to the list of prize-winners, Sweden also won bronze medal for work by blind, deaf and dumb students, and silver for school maps.<sup>12</sup> In a French description of the Swedish and Norwegian exhibition Sweden got fine reviews for its seemingly modern education:

maps, charts and other music, books, placed in the hands of children, characterized by serious qualities of good choice and clarity, and after visiting this small school, we are no longer surprised the Swedes are one of the most educated and most advanced peoples of Europe. (Mellion 1867, p. 38 transl. here)

### ... to schoolhouses

In the World's Fair exhibition in Paris 1867 North America won a prize jury award for its school building, which was described by Finnish spectators as 'light and with lots of space and clean air' (see Figure 1).<sup>13</sup> Sweden had presented its educational exhibition within the country's main pavilion, which was crafted in honour of the 16th century Swedish king Gustaf Vasa (*L'Exposition populaire illustrée*, 1867 p. 18). At the 19th century World's Fairs it was common to choose a historical theme for a country's pavilion (Ekström 1997), but in this case the consequence was, as noted by the Finns, that it became very dark.<sup>14</sup> In order to make a better impression Sweden therefore chose to follow the USA in presenting its education within a full scale schoolhouse in Vienna 1873 and Philadelphia 1876. We know that Sweden made quite an effort to build these schoolhouses and to fill them with the best teaching material and student work that the

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<sup>9</sup> Catalogue of the Educational Division of the South Kensington Museum (London: Spottiswoode, Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1876), intro pages (not paginated). In *Ny illustrerad tidskrift* [New Illustrated Magazine] there are good illustrated records from all World's Fairs in the 1860s and 1870s except from the two in London in 1862 and 1812.

<sup>10</sup> Exposition universelle de Paris (1 April 1867 – 3 November 1867).

<sup>11</sup> Otto Alfthan, *Berättelse från Verldsexpositionen i Paris 1867 afgiven till Auxiliärkomitén i Helsingfors af kommisariern för Finland vid denna utsällning*. [Accounts from the World's exhibition in Paris 1867] (Helsingfors: J.C. Frenckell & son, 1868).

<sup>12</sup> *Förteckning öfver de svenska utställare vid 1867 års verlds-exposition i Paris, hvilka fått sig tilldelade pris och belöningar* [List over the Swedish exhibitors at the 1867 World's exposition in Paris, who got prizes and rewards] (Stockholm, 1868).

<sup>13</sup> Otto Alfthan, *ibid.* 1868,122.

<sup>14</sup> Otto Alfthan, *ibid.* 1868,122.



country could provide. The cost for the Vienna schoolhouse was 6000 Swedish kroner, and for the schoolhouse in Philadelphia costs ran up to 25000 – 30000 Swedish kroner.<sup>15</sup>



**Figure 1.** The American schoolhouse model in Paris 1867 (L'Exposition universelle de 1867 illustrée 1867)

In Vienna 1873<sup>16</sup> the countries had been informed that the field of education would be given special attention. Sweden therefore decided to build a full-scale wooden schoolhouse (Figure 2).<sup>17</sup> It followed the basic architecture of the Royal building plan for schoolhouses, but differed in appearance since it also was aligned with the other Swedish buildings at the exhibition that followed an old traditional Nordic style (Kristenson 2005, p. 79). The schoolhouse was built by Pehr Johan Ekman, famous for his production of pre-fabricated buildings (ibid.).

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<sup>15</sup> At the time the cost for an ordinary country Schoolhouse in Sweden was about 4300 – 8700 Kroner: Westberg (2014a).

<sup>16</sup> Weltausstellung (01 May 1873 – 01 November 1873).

<sup>17</sup> Nämnden för Sveriges deltaganden i världsutställningen i Wien, 4 November 1872 [Letter to Ministry of Education], Riksarkivet, UD 1902 års dossiesystem, vol 2358, file 17 [The National archives, The archives of Foreign affairs].



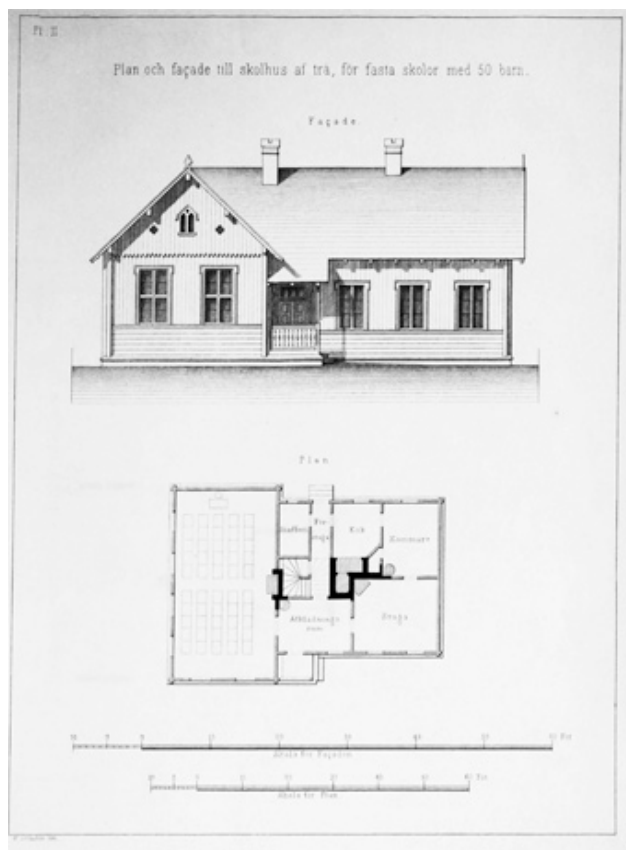


**Figure 2.** The Swedish schoolhouse in Vienna built by *AB Ekmans Mekaniska Snickerifabrik*. Nordiska museet. Skolmuseet, "Utställningar". [The Nordic Museum. The archives of the Swedish school museum, "Exhibitions"], Stockholm.

Some spectators were initially not sure if the building was representative of Swedish schoolhouses or rather of the skills of Swedish woodsmen. However, since they saw the drawings of the Royal building plans for schoolhouses (Figure 3) inside, on the walls, they came to the conclusion that Sweden really had high quality schoolhouses. (Synnerberg 1873). The schoolhouse was appreciated to the degree that for example the Romanian government approached the Swedish government with a formal request for the architectural plans for the schoolhouse presented in Vienna.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Brev till Statsrådet och Chefen för Kungliga Eckklisastikministeriet, 18 sept 1874. [Archive letter 1874, dated 18 Sep, 1874] Eckklisastikdepartementet, "Konselj 1874-09-18", SE/RA1210/01, file 19 [The National Archives, The Bureau of National Education].



**Figure 3.** The Royal building plans for schoolhouses. 'Schoolhouse built in wood intended for 50 children (Plate 2). Source: *Öfverintendentsembetet, Normalritningar (1865), pl. 2.*

However, Sweden received even more signs of appreciation for their schoolhouse displayed at the Philadelphia centennial exhibition in 1876.<sup>19</sup> Sweden had been among the first countries in the world to recognise the United States as a sovereign nation in 1776. Sweden was also the first country to accept the invitation to the centennial exhibition and sent a delegation there in 1874 to scout the area (Werner 2005, p. 61). Sweden was promised one of the best sites of the expo area.<sup>20</sup> Sweden made quite an effort here and was the country that spent most money, in proportion to the number of inhabitants, of all 60 participating countries (Werner 2005, p. 61). As an example of this expense, Sweden shipped a full-scale schoolhouse and Swedish craftsmen to build it.

The schoolhouse in Philadelphia was designed by the same architects, Magnus Isæus and Ernst Jacobson, that drew the plans for the schoolhouse in Vienna, but it was built by another company: *Wengströms mekaniska snickeri fabrik AB* (Figure 4).

<sup>19</sup> The formal name of the exposition was the International Exhibition of Arts, Manufactures, and products of the Soil and Mine in Philadelphia. It lasted between 10 May 1876 – 01 November 1876 and was launched in celebration of the United States Centennial.

<sup>20</sup> Riksarkivet, UD 1902 års dossiesystem, vol 2358, file 23 [Letters to The Minister of State and Foreign affairs 1873-1874] [The National Archives, The archives of Foreign affairs].



**Figure 4.** The Swedish Schoolhouse. Published on license from the Free Library of Philadelphia and Bridgeman Art Library. Source:

<http://libwww.library.phila.gov/CenCol/Details.cfm?ItemNo=c021811>

Swedish education was highly acclaimed by the prize jury in Philadelphia, winning over 40 prizes. The schoolhouse in itself received the following commendation:

For an excellent school building furnished with furniture and materials of all kinds also including textbooks and valuable collections, and student work, manifesting an effective school system, completely orderly and maintained by the government and the people. (Redogörelser för verldsutställningen i Filadelfia 1876 [Official accounts from the World's exhibition in Philadelphia], p. 29, transl. here)

Ontario Deputy education minister Hodgins wrote about the Swedish schoolhouse, that:

This Kingdom [of Sweden] had already distinguished itself by its educational exhibit at the Paris Exposition of 1867, and especially at the Vienna Exhibition of 1873. But, as these places were in Europe, it was a less difficult and expensive undertaking, to transport a large variety of articles to the French and Austrian Capitals, than it was to have them despatched to the New World. It showed great enterprise and decision on the part of a comparatively small kingdom, in the north of Europe, to enter into competition with so formidable, and noted an educational competitor, as the United States of America. /.../

The mode adopted by Sweden to illustrate her processes of education, was most striking and instructive. Few who visited the exhibition, would likely visit Sweden; she, therefore in effect, transported to Philadelphia, as it were, a little shady nook of a rural village, with its quaint, but tasteful Schoolhouse. Once within its doors, the visitors would be as literally in one of the village schools of the kingdom, as he would be were he in Sweden itself. There was the hall or entry, with its fittings and huge barometer, the school- room with its tile stone, desks and seats, teacher's platform, musical instruments, maps, illustrations,

apparatus and other appliances, the teacher's private room, or class-room, and above all, the teacher's apartments, occupying one side of the school-building. (Hodgins 1876, p. 59)

Obviously the efforts made, and the costs paid, by the Swedish government made an impression, but even if the government realised this, and was rewarded for it, they decided that for Paris 1878 less money would be spent on the exhibition.<sup>21</sup>

It is clear that the schoolhouse served as some kind of showroom and meeting place at the exhibits, as well as an exhibition object in its own right. Looking at the different things displayed and or commended between 1862 and 1878, they actually relate to each other even if they at first sight do not seem to have anything in common. We find that many of them are solutions to supposed problems with mass-education. But the schoolhouse was not just a place to 'store' mass education. Referring to other countries schoolhouses also became an argument to modernise ones own country's education.

### Which aspects of Swedish education were displayed and what was appreciated?

What was actually represented of a country's education at the World's Fairs? Most evident is that these exhibitions displayed usual school artefacts, books, maps, globes, pictures of animals etc. related to the late 19th century fashion for object teaching (see Figure 5 and 6). However, looking at what really met appreciation in reports, articles and in the awards we find that it was objects or methods related to problems of mass-education and to the needs of the industrialised society.



**Figure 5.** Interiors from the Swedish schoolhouse in Vienna 1873. (Ny illustrerad tidskrift [New Illustrated Magazine 1873, no 30])

<sup>21</sup> The case here was also that the organisational structure of the Paris exhibition did not really allow any foreign schoolhouses (cf. Ny illustrerad tidning [New Illustrated Magazine] 1878, p. 32).



If we look at the notion of the modern schoolhouse, as presented in Siljeström's writings, we see a "fear" that poor schools will destroy the children both mentally and physically. The single school bench (see Figure 5 and 6) that is often mentioned in this material can be understood as a step towards (a physical) individualisation, as it was adjustable in relation to the child's height.



**Figure 6.** Interiors from the Swedish Schoolhouse in Philadelphia 1876. Nordiska museet. Skolmuseet, "Utställningar". [The Nordic Museum. The archives of the Swedish school museum, "Exhibitions"], Stockholm.

The idea of these exhibitions was clearly to give a comprehensive but complete picture of the education system. A classroom filled with high qualitative teaching materials gave the spectator an image of what kind of teaching Swedish children received:

The system of instruction in an elementary school seems to consist in a large degree of object teaching, judging from the articles on the exhibition in this building. There were glass cases of mosses, plants and woods labelled, and cards with pictures of birds and beasts, each with its appropriate label. (Ingram 1876, p. 532)

Or to take another example from the New York Tribune, June 24, 1876, the reporter imagines two Swedish children coming to school in the morning:

Olga and Karl having reached the picturesque schoolhouse, leave their coats and caps in a hall, and find themselves in one of two rooms, with stationary desks and seats which science has taken care shall give the proper support to their little backs. It is warmed by a porcelain stove, and thoroughly lighted and ventilated. On the walls are maps of Sweden, showing her mountains, her water surface, productions, industrial interests, mines etc. There are pictures of the people cutting timber, mining, fishing, hunting the wild boar. The child learns insensibly in an hour much of the world outside of his village, the resources of his country, and lives of his countrymen, and that without a spoken word. New York Tribune (6/24/1876, p. 2, IV 10994)



It seems like all the material on wall, which probably could not be found in one single authentic classroom back in Sweden, made the spectator believe in the strength of object teaching – “learning without a spoken word”.

In Paris 1878<sup>22</sup> Sweden chose to display less educational material than in previous exhibitions (Catalogue 1878). Instead Sweden sent some of its more famous educationalists, and presented more of written reports, as had US done in Philadelphia. In Paris, for example, the inventor of the subject of Sloyd Otto Salomon gave a speech about the importance of Sloyd<sup>23</sup>, for which he was awarded a *Médailles d'Or*.<sup>24</sup>

Sloyd and the philosophy of Otto Salomon was clearly based on the fear that the contemporary elementary school was too theoretical. The rote learning of pure facts led the children to adopt negative attitudes towards the school and towards each other, Salomon believed (see Salomon 1892). The children also needed to develop practical skills and they needed physical activity.

In a Finnish report from Vienna we see how they found the educational exhibition to be an expression of the industrialisation of the school system. The Finnish spectators wrote that the school exhibition displayed first and foremost the “external side” of education, namely, what is visual: schoolhouses, apparatus, material; secondly, it gave statistics; and thirdly, and most importantly, it revealed the results of teaching in the forms of *schule arbeiten* (Synnerberg 1873, p. 2-4). Taken together, the Finnish spectators saw a new school develop that could rationalise or even industrialise learning – using new methods (i.e. object teaching) that made more children learn faster. But they feared that it came at a high price – mechanical learning. In order to prevent the mechanisation of man, gymnastics and other physical activities were seen as a welcome solution:

As a counterweight against the harmful influence of mass-reading and one-sided intellectual activities, an important task in the modern school will also have to be the technical exercises and especially manual labour in various forms. (Synnerberg 1873, p: 5)

Volker Barth wrote in an article about the exhibition in Paris 1867 that the visualisation of learning and the learning possibilities of all people – blind, deaf, dumb and even so-called idiots – served the purpose of normalisation of training, and especially then state governed training. The purpose here was not to illustrate that everybody could learn, but that learning could be useful to the society:

Blind people were also the subjects of these show lessons. The visitors had to be convinced that education was adaptable to their requirements. The instruction, which was supposed to be “appropriated to abnormal conditions”, aimed at the

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<sup>22</sup> Exposition universelle de 1878 (01 May 1878 – 10 November 1878).

<sup>23</sup> Speech in: Otto Salomon's private acts in August Abraham's siftelses arkiv, SE/GLA/12113/Ö II b/10; It is sometimes said that Sloyd is the only Swedish educational invention. In his school at Näss-Floda Otto Salomon personally trained 4000 Swedish teachers and 1500 teachers from other countries in the subject of Sloyd. For an introduction in English see: <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/publications/ThinkersPdf/salomone.PDF>

<sup>24</sup> Riksarkivet, UD 1902 års dossiesystem, vol 2355, file 14 [List of prize-winners] [The National Archives, The archives of Foreign affairs].

removal of that abnormality. The teachers had to deal with the specificities of their pupils; they had to choose their methods in accordance with their particularities. "The physical shape and the social condition have indeed a noticeable influence on the choices of the proper means to hasten instruction." The goal was not the individual well-being of the blind but their usefulness to society. (Barth 2007, p. 469)

Clearly the combination of a schoolhouse and its objects and examples of pupils' work functioned as an argument both towards society to invest in education, and make it purposeful for all of its citizens – and towards the citizens that going to school was something both useful and normal.

The possibility of using the World's Fairs in order to educate the society made the spectators and especially the media at these events very important. We actually see in the Swedish press that it often seemed more important to report about what other countries' reporters had noticed about Sweden, than to make one's own comparisons.

### **The international versus the domestic perspective of the schoolhouses**

Anders Ekström (1994) writes in his book about the media and the Stockholm World's Fair 1897, that people at the World's Fairs during the late 19th century stopped to look at other people that looked at something. People were just not used to looking at exhibitions like these. Barth found that the majority of the visitors who sought treatment at the exposition in Paris 1867 complained of headaches, tiredness and dizziness, probably caused by too many impressions (2007, p. 468). But what did these exhibitions actually represent and how did the people who had visited them present their impressions? What did the visitors learn about education in other countries, or rather, what did they believe they had learned and how was the learning in itself mediated?

It is estimated that London 1862 had over six million visitors. Of these, 35.000 were children and pupils representing 713 specially invited schools (London Catalogue 1862). In Paris 1867, with all in all 11 million visitors, the French government gave all teachers a 50 per cent reduction on the entrance tickets, and just three days before the ending of the exposition 10.000 pupils were invited, maybe some of whom we see in Figure 7.



**Figure 7.** School classes visiting the exhibition in Paris 1867 (L'Exposition universelle de 1867 illustrée 1867)

The Philadelphia Centennial also had around 10 million visitors<sup>25</sup> while Vienna 1873 and Paris 1878 did not attract that many people (cf. Dittrich 2010). Obviously the World's Fairs were learning places in their own. Some of the visitors had been to World's Fairs before and could make comparisons. A common statement was that the Vienna exhibition had a much better section about education than did Philadelphia (e.g. Veckoblad för folkundervisningen May 20<sup>th</sup> 1877). But for most people their visit to a World's Fair exhibition would be their first and last. To an untrained eye things on display could convey the wrong meaning. For example, from Philadelphia we find spectator accounts of a Japanese schoolhouse next to the Swedish one (New York Tribune (6/24/1876), but when comparing the maps of the exhibition and the content in catalogues we see that this was actually a Japanese bazar.

Even to the trained eye, there was still the possibility of a false representation of the state of affairs back home, so to speak. Clearly, most countries would choose to display the best of their education. Some spectators realised this, as is clear from the Finnish report from Vienna 1873 (Synnerberg 1873), but we also see examples of true beliefs in what met the eye. In some cases the representativeness of what was displayed first came under criticism when Swedes back home read the reports from the World's Fairs. This is most evident when we compare international reports with national reports about the Swedish schoolhouse in Philadelphia. In an official American account of the Centennial J. S. Ingram wrote:

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<sup>25</sup> Redogörelser för verdensutställningen i Filadelfia 1876 [Official accounts from the World's exhibition in Philadelphia], preface.

... Swedish Schoolhouse, situated north of the Main Building, which attracted so much deserved attention from its tasteful design. The materials used in its construction were imported from Sweden. It represented a typical primary country schoolhouse, and was forty by fifty feet in size. The main entrance opened into a large vestibule, on the right end of which was a large private apartment for the teacher, and at the other was the school-room. Three rows of school-desks of peculiar pattern were here arranged. The desks were all of the same size, but were adapted to children of different ages by means of a folding foot-board, which could be raised or lowered. The desks were provided with an ink-well, book-rest, a place for the slate, and the books were protected from the dust by a lid. (Ingram, 1876, p. 532)

The Swedish schoolhouse was filled with statistics and other data that could show that the Swedish government and the people in Sweden were building and organizing a modern school system. Pupils' works, such as essays or sum books were obvious "results" to display. But did all of this really represent the "typical" primary school, as suggested by Ingram in the quote? In a letter to Carl Jonas Meijerberg (1816-1903), the organiser of the education section at Philadelphia, Peter Gödecke – the principal of Nerike folkhögskola – clearly illustrates that efforts were made to select the *best* student work possible:

... I would, in view of the final wrapping on Philadelphia-things, ask about the last date to send in the material to the exhibit. As we mentioned before, we have here at school a few disciples who excelled with beautiful linear drawings, such drawings we wish to enclose a few that are now being prepared but should be ready soon. (Letter from Gödecke to Meijerberg Sköllersta March 1, 1876, transl. here).

And of course, not even Meijerberg was very representative. In Sweden he had several important positions within the educational system.<sup>26</sup> In an article in the New York Tribune we get a picture of the impression Meijerberg and his Swedish school material could have on the visitor:

On his [Meijerberg's] desk were dozens of ordinary copy books written and sent over by the identical little babies of whom I was in search. Their names were on the back. Olga Johansson, Karl Bund, &c.; I held them in my hand as he talked [Meijerberg] – they made the statistics real. When he told me that 85 per cent of all the children in Sweden went to the national schools, it was not a percentage I saw

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<sup>26</sup> Dittrich noted that the education experts at these fairs combined in themselves many different positions. They combined occupations such as: officials of ministries of education and school boards, school directors, university presidents, prominent teachers, politicians, clergymen, specialists in school hygiene, medical doctors, manufacturers of school equipment and architects (Dittrich 2010, p. 87-88). A New York Tribune journalist thought that Meijerberg was a passionate and a very skilled informer of Swedish education: "I found there Dr C.J. Meyerberg (sic!), one of the first Government school inspectors of Sweden, who certainly seemed to care as much for the shabby little children as any woman could do, and who poured forth information and statistics quite beyond any woman's power to carry away." (New York Tribune (6/24/1876, p. 2).

at all, but Olga and Karl in their coarse shoes and patched jackets trotting along the same road upward as the nobleman's son, and sitting on the bench beside him. Olga's father is a miner, Karl's a peasant ... The whole family of either will not probably own \$50 in the year. What chance would these little ones have to become anything better than mere beasts of burden if their country was not a mother to them? New York Tribune (6/24/1876, p. 2, IV 10994)

Meijerberg as a person, the school material exhibited, and the will, presumably, of the spectator to see a better future for the children created an image, a space, of Swedish education communicated to people through newspapers and reports, as facts. Did the Centennial visitors regard, as Hodgins, Ingram or the New York Tribune reporter as appeared to, the schoolhouse as an exact replica or a transported example of a working education system? Sweden presented an ideal schoolhouse, but what did it represent? When the visitor observed the Schoolhouse what did they see? a real school, transplanted ? an artifice? evidence of a system? Would they have been surprised to read the letter to the local newspaper *Karlskrona Veckoblad*:

It is generally considered that America is unrivalled when it comes to exaggerations. Now this parameter has been surpassed, even by our country Sweden. A letter to *Karlskrona Veckoblad* proves this through the rendering of an American newspaper opinion regarding the "Swedish schoolhouse at the Philadelphia Exhibition", wherein it is stated that among other exhibition objects from Sweden there is also a schoolhouse, "as it is employed in Sweden," and shortly thereafter, that this schoolhouse will cost over 10,000 dollars. /.../ Here at home, it is still far from being that upright /.../ a single storey building painted in red on unplanned wainscot; a low door shows us where the entrance is found. In the small dirty hall stand a score as dirty clogs, which, like barricades close the passage. To the left of the hall we see a door that leads to two small flame stoves or, at best, of brick masonry stoves equipped hovels, intended for "a residence for the teacher". To the right of the hall we find likewise a door, and from the noise inside we conclude, that is where we have the "school room". After we kicked a bunch of clogs, etc. away, we step inside. At the front of the low level of smoke and dirt darkened "room" we see an elevation, depicting pulpit, and from there one person, namely, the schoolteacher. On the floor long black benches and a seven-eight a dozen more and less ragged, rude and impolite kids. On the walls a few fragments of maps of Scandinavia, the province in which the school exists, and in the best case, over Europe. At the far end a large heap of stones, depicting the stove.<sup>27</sup>

The Swedish schoolhouse in Philadelphia was clearly not representative of real Swedish schoolhouses back home. In *Veckoblad för folkundervisningen* (1877) [Education weekly] a visitor from the Philadelphia exhibition describes in some detail the differences between the different countries' schoolhouses at the exhibition. Sweden had impressed, especially with the contents in the schoolroom and the ventilation system. The news editor's reaction to the description of the Swedish schoolhouse was that he thought only one out of fifty schoolhouses followed the direction of the Royal building plans for schoolhouses:

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<sup>27</sup> *Lindesbergs allehanda* 1876-06-30, 3, transl. here



The one at the exhibition in Philadelphia so much admired Swedish schoolhouse therefore has certainly a comparatively small number of alikes in its homeland, and the glory, we Swedes therefore harvested, is, we believe, neither good or rightiously deserved. (Veckoblad för folkundervisningen 1877, p. 41 transl. here)

To sum up, these exhibitions were a major investment for the participating countries. Sweden here clearly made an effort in the area of education, a calculated attempt to portray the Swedish state and society as having an advanced educational system. It seems to have worked pretty well. The Schoolhouse and its visualized pedagogic relations and appliances were all genuine products and available in Sweden. However, in their totality, they did not represent the normal Swedish school, as major local investment in school buildings was just beginning in Sweden and the schoolhouse at the exhibitions was very well endowed with teaching materials (Westberg 2014a). The schoolhouse was both real and ideal, and both actual and mythological. For the visitor, it offered material evidence of its status as an excellent Swedish school, a good representative of a modern education system.

For the Swedish home audience (and to migrant Swedes overseas), it was a symbol of a new national identity. It made a claim that a well governed, Sweden was coming into existence. The Schoolhouse was a large advertisement, and for it to work, it had to be interesting and entertaining, to hold grains of truth, and to be based in the realm of possibility (Lundahl & Lawn 2013). Thus, there were many different reasons that Sweden participated and advanced in this space of future education.

## Conclusions

World's Fairs of the late 19th century were clearly places where innovations flourished and experiences and ideas were exchanged. The World's Fairs were spaces in which ideas about future education could be projected; however, the quality of text books or the ideas of single benches, Sloyd or object teaching were not as important as the realisation of the importance of comparing educational systems. As a consequence of this experience many countries developed national school museums, taking care of the actual objects from the World's Fairs, but also passing on ideas from other countries to the domestic group of teachers (Fuchs 2005), thus making an increase international transfer of ideas, ideals and innovations in education possible.

Another way to understand the logic of 'the international' here is from the perspective of the people at the heart of a progressive educational movement. It might be that these people had few possibilities to discuss their ideas at a domestic level. Siljeström and Meijerberg certainly were not representative of Swedish educational clergymen at the end of the 19th century, but he had a vivid correspondence with likeminded people abroad, and they met and participated in these exhibitions. Appearing as modern and progressive made it possible to participate in international elite conversations about education – which could inform, enlighten and legitimize national reforms. People like Siljeström, Meijerberg in Sweden or Hodgins and Ingram on the North American side, clearly transcended the boundaries of their own institutions on nation-states (cf. Dittrich 2010).

By introducing the concepts "policy up and download" Tanja Börzel (2002) shows in an often quoted article how Member state governments both shape European Union policy

outcomes and adopt them. Uploading policy to an international level and then downloading it reduces the cost at the domestic level, since adapting to international policy often has greater legitimacy than simply suggesting national reforms (cf. Schriewer 1992, 2004). I would suggest that the key actors in Sweden, USA, Canada and UK referred to in this paper discovered this logic, even if not at a conceptual level. Being able to show that the Swedish schoolhouse was much appreciated abroad became an argument when working on these reforms at the domestic level. The nation state participated through these actors by using them both as representatives of the country and as promoters at home. In Sweden the Royal building plan for schoolhouses' architecture started to have an impact on the building of new schoolhouses in the late 19th century (Westberg 2014b). The "fame" of the exhibitions probably had little to do with this, at least in a direct way. But it probably, among other things, gave the young nation state the confidence to continue its standardizing efforts.

As a final remark, it is interesting to reflect about what was at the core of these standardisation and modernisation processes. Prince Albert of England suggested right at the beginning (1851) that the exhibitions should not only contain objects from art and industry, but should also represent *the means by which they were produced*, i.e. culture, knowledge and education. We can also clearly read from the sources about a close connection between training and industry. For example *Svenska Slöjdföreningen* (formed in 1844) was part of these exhibitions from the beginning. *Svenska Slöjdföreningen* had as an expressed purpose to ensure that the high quality of craftsmanship was not lost when more and more work turned into mass-production. They saw that education could be a way of guaranteeing high quality craftsmanship – even if they also feared that too much intellectual education could lead to instrumental mass-reading. Sloyd became the antidote. Compared to other countries this elaborated vision of technical education was more successful in Sweden (cf. Dittrich 2010). The amount of material relating to Sloyd in these exhibits indicates the close relation between a particular kind of education – the *Folkskola* (being neither too practical nor too theoretical) – and industrialisation. Sweden was recognised for its *Folkskola* as one of many purposeful forms of mass-education, serving the needs of a modern industry and a modern society rather than the church and the nation. We can see how this recognition turned into a pride that expanded thereafter. Sweden chose to display material and objects that were not necessarily representative of the quality of Swedish education, but of the ideal of this *Folkskola*. Compared to other investigations of the effects of the World's Fairs on educational departments (Dittrich 2010, Lawn 2008) this paper illustrates not primarily cultural transfer between different countries, but also the tension between a country's international self-image and its national self-image.

Comparing the representations at the late 19th century World's Fairs with how international comparisons are made in today's educational policy-making, I would argue that the findings in this paper represent a kind of international comparison based on what we can call an aesthetic accountability (cf. Ghertner 2010). The rise of the comprehensive and compulsory school was also about the hope and ambition to construct a modern society. Education could fill this society with idealistic content. Today there is a stronger emphasis on comparability and statistical results than on content (Zymek 2007, Lingard & Rawolle 2011). By considering objects, numbers and charts etc. we see how shifts in the educational systems related to different ideas of modernity. At the same time, the concept of 'objective' (arriving in the mid-19th

century) denoted a modern sense of detachment of self from the object world (Pred 1995 p. 51). This paper broadly illustrates a state of material and aesthetical objectivity about education, on the verge of scientific objectivity at the outset of the 20th century. Still objects dominated, but for example at Philadelphia 1876, the United States had started to fascinate with statistics instead of displaying schoolhouses. One thing about objects and schoolhouses that really differentiates them from modern data about education is that they could be walked around, studied closely and seen in relation to other things, from different angles.

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