



## Swedish Education Exhibitions and Aesthetic Governing at World's Fairs in the Late Nineteenth Century

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**Abstract** • For many historians of education, the emergence of a modern education system after the mid-nineteenth century was a national and regional process, neatly and carefully closed off within the borders of the nation. However, these accounts have often disregarded the effects of the flows of cross-border ideas and technologies, such as international comparisons, lesson-drawing, policy diffusion and travel, as well as local adaptations and translations of education policy originating elsewhere. The purpose of this article is to shed light on the relations between Swedish education and the international scene when it comes to policy and practice formation. The field of study is the international World's Fairs of 1862–1904. Looking at what Sweden displayed, and understanding how visitors perceived it, the article raises questions concerning how exhibitions like these worked as mediators of educational ideals. The focus will be on the dissemination of aesthetic ideals, and the article will show that the World's Fairs were platforms for an aesthetic normativity that had governing effects locally as well as globally.

**Keywords** • World's fair, education exhibitions, aesthetic governing, synoptical power, transnational history

### Introduction - The World's Fairs as spaces of the future

For many historians of education, the emergence of a modern education system after the mid-nineteenth century occurred as a national and regional process, neatly and carefully closed off within the borders of the nation.<sup>1</sup> These accounts have, however, systematically disregarded the effects of the flows of cross-border ideas and technologies as well as local adaptations and translations of education policy originating elsewhere. Therefore, it is important to look at these flows and where they take place among countries, regions and people. One such 'transnational hub' of policy and practice formation in education was the World's Fairs in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. The purpose of this article is to provide an understanding of how such exhibitions functioned as mediators of educational ideals.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Akira Iriye, *Global and Transnational History: The Past, Present and Future* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 2.

2 This article was originally presented at AERA 2014, Philadelphia, Session: Education Reform at the Turn of the 20th Century, Division F; however, it is now revised. Some findings in this article were previously described in Christian Lundahl and Martin Lawn, "The Swedish Schoolhouse: a Case Study in Transnational Influences in Education at the 1870s World's Fairs," *Paedagica Historica* 51, no. 3 (2014), 319–35. The present article, however, draws on a larger body of material and tries to strengthen the theoretical arguments. The article is written within the project From Paris to PISA ([www.paristopisa.com](http://www.paristopisa.com)), funded by *Vetenskapsrådet* [The Swedish Research Council].

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More specifically, the article draws on research carried out on most of the major World's Fair exhibitions between 1862 and 1904.<sup>3</sup> Using Sweden as a focal point, the main questions addressed in this study are: in what ways did these exhibitions disseminate educational ideals and techniques? What was chosen for display, how was it selected, what did it represent, and how did the audience appreciate it?

In this article, I argue that exhibitions rested upon four foundations, which also form the structure of the article. These foundations are 1) *Visualising*, 2) *Governing*, 3) *Markets*, and 4) *Audiences*. *Visualising* involves the modus operandi of every exhibition – things are put on display. Reviewing what was selected for display and how it was displayed tells us something about what was considered most important, or possible, at a given time, to produce and promote. It also says something about the pedagogics of visualisation. *Governing* often involves the very purpose of an exhibition. Exhibitions aim at accomplishing change in power relations or in ways of thinking through the work around structures of formal authority. They encourage comparison and competition. They provide ideals and function as “normative social spaces.”<sup>4</sup> *Markets*, with the exception, perhaps, of museums, are places where the things exhibited can be sold, traded or shared. This was certainly the case with the World's Fairs, but they were often also about sharing skills and ‘tricks of the trade.’<sup>5</sup> Finally, without audiences looking and learning, there would not be much of an exhibition. If the aim of an exhibition is change in some way or another, someone must be influenced. World's Fairs have been described as a curriculum – they ‘function as transfer points for the exchanges of educational ideas’ between the different continents.<sup>6</sup>

Central to these foundations of an exhibition are the manifold kinds of numerical and aesthetic representations of educational systems, such as objects or charts, selected to say something of the educational system as a whole. In the following, I will particularly elaborate on the concept of ‘aesthetic governing,’ as it was particular, often beautiful or tidy, representations that were used to affect emotions, beliefs and hopes.<sup>7</sup> I will argue that exhibitions as transfer points for new educational ideas and technologies cannot effectively project a future based only on rational and comparable statistics. The ‘future’ must be imagined or sensed for the governing to be effective.

The theoretical section of the article relates the study of World's Fair exhibitions to a transnational perspective on the history of education, in which the concept of soft power is important to understanding the relationship between different countries at places such as the World's Fair. This section ends with an elaborated distinction among the concepts governing, governance and governmentality. The four

3 Because this article is part of an ongoing project, From Paris to PISA, two major exhibitions during this period are not accounted for in this article: Chicago 1893 and Paris 1900. However, they will be addressed in forthcoming papers ([www.paristopisa.com](http://www.paristopisa.com)).

4 Anders Ekström, *Den utställda världen: Stockholmsutställningen 1897 och 1800-talets världsutställningar* (Stockholm: Nordiska Museets förlag, 1994), 11.

5 Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984).

6 Eugene F. Provenzo, *Culture as Curriculum: Education and the International Expositions (1876–1904)* (New York: Peter Lang, 2012).

7 D. Asher Ghertner, “Calculating Without Numbers: Aesthetic Governmentality in Delhi's Slums,” *Economy and Society* 39, no. 2 (2010), 185–217; D. Asher Ghertner, “Rule by Aesthetics: World-Class City Making in Delhi,” in *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global*, ed. Ananya Roy and Aihwa Ong (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011), 279–306.

subsequent sections explores the four foundations of an exhibition. First, I show how Sweden used entire schoolhouses to visualise future ideals. Thereafter, I illustrate how Sweden partook in international comparisons at these exhibitions. I show how the exhibitions function as markets, where the countries bought, traded and learned from each other. Finally, I discuss the role of the audiences and how they experienced these spectacles. In the concluding section, I discuss the use of these exhibitions to display ideals, not only to gain recognition from other countries but also to use the international experiences to achieve changes at a domestic level.

### Perspective and theoretical framework

Investigating the mediating role that the World's fairs had on educational ideas and technologies implies a transnational perspective on history. Transnational history is about contacts among communities, politics and societies and their exchanges, interactions, integrations and de-coupling. A transnational perspective on history means acknowledging and assessing foreign contributions to design, taste, strategies, politics and future hopes. Such a perspective also highlights the trends, patterns, organisations and individuals that exist between and within our different historical entities.<sup>8</sup> With a transnational perspective, it is furthermore important to “think ‘with and through’ the nation”<sup>9</sup> and to look at “local reactions to external global forces.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, to analyse the participation at the World's fairs, it is important to have both an internal and an external perspective of a country's participation. For example, as will be described further below, Swedish spectators not only reacted to foreign exhibits, they also reacted to foreigners' descriptions of what Sweden exhibited.

Whereas early nineteenth century international comparisons in education were mainly found in travelling accounts, the second half of the nineteenth century offered new ways of comparison and international exchange through international exhibitions. The international World's fairs were among the “few genuinely international cultural institutions” of their time.<sup>11</sup> At the opening of the first World's fair exhibition in London in 1851, Prince Albert of the United Kingdom declared the importance of education, but it was in London in 1862 that education first received its own department at a World's fair.<sup>12</sup> From the beginning, the international exhibitions helped make comparisons between states increasingly transparent and organised, based around identity and production. The international exhibitions constituted a new mode of production in education, parallel to that of schooling. The future was organised and turned into a display of required objects and techniques that placed entire nations in an elevated, viewable space.<sup>13</sup> The kind of data, the actors and their positions and relations, the patterns used to disseminate ideas, the use of media,

8 Pierre-Yves Saunier, *Transnational History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 3.

9 *Ibid.*, 8.

10 Gita Steiner-Kamsi, “The Politics of League Tables,” *Civic Education*, no. 1 (2003), 1–6.

11 Klaus Dittrich, “Experts Going Transnational: Education at World Exhibitions during the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century” (PhD diss., University of Portsmouth, 2010).

12 *Ibid.*, 17

13 Bruno Giberti, *Designing the Centennial: A History of the 1876 International Exhibition in Philadelphia* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002); Anders Ekström, *Viljan att se – viljan att synas: Medieumgänge och publik kultur runt 1900* (Stockholm: Carlssons förlag, 2010); Jeff Werner, *Medelvägens estetik: Sverigebilder i USA* (Hedemora: Gidlunds, 2008).

etc., that we find when looking at the international exhibitions reveal the process of modelling and re-modelling an ideal school system.<sup>14</sup>

The Swedish historian Anders Ekström has described the late nineteenth century World's fairs in general as an "aggressive national, political and economic competition and battle ground, often formulated in war metaphors."<sup>15</sup> They were the Olympic Games of arts and industry; in fact, the formal Olympic Games in sports were co-arranged with the World's fair in Paris 1900 and in St. Louis 1904. Regarding education, Klaus Dittrich has described the participation of education experts at the fairs as a combination of three conscious strategies. First, they went transnational to appropriate foreign features for their own institutions, to learn from abroad. Second, they wanted to represent their own institutions and achievements on an international stage. Third, they wanted to cooperate on the international level, transcending the boundaries of their own institution or nation state.<sup>16</sup>

The exhibitions were also centres for national policy and power transfer. Robert W. Rydell 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.<sup>17</sup> The fairs offered these ideas along with "the proper" interpretation of social and political reality.<sup>18</sup> The hegemonic function was also associated with the evolution of consumerism and the role of newly emerging media. At these fairs, innovative ways of displaying and visualising ideals and models, as well as new ways of looking and perceiving, contributed to effective dissemination.<sup>19</sup> Eugene F. Provenzo claims that "[p]erhaps nowhere was the impact of the expositions and the new system of knowledge and power they helped to set in place as great as in the area of education."<sup>20</sup>

In the case of education, the power of these exhibitions has been related to the notion of accountability. Noah Sobe and David Boven describe the accountability of the exhibitions as the "political' work of establishing norms, constructing subjectivities and helping to establish what is and is not possible' through 'rituals of verification.'"<sup>21</sup> From their research about the participation of the USA, they show that the fairs were mainly about four things. First, standardization and uniformity via information on educational systems that was in some ways quantifiable or able to be expressed with numbers. Second, an on-going conversation about whether exhibits should feature the "products" or outcomes of schools or the "processes" and methods used at different schools. Third, whether an exhibit should present the highest-quality work or a representative sample of student work. Fourth, an overarching emphasis on performativity and a conscious styling of education exhibits as an arena of performance.

14 Martin Lawn, ed., *Modelling the Future – Changing Education through World Exhibitions* (London: Symposium Books, 2008).

15 Ekström (1994), 23. Transl. here.

16 Dittrich (2010), 37–38.

17 Rydell (1984).

18 See also Volker Barth, "Displaying Normalisation: The Paris Universal Exhibition of 1867," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 20, no. 4 (2007), 462–85.

19 See especially Alan Pred, *Recognising European Modernities: A Montage of the Present* (London: Routledge, 1995); Giberti (2002); Ekström (2010).

20 Provenzo (2012), 5.

21 Noah W. Sobe and David T. Boven, "Nineteenth-Century World's Fairs as Accountability Systems: Scopic Systems, Audit Practices and Educational Data," *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 22, no. 118 (2014), 4.

However, the USA was not very representative in these efforts.<sup>22</sup> Many other countries made more of an effort in showing their educational objects, such as schoolhouses, teaching materials, and pupils' work. This clearly holds true for Sweden, even if Sweden also presented some statistics about its educational system. Therefore, it is necessary to differentiate between numerical accountability and aesthetic normativity. Whereas the former is seen more as a panoptical power producing standards through statistical norms and calculations, the latter can be seen as a synoptical power, producing and displaying ideals affecting emotions, beliefs and hopes.<sup>23</sup>

Aesthetic normativity can be understood as a kind of 'soft power.' According to Joseph Nye, "[s]oft power rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others."<sup>24</sup> In contrast to 'hard power,' whereby someone uses brute force, threats or sanctions to obtain what s/he wants, soft power appeals to shared values through persuasion or attraction strategies. Soft power – getting others to want the outcomes you want – co-opts people rather than coerces them.<sup>25</sup> This power resource is especially valuable in the areas of internationalisation and foreign affairs.

A country may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries – admiring its values, emulating its example, aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness – want to follow it. In this sense, it is also important to set the agenda and attract others in world politics, and not only to force them to change by threatening military force or economic sanctions.<sup>26</sup>

One way to understand the importance of participating at the World's fairs in such a way as to draw others' attention is that if a country displayed excellent examples of its education system, the country increased its opportunities to exchange ideas and cooperate on future developments:

The expositions provided educators with a forum where they could freely exchange ideas and observe the educational experiments of other nations. In doing so, they were achieving the primary purpose intended by the organisers of the expositions – the exchange and advancement of new technical information and knowledge.<sup>27</sup>

We can thus assume that a major motive to participate in these exhibitions was knowledge exchange and a will to learn how to advance the society in various aspects.<sup>28</sup> It is therefore easy to understand how an aesthetic normativity could be nourished at the World's Fairs as a kind of soft power between countries, but I will also argue that a kind of aesthetic governing also took place within education as such

<sup>22</sup> Sobe and Boven (2014); Lundahl and Lawn (2014).

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Mathiesen, "The Viewer Society: Michel Foucault's Panopticon Revisited," *Theoretical Criminology* 1, no. 2 (1997), 215–34.

<sup>24</sup> Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 5.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 6–7.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>27</sup> Provenzo (2012), 10.

<sup>28</sup> In this article, I have mainly used sources that describe what happened at the World's Fairs but looking deeper into parliamentary debates and propositions can reveal more about the explicit reasons to Sweden's participation in the exhibitions. Christian Lundahl, "Becoming International in the Late 19th Century. The Arguments For and Against Sweden's Participation in the World's Fairs" (paper presented at Comparative Education in Europe (CESE), Glasgow, Scotland, 31 May–3 June, 2016).

during this period of investigation. To do that, it is necessary to qualify the concept of governing and distinguish it from governance and governmentality.

Governance is commonly understood as, ‘the prevailing patterns by which public power is exercised in a given social context.’<sup>29</sup> Governance implies a structure, “an answer to ‘who is authorized to decide;’” whereas governing “implies the way people work within and around those structures of formal authority to get things decided.”<sup>30</sup> A closely related concept is that of governmentality. Both governance and governmentality concern the state and “stateness,” albeit in very different traditions and focus areas.<sup>31</sup> In his studies of the New Delhi slum, Asher Ghertner, drawing on Michel Foucault and Jacques Rancière, defines aesthetic governmentality as a socially produced aesthetic normativity – “a distribution of the sensible’ that lays down boundaries between the beautiful/ugly, visible/invisible, legal/illegal – that operates as a normalizing urban quality, inducing a form of self-government among those who identify with the desirability of world-class urban improvements.”<sup>32</sup> Ghertner argues that this ‘mode of governing’ is particularly effective in cultures not dominated by the logic of numbers.<sup>33</sup>

Characteristic of Foucault’s approach and to the concept of governmentality, however, is a relational conception of society and its institutions connecting the political and the subjective realms. But as Denise Lawrence-Zúñiga found, it can be difficult to determine whether this aesthetic governing or normativity also affects the thinking and or behaviour of the subjects over which the power is exercised.<sup>34</sup> A more reasonable starting point is to perceive aesthetic *governing* as a soft power also within the practice of education and not a priori assume that it develops into governmentality. Thus, we have two levels of aesthetic governing, between countries and within education. Exhibitions visualise norms and ideals, making comparisons and external validation possible as Sobe and Boven state; but exhibitions also, as I will show, encourage learning from each other through sensation, admiration, fascination, surprise and curiosity. One of those things that appealed to sensation and admiration was the Swedish schoolhouse and all of its contents, its objects and educational artefacts such as pupils’ work. The educational ideal Sweden displayed at the World’s Fairs expressed an aesthetic normativity saying that it was no longer acceptable to look, smell or behave however one chose. It was important to adapt not only to values of beauty, cleanliness and hygiene but also to orderliness and functionality. Before further exploring how exhibitions such as the World’s Fairs helped disseminate educational ideals and techniques, a brief background to the Swedish case is necessary.

29 Rob Jenkins, “The Emergence of the Governance Agenda: Sovereignty, Neo-Liberal Bias and the Politics of International Development,” in *The Companion to Development Studies*, ed. Vandana Desai and Robert Potter (London: Edward Arnold, 2000), 485.

30 Leslie David, “‘Governance’ or ‘Governing?’” (paper prepared by the Centre for Higher Education Policy, Los Angeles, CA, presented to the Governance Roundtable, Santa Fe, NM, June 2003), 4–5.

31 Karin Amos, “Governance and Governmentality: Relation and Relevance of Two Prominent Social Scientific Concepts for Comparative Education,” *Educação e Pesquisa* 36.SPE (2010), 23–38.

32 Ghertner (2011), 3.

33 See especially Gerthner (2010).

34 Denise Lawrence-Zúñiga, “Bungalows and Mansions: White Suburbs, Immigrant Aspirations, and Aesthetic Governmentality,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 87, no. 3 (2014), 819–54.

## Staging a schoolhouse as a portal to the future

World's Fairs have put education systems on display from the 1860s until today. 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 these fairs, which otherwise were mainly exhibitions of industry, art and culture.<sup>35</sup> In a few cases, some countries such as Sweden chose to display entire schoolhouses, or up to full-scale models thereof, at the London exhibition of 1871, the Vienna Exhibition of 1873, the Centennial exhibition in Philadelphia 1876 and the Stockholm exhibition in 1897.

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.<sup>36</sup> On a national level, Per A. Siljeström (1815–1892), a teacher of natural sciences, made impressive efforts at improving the state of schoolhouses, publishing handbooks in schoolhouse architecture. In 1862, he also became the first *folkskole* inspector of Stockholm. It is fair to say that through his work, he laid the ground for a new schoolhouse standard based on modern architecture in Sweden.<sup>37</sup>

For Siljeström, the quality of the schoolhouse was a reflection of the quality of the education and a sign of respect for teachers and children:

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.<sup>38</sup>

Siljeström clearly states a relationship between poor standards in schoolhouses and bad school discipline and learning. With this perspective on discipline and learning, a nice schoolhouse in a good environment became very important, and Siljeström's interest in modernising schoolhouses came to occupy his work for some years.<sup>39</sup> It

35 Hjärdis Kristenson, *Skolhuset – Idé och form* (Lund: Bokförlaget Signum, 2005).

36 Ibid., 55.

37 Kristenson (2005); Johannes Westberg, *Att bygga ett skolväsende. Folkskolans förutsättningar och framväxt 1840–1900* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2015a).

38 Per Adam Siljeström, *The Educational Institutions of the United States, their Character and Organization* (London 1853a), 207.

39 Siljeström wrote a pamphlet in 1853 in which he argued, not least from a hygiene perspective, for the modernisation of schoolhouses: Siljeström, *Skolhusen och skolmaterielen: Om vigten af en ändamålsenlig anordning af skolornas upplysning, luftvexling m.m. samt om behöfliga förbättringar i dessa hänseenden, med särskilt afseende på hufvudstadens offentliga skolor: föredrag hållet vid pedagogiska föreningens årsmöte den 1 juni 1853: tillika med några sednare tillägg* (Stockholm, 1853b). He soon also published drawings/plans for how to build and furnish them – much of which came from America (only one desk and one chair was drawn in Sweden – by Svenska slöjdföreningen), see: Siljeström, *Inledning till skolarkitekturen* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 1856a); Siljeström, *Bidrag till skol-arkitekturen: Ritningar och beskrifningar öfver skolhus, skolmöbler, undervisningsmedel m.m. till tjänst för skolstyrelser, skolföreståndare, lärare och andre för undervisningsväsendet intresserade personer* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 1856b).

is clear that the National Building Plans for schoolhouses in Sweden (*normalritningar*) from 1865 bear the landmarks of Siljeström's school architecture and his basic arguments.<sup>40</sup> Some formulations are exact copies of Siljeström's writings.<sup>41</sup> However, compared with what we see in the National Building Plans, Siljeström placed a relatively strong emphasis on the value of choosing a good environment when building a new schoolhouse in a neighbourhood. The poor environments and conditions schoolhouses were built in had not been such a great problem when the church governed the education, Siljeström argued:

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.<sup>42</sup>

It seems that Siljeström intended for schools to be attractive in other ways when they are not used solely for educating for religious purposes. Here, aesthetics could play an important role. Siljeström argued that when more children, from younger ages and for a longer time, were expected to learn more and develop civic manners, there was a need for 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. Modern architecture, light and tidy rooms, open space and clean air appeal directly to the senses. 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.

When Sweden included education exhibits for the first time at the World's Fair in London in 1862,<sup>43</sup> Siljeström was chosen to organise and present the Swedish education exhibits.<sup>44</sup> Except for Sweden, no other country seems to have exhibited schoolhouses at the exhibition in London 1862. The only known exhibit of schoolhouses is Siljeström's *drawing* of a schoolhouse. He actually received a 'Medal of Excellence' for the objects displayed at the Swedish exhibition room at the educational department of the London exposition. The objects included the drawing of a new elementary school as well as school furniture, maps and plans.<sup>45</sup>

Possibly, Sweden wanted to participate, exchange ideas and compete at these exhibitions with an emphasis on the material objects of education. The early World's Fairs were related to industrialisation and a general interest in material moderni-

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<sup>40</sup> This was a legislative document proclaiming that every new school building in Sweden should follow the standards set by this act.

<sup>41</sup> Kristenson (2005), 60.

<sup>42</sup> Siljeström (1853b), 27. Transl. here.

<sup>43</sup> London International Exhibition on Industry and Art (1 May 1862–15 November 1862).

<sup>44</sup> Behind the people working at the Swedish exhibitions stood a national commission of selected experts who initially decided what to exhibit and what should represent Sweden.

<sup>45</sup> *International Exhibition 1862 – Catalogue of Works of Industry and Art – Sweden* (London: Clowes and Son 1862), 65; *Förteckning å de vid 1862 års allmänna industry- och konstexposition i London belönade utställare* (Stockholm: Isaac Marcus, 1863), 21.



sation.<sup>46</sup> At the same time, education could be elevated to a new societal position, deserving – at least according to people such as Siljeström – an attractive appearance accompanying an ambition to foster not only skilled people but also clean, healthy, sound and disciplined people. In the following, I will illustrate how Sweden's participation at the exhibitions can be seen as a form of aesthetical governing that appeared in what was visualised, compared, exchanged and learned.

### Displaying, comparing and competing

Where early nineteenth century international comparisons, as already mentioned, could mostly be found in travel accounts, the second half of the nineteenth century offered new ways of comparison and competition through international exhibitions.<sup>47</sup> With education systems displayed side-by-side, the comparative and competing logic of the industrial movement also affected ways of thinking about education. As noted by Sobe and Boven, the United States, at least from the 1870s to the 1890s, tried to display its educational system using facts and figures. Sweden, on the other hand, chose to put entire schoolhouses filled with authentic, even if carefully selected, school objects on display. How did this “method” of display evolve? In what different ways can we find expressions of numerical and aesthetical governing at these fairs?

In London 1862 and in Paris 1867, the school items were displayed in exhibition cases and cabinets.<sup>48</sup> In Paris 1867, a Finnish observer noted that only three countries chose to have a separate exhibition about education and folk culture (e.g., 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 the schoolhouse presented by Sweden was deemed “far too small and dark.”<sup>49</sup> According to the list of prize-winners, Sweden also won a bronze medal for work by blind, deaf and dumb students and a silver medal for school maps.<sup>50</sup>

In Paris 1867, the United States won a prize jury award for its schoolhouse, which was described by Finnish spectators as “light and with lots of space and clean air.”<sup>51</sup> Sweden had presented its educational exhibition within the country's main pavilion, which was crafted in honour of the sixteenth century Swedish king Gustav I of Sweden.<sup>52</sup> Although the choice of a historical theme for the pavilion was rather common at the nineteenth century World's Fairs,<sup>53</sup> in this case, the consequence was the critique “too small and dark.”<sup>54</sup>

46 Anders Ekström, Solveig Jülich and Pelle Snickars, eds., 1897: *Mediehistorier kring Stockholmsutställningen* (Stockholm: Statens ljud- och bildarkiv, 2006); Pred (1995).

47 In, for example, Siljeström's script “A Contribution to the School Architecture” (1856b), he presents drawings of schools and classrooms from his visits to America and England. See also Dittrich (2010).

48 Exposition universelle de Paris (1 April 1867–3 November 1867).

49 Otto Alfthan, *Berättelse från Verldsexpositionen i Paris 1867 afgiven till Auxiliärkomitén i Helsingfors af kommisariern för Finland vid denna utställning* (Helsingfors: J.C. Frenckell and son, 1868).

50 *Förteckning öfver de svenska utställare vid 1867 års verlds-exposition i Paris, hvilka fått sig tilldelade pris och belöningar* (Stockholm, 1868).

51 Alfthan (1868), 122.

52 *L'Exposition populaire illustrée*, 1867, 18.

53 Anders Ekström, *Damen med velocipeden: Till tingens kulturhistoria* (Uppsala: Avdelningen för vetenskapshistoria, Uppsala universitet, 1997).

54 Alfthan (1868), 122.

To make a better impression on the audience and on the prize jury, Sweden chose to follow the United States in presenting its education within a full-scale schoolhouse in Vienna 1873 and Philadelphia 1876. We know that Sweden made a major effort to build these schoolhouses and to fill them with the best teaching material and student work the country could provide. The cost for the Vienna schoolhouse was 6,000 Swedish kronor, and for the schoolhouse in Philadelphia, costs ran up to 25,000–30,000 Swedish kronor (Figure 1).<sup>55</sup> The exhibited schoolhouses followed the basic architecture of the National Building Plan for schoolhouses (Figure 2), but they were also aligned with the other Swedish buildings at the exhibitions that often followed an old and traditional Nordic style.<sup>56</sup> They were clearly made more attractive aesthetically than ordinary schoolhouses in Sweden.<sup>57</sup>



Figure 1. The Swedish Schoolhouse in Philadelphia 1876 and in Stockholm 1897. Sources: Original 1876 Centennial lithograph, The Swedish school house (author's private collection); Ludvig Looström, ed., *Allmänna konst och industriutställningen i Stockholm 1897* (Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand, 1899), 360.

Some Finnish spectators were initially unsure whether the displayed schoolhouses were representative of Swedish schoolhouses or, rather, of the skills of Swedish woodsmen. However, because the spectators saw the drawings of the National Building Plans for schoolhouses (Figure 2) displayed on the inside of the schoolhouse, they concluded that Sweden really did have high-quality schoolhouses.<sup>58</sup> The schoolhouse at Philadelphia received particular appreciation.<sup>59</sup> The schoolhouse in Philadelphia (Figure 1 left pic.) was designed by the same architects, Magnus Isæus and Ernst Jacobson, who had constructed the schoolhouse in Vienna,<sup>60</sup> but it was built by another company: *Wengströms mekaniska snickeri fabrik AB*. When, in 1897, Sweden and Stockholm had the opportunity to arrange the World's Fairs, the Swedish

55 At the time, the cost for an ordinary country schoolhouse in Sweden was approximately 4,300–8,700 kronor; see Johannes Westberg, "How Much did a Swedish Schoolhouse Cost to Build? Rewriting the History of 19th-Century Rural Schoolhouses," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 39, no. 4 (2014), 448–71.

56 Kristenson (2005), 79; Lundahl and Lawn (2014).

57 Compare, for example, with schoolhouses presented in Kristenson (2005) and in Westberg (2015a).

58 Carl Synnerberg, *Skolväsendet vid Verldsutställningen i Wien 1873. Aftryck ur tidsskrift. Utgiven av Pedagogiska föreningen i Finland* (Helsingfors, 1873).

59 Lundahl and Lawn (2014).

60 Picture available in Lundahl and Lawn (2014).

exhibition committee decided that Sweden should once again hold the educational exhibit in a real schoolhouse (Figure 1 right pic.). As was obviously not the case in Vienna and Philadelphia, the schoolhouse in Sweden could be built to permanently function as a schoolhouse even after the exhibition closed.<sup>61</sup> The organisers therefore decided to see whether any municipality near Stockholm needed a brand new school. The municipality in Norrköping replied, and *Ekmanska snickerifabriken*, responsible for the Vienna schoolhouse, had one built for them.<sup>62</sup>

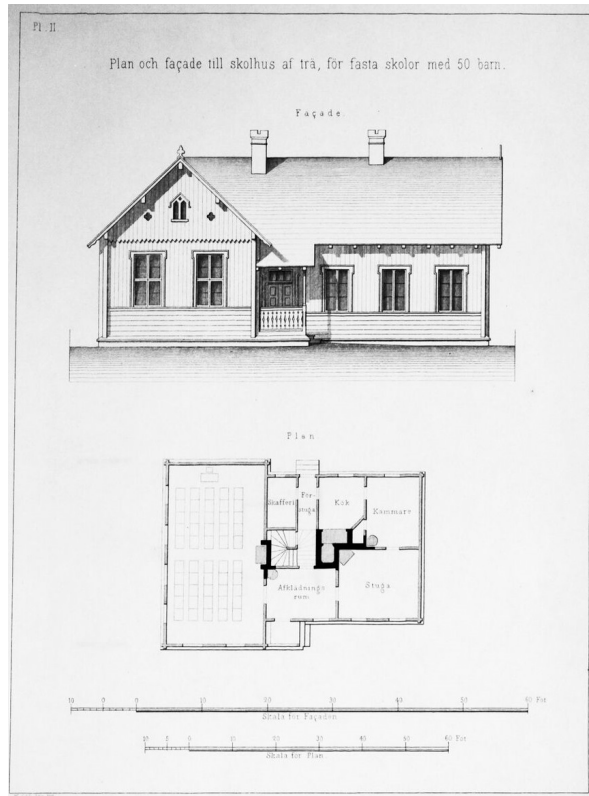


Figure 2. The National Building Plan for schoolhouses (1865). 'Schoolhouse built in wood intended for 50 children' (Plate 2). Source: *Öfverintendentsembetet, Normalritningar* (Stockholm, 1865), pl. 2.

61 A curiosity concerning the schoolhouse in Philadelphia is that after the exhibition, it was chosen for Central Park in NY by park co-designer Fredrick Law Olmsted, where it has served many different purposes ever since: <http://www.centralparknyc.org/things-to-see-and-do/attractions/swedish-cottage.html> (accessed June 1, 2016).

62 *Redogörelse för Stockholms folkskolors utställning samt utställningarna i folkskolehuset* (Stockholm: Walfrid Wilhelmssons boktryckeri, 1897). The schoolhouse was built and put on display in Djurgården, Stockholm, next to the Nordic museum, but it has not been possible to determine whether it was ever actually transported to Norrköping.



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.<sup>64</sup>

Obviously the efforts made, and the costs paid, by the Swedish government made an impression.<sup>65</sup> The quantitative and qualitative comparisons made possible by arranging either objects or numbers side by side trained both spectators and consumers.<sup>66</sup> In the context of arts, culture and industry, the logic of industrial improvement moved into people's everyday lives, including the field of education. Some spectators even described the educational departments at the World's Fairs as the "industrialisation of education."<sup>67</sup> Provenzo argues that education and industry in this way became "inseparable in the scheme of progress and power" that emerged from the late nineteenth century World's Fairs.<sup>68</sup>

It is clear that the schoolhouse served as some kind of showroom and meeting place at the exhibitions, as well as an exhibition object in its own right. The strength of the schoolhouse as an exhibition object was its ability to persuade the audience to believe in what they saw. Being able to walk around inside, to look at bookshelves, to sit at the pupils' desks, and to feel the fresh air from the ventilated school room – all of it worked as an aesthetical force making the subject "feel and realise" how modern Swedish education was. In an article in the *New York Tribune*, we gain a picture of the impression that Carl Jonas Meijerberg (1816-1903), the organiser of the education section at Philadelphia, and his Swedish school material could make 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 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?<sup>69</sup>

Meijerberg as a person, and the school material selected for the exhibition, created an image of Swedish education communicated to people through newspapers and

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64 George J. Hodgins, *Special Report to the Honourable the Minister of Education on the Ontario Educational Exhibit, and the Educational Features of the International Exhibition at Philadelphia, 1876* (Toronto: Hunter, Rose & Co., 1877), 59.

65 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. The case here was also that the organisational structure of the Paris exhibition did not really allow any foreign schoolhouses (cf. *Ny illustrerad tidning* (1878), 32).

66 Ekström, Jülich and Snickars (2006); Pred (1995).

67 Synnerberg (1873).

68 Provenzo (2012), 55.

69 *New York Tribune*, June 24, 1876, 2.

reports as facts.<sup>70</sup> In the quote from the *New York Tribune*, it is also interesting to note how the author draws conclusions that go beyond the schoolhouse and makes assumptions about the country of Sweden, its people, its democracy, etc. This is a typical example of how soft power works on a transnational scene as a kind of “Nation branding”<sup>71</sup> By displaying an aesthetic schoolhouse with orderly and tidy content, Sweden is not just appreciated for its education system: the schoolhouse and its content represent another culture and another way of thinking. In this way, education and the nation are linked, and things valued highly in education give status to the nation, and likewise, things considered attractive in other national state areas can be linked to education (such as equality and democracy). The representation of education as aesthetic thus promotes governing by comparison between countries, but as shown below, there was also an aesthetic governing taking part *within* education.

### Markets of objects and of knowledge

The World’s Fairs were market places as well as places of learning. Things were bought, traded and sold.<sup>72</sup> At the same time, audiences received impressions, were influenced and developed new ideas of their own from what they saw when visiting the fairs. Regarding education, these exhibitions displayed common school artefacts, including books, maps, globes and pictures of animals, related to the late nineteenth century fashion for object teaching. Many objects were displayed. At the educational exhibit in Vienna 1873, over five-thousand exhibitors submitted materials.<sup>73</sup> Sobe and Boven show that for American education, it was important to display statistics of teacher and student enrolment to show progress. Sweden did that as well but also chose to show progress by highlighting certain objects and aspects of the educational system. Here, the modern subjects of Sloyd, gymnastics and drawing were prominently displayed.

However, when looking at what really gained appreciation in reports, in articles and in the awards, we find that it was objects or methods related to challenges in mass education and to the needs of the industrialised society. Some of these were clearly related to notions of aesthetics.

70 Meijerberg was obviously not a very representative member of the Swedish educational community. In Sweden, he had several important positions within the educational system. Dittrich noted that the education experts at these fairs combined many different 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), 87–88). A *New York Tribune* journalist thought 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*, June 24, 1876, 2.

71 E.g., Melissa Aronczyk, *Branding the Nation: The Global Business of National Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). See also Werner (2008).

72 Lundahl and Lawn show, for example, that the South Kensington School Museum in the UK acquired almost all of what Sweden had displayed in London 1871, 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, see Lundahl and Lawn (2014). There are registers preserved that accounts for every piece sold, see e.g., Riksarkivet, Utställningsbestyrelserna, Sveriges deltagande i världsutställningen i St. Louis 1904 (U9), vol 8. SE/RA/420463/420463.09. Provenzo shows especially how Russia carefully collected materials from the educational exhibits at the Centennial 1876 for their national school museums, see Provenzo (2012), 46–47.

73 Provenzo (2012), 9.

The idea of these exhibitions was to give a comprehensive but complete picture of the education system. A classroom filled with high-quality 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.<sup>74</sup>

In the Paris World's Fair of May 1–November 10, 1878, Sweden chose to display less educational material than in previous exhibitions.<sup>75</sup> Instead, Sweden sent some of its more famous educationalists and presented more written reports, as the United States had done in Philadelphia. In Paris, for example, the internationally well-known representative of the subject of Sloyd, Otto Salomon, gave a speech about the importance of Sloyd, for which he was awarded a *Médaille d'Or*.<sup>76</sup> Sloyd and the philosophy of Otto Salomon were 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 schooling and towards each other, Salomon believed.<sup>77</sup> 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 education 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, apparatuses, material; secondly, it gave statistics; and thirdly and most importantly, it revealed the results of teaching in the forms of *schule arbeiten*.<sup>78</sup> Taken together, the Finnish spectators saw a new school develop that could rationalise or even industrialise learning – modern schoolhouses, ergonomic school benches and new methods (i.e., object teaching) made more children learn faster. But they feared that it came at a high price; mechanical learning. 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.<sup>79</sup>

74 J. S. Ingram, *The Centennial Exposition, Described and Illustrated* (Philadelphia: Hubbard Bros, 1876), 532.

75 *Exposition universelle de 1878, à Paris: Royaume de Suède* (Stockholm: Imprimerie centrale, 1878).

76 Riksarkivet, UD 1902 års dossiesystem, 30, vol. 2355, file 14 [List of prize-winners]; Speech in: Otto Salomon's private acts in August Abraham's stiftelses arkiv, SE/GLA/12113/Ö II b/10. Sloyd became a widespread subject in schools around the world. In his school at Nääs-Floda, Otto Salomon personally trained 4,000 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>; Hans Thorbjörnsson, “Swedish Educational Sloyd – an International Success,” *Tidskrift för lärarutbildning och forskning* 13, no. 2–3 (2006), 10–33.

77 Otto Salomon, *The Theory of Educational Sloyd: The only Authorised Edition of the Lectures of Otto Salomon / Revised and Edited for English and American Students by an Inspector of Schools* (London: George Philip & Son, 1892).

78 Synnerberg (1873), 2–4.

79 *Ibid.*, 5.

It was exactly here that Sweden found a way to contribute to international education policy. Instead of showing progress mainly in terms of enrolment lists, etc., Sweden promoted the fact that Swedish educators had made important contributions to school subjects such as Sloyd and gymnastics through the works of Otto Salomon and Pehr Henrik Ling.<sup>80</sup> This becomes evident if we look, for example, at the World's Fair in St. Louis 1904 (Figures 4 and 5). In St. Louis, Sweden presented the comprehensive school system in a large exhibition showroom. We clearly see that these new subjects, 'the liberal arts,' are brought to the fore and take up most of the space in the exhibit area. Together with adult education and vocational education, these more aesthetical and practical subjects take up approximately four-fifths of the total space (Figure 4).

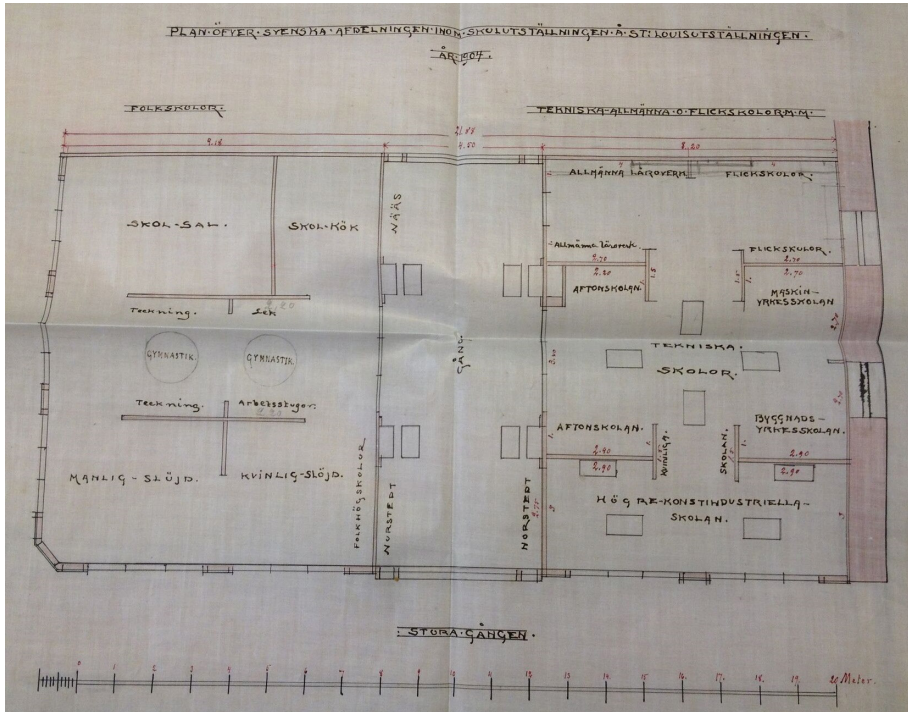


Figure 4. Blueprint for the Swedish educational exhibition at the World's Fair in St. Louis 1904. Source: Nordiska museet, Skolmuseet, "Utställningar," Stockholm.

When the visitors entered the Swedish educational exhibition, they first saw, directly to the left, the Sloyd area. Behind that, they found gymnastics, and in the inner left corner, theoretical school subjects such as language, arithmetics and religion. At the other side of the corridor, the visitor first found the higher school for industrial art and behind it, evening schools and vocational education. In the inner right corner, one could find the traditional grammar school. It is obvious that Sweden wanted to display up front more modern aspects of its educational system.

80 June E. Eyestone, "The Influence of Swedish Sloyd and Its Interpreters on American Art Education," *Studies in Art Education* 34, no. 1 (1992), 28–38; Natalie Barker-Ruchti, "'Stride Jump – Begin!': Swedish Gymnastics in Victorian England," *Sporting Traditions* 22, no. 2 (2006), 13–29.





Figure 5. Swedish Sloyd. The Swedish exhibition at the World's Fair in St. Louis 1904. Source: Riksarkivet, Utställningsbestyrelserna, Sveriges deltagande i världsutställningen i St. Louis 1904 (U9), vol 8. SE/RA/420463/420463.09.

The new school subjects in primary education were clearly aimed at modernising the individual subjects through the use of bodily work and aesthetics. In the guide book to the education exhibition, we can see how an aesthetic normativity could be expressed in educational terms. For example, Sloyd for the boys was intended:

- To awaken an interest in and a respect for manual labour;
- To accustom the pupil to habits of order, exactness, attention, and perseverance;
- To develop in him dexterity, promptitude, judgment, and skill;
- To train the eye to discern and the hand to execute;
- To develop a sense of form and taste; and
- To strengthen his physical powers.<sup>81</sup>

For the girls, the aim of the instruction was:

- To exercise hand and eye;
- To quicken the power of thought;
- To strengthen love of order;
- To develop independence;
- To inspire respect for carefully and intelligently executed work; and, at the same time,
- To prepare the girls for the execution of their domestic duties.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>81</sup> *Guide to the Educational Exhibit of Sweden [at Saint Louis, 1904] with Notes on Some Points of Educational Activity in Sweden* (Stockholm, 1904), 13.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

Clearly, the combination of a schoolhouse and its objects and examples of pupils' work functioned as an argument both for society to invest in education and to make it purposeful for all of its citizens – and towards the citizens saying that going to school was something both useful and normal. At the same time, the citizens would learn to appreciate the light, fresh, clean, orderly, functional norms of activity and living.

The possibility of using the World's Fairs to educate the society in this way 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 on what other countries' reporters had noticed about Sweden than to make one's own comparisons. Having an 'international perspective' had become important *per se*, even if the reports were mainly local, about one's own nation.<sup>83</sup>

### The international versus the domestic perspective

As illustrated, exhibitions are about visualising, displaying, marketing, governing and learning. The World's Fairs are also interesting from a policy perspective, because they represent an international space for these activities. The question of what was represented at these exhibitions – the reality or an ideal, a dream or more realistic hopes – can be understood from a transnational perspective as a matter of a nations' *use* of international outlooks. In other words, we need to look at 'the local reactions to global forces.' In this particular case, handling the international space becomes an activity in itself in which *objects* play an important role as connectors between and among national and international audiences. Objects have the material capacity to make connections possible. They can create a shared and or contested landscape of identity, imagination and practices using, for example, maps and globes.<sup>84</sup> At a World's Fair, they can connect the inventor of a school desk from Sweden with the future hopes of educationalists with respect to the children in France. Objects can be translated and interpreted in ways that suit subjective purposes. Furthermore, they can be mutually understood or mutually misunderstood among different observers.

Anders Ekström writes in his book about the media and the Stockholm World's Fair 1897 that people at the World's Fairs during the late nineteenth century started to look at other people who were looking at something. The audience became a spectacle in itself.<sup>85</sup> People were simply 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 'mental overload.'<sup>86</sup> But what did these exhibitions actually represent, and how did the people who had visited them describe 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?

First, we can conclude that many people had the opportunity to draw impressions from these exhibitions. For example, it is estimated that London 1862 had more than

83 E.g., "Sverige på Filadelfiautställningen," *Kalmar*, April 26, 1876, 2.; "Sverige och Norge på Filadelfiautställningen," *Tidning för Wenersborgs stad och län*, June 12, 1876, 3.

84 Saunier (2013), 47–49.

85 Ekström (1994).

86 Barth (2007), 468.

six million visitors. Of these, 35,000 were children and pupils representing 713 specially invited schools.<sup>87</sup> In Paris 1867, with a total of 11 million visitors, the French government gave all teachers a 50 per cent reduction on the entrance tickets, and it has been estimated that more than 12,000 teachers visited the exhibition.<sup>88</sup> Just three days before the end of the exhibition, 10,000 pupils were invited to visit. The children were moved around in long lines to look at the objects on display (Figure 6).



Figure 6. School classes visiting the exhibition in Paris 1867. Source: *L'Exposition universelle de 1867 illustrée*, 1867.

The Philadelphia Centennial also had approximately 10 million visitors, whereas Vienna 1873 and Paris 1878 did not attract that many people.<sup>89</sup> Stockholm 1897 attracted only 1.5 million visitors, and Paris 1900 broke all the former records with more than 50 million visitors.<sup>90</sup> Obviously, the World's Fairs were learning places in their own right. 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 education section than Philadelphia.<sup>91</sup> But for most people their visit to a World's

87 *International Exhibition 1862 – Catalogue of Works of Industry and Art – Sweden* (London: Clowes and Son, 1862).

88 Provenzo (2012), 9.

89 *Redogörelser för världsutställningen i Filadelfia 1876*, preface; Dittrich (2010).

90 Joakim Landahl, "Estetikens triumf: Skolan på världsutställningen i Paris 1900," *Vägval i skolans historia*, no. 2 (2014); See also John E. Findling and Kimberley D. Pelle, eds., *Historical Dictionary of World's Fairs and Expositions, 1851–1988* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990).

91 E.g., *Veckoblad för folkundervisningen*, May 20, 1877.

Fair exhibition would be their first and last. To an untrained eye, the things on display could sometimes convey the wrong meaning. For example, from Philadelphia, we find spectator accounts of a Japanese schoolhouse next to the Swedish one,<sup>92</sup> but when comparing the maps of the exhibition and the content in catalogues, we see that this was actually a Japanese bazaar.

Even to the trained eye, there was still the possibility of a false representation of the state of affairs back home. 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,<sup>93</sup> but we also find examples in which people believed in what they saw. 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 that the schoolhouse:

... 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 40 by 50 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.<sup>94</sup>

The Swedish schoolhouse was filled with statistics and other data that showed how the Swedish government and the people in Sweden were building and organising a modern school system. Pupils' works, such as essays or maths 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 Meijerberg, 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. We wish to enclose a few such drawings that are now being prepared but should be ready soon.<sup>95</sup>

In the United States, there was a discussion on whether one should exhibit the best objects or merely the most representative objects.<sup>96</sup> This was seemingly not the case in Sweden, but did the Centennial visitors regard – as Hodgins, Ingram or the New York Tribune reporter appeared to – the schoolhouse as an exact replica or a trans-

92 *New York Tribune*, June 24, 1876.

93 Synnerberg (1873).

94 Ingram (1876), 532.

95 Letter from Gödecke to Meijerberg Sköllersta March 1, 1876. Transl. here. From Meijerberg's personal archive, Kungliga Biblioteket, Stockholm.

96 Sobe and Boven (2014).

ported example of a working education system? Sweden presented an ideal schoolhouse, but what did it represent? When the visitors 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 an unplanned wainscot; a low door shows us where the entrance is found. In the small dirty hall-stand a score of 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, a brick masonry stove-equipped hovel, intended as "a residence for the teacher." To the right of the hall we find likewise a door, and from the noise inside we conclude that this is where we have the "school room." After we have kicked a bunch of clogs, etc. away, we step inside. At the front, in the "room" darkened by smoke and dirt, we see an elevation, resembling a pulpit, and there stands one person, namely, the schoolteacher. On the floor, long black benches and a seven, eight, or a dozen more or less ragged, rude and impolite children. On the walls a few fragments of maps of Scandinavia, of the province in which the school exists, and in the best case, of Europe. At the far end, a large heap of stones, which is the stove.<sup>97</sup>

The Swedish schoolhouse in Philadelphia was clearly not representative of real Swedish schoolhouses back home. In *Veckoblad för folkundervisningen* (Education Weekly), from 1877, 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 of 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 50 schoolhouses followed the direction of the National Building Plans for schoolhouses:

The Swedish schoolhouse at the exhibition in Philadelphia, which is so much admired, therefore has certainly a comparatively small number of duplicates in its homeland, and the glory, we Swedes therefore harvested, is, we believe, neither good nor righteously deserved.<sup>98</sup>

It is interesting to see how the appreciation Swedish education met at these fairs was not always appreciated as such back in Sweden. This indicates that it was important for Sweden to participate at the World's Fairs, which were modern and progressive, to 'get access' to and exchange new technologies and knowledge in order to advance reforms back home. At the same time, on a domestic level, the reality might have been poorer, and from a local policy point of view, reforms could be more legitimate if they addressed current problems rather than future hopes.

<sup>97</sup> *Lindesbergs allehanda*, June 30, 1876, 3. Transl. here.

<sup>98</sup> *Veckoblad för folkundervisningen* (1877), 41. Transl. here.

To sum up, these exhibitions were a major investment for the participating countries. In the area of education, Sweden clearly made a calculated attempt to portray the Swedish state and society as having an advanced educational system. This was put on display in a tasteful and aesthetical way, and it seems to have worked well. The schoolhouse and its visualised pedagogic relations and appliances were all genuine products available in Sweden. However, in their totality, they did not represent the normal Swedish school, as major local investment in schoolhouses was just beginning in Sweden and the schoolhouse at the exhibitions was very well endowed with teaching materials.<sup>99</sup> The schoolhouse and its contents were both real and ideal and both actual and mythological. The issue about representativeness is rather a question of what it represented to those who looked at it.

## Conclusions

Historians of education are increasingly recognising the importance of the World's Fairs in disseminating educational ideas and technologies. At the same time, it seems important to approach the role of the World's Fairs from a comparative and transnational perspective because different countries had different principles for selecting what should be displayed, why it should be displayed, and how to interpret what was displayed.<sup>100</sup> No less important is to further investigate interactions and cross-border flows of ideas and technologies and how specific representations might lead to different understandings in different cultures.

The modus operandi of the World's Fairs was that of displaying, comparing and competing. The fairs were often crowded with objects on display. In Vienna 1873, for example, more than five thousand exhibitors submitted materials, as mentioned earlier. To stand out, it was logical to display attractive and aesthetical objects. As Georg Simmel noted in a reflection on the Berlin trade exhibition in 1896:

It is at the point where material interests have reached their highest level and the pressure of competition is at an extreme that the aesthetic ideal is employed. The striving to make the merely useful visually stimulating – something that was completely natural for Orientals and Romans – for us comes from the struggle to render the graceless graceful for consumers.<sup>101</sup>

Turning the graceless into graceful representations in a transnational space has important governing implications. First, it provides an opportunity to participate in what Provenzo describes as a “symbolic universe constructed by an emerging social elite.”<sup>102</sup> Being part of this universe provides the possibility to interpret and define a particular social and political reality. Siljeström and Meijerberg certainly were not representative Swedish school officials at the end of the nineteenth century, but they had a vivid correspondence with like-minded people abroad, and they met and par-

99 See Westberg (2015a); Johannes Westberg, “Multiplying the Origins of Mass Schooling: an Analysis of the Preconditions Common to Schooling and the School Building Process in Sweden, 1840–1900,” *History of Education* 44, no. 4 (2015c), 415–36.

100 See Ekström (1994); Lawn (2008); Dittrich (2010); Provenzo (2012).

101 Georg Simmel, David Frisby, and Mike Featherstone, *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings* (Los Angeles: Sage, 1997), 157.

102 Provenzo (2012), 5.

participated in these exhibitions. Appearing as, what we would call, modern and progressive made it possible to participate in elite conversations about education – which could inform, enlighten and legitimise national reforms. People like Siljeström and Meijerberg in Sweden or Hodgins and Ingram on the North American side clearly transcended the boundaries of their own institutions and nation-states.<sup>103</sup>

Secondly, from this position of being included, there is an option to direct the discourse towards a specific content area. In the Swedish case during the late nineteenth century, this was much about an aesthetic normativity that in one regard said it was important to adapt to values of beauty, purity, and cleanliness as well as order, control and functionality. Reading Siljeström, this is an argument for increased health, learning and discipline. At the same time, there was the influence of *Svenska Slöjdföreningen* (The Swedish Sloyd Society) formed in 1844. Svenska Slöjdföreningen had an expressed purpose to ensure that the high quality of craftsmanship was not lost when increasingly 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 with other countries, this elaborated vision of technical education was more successful in Sweden.<sup>104</sup> The amount of material related to Sloyd in these exhibits indicated 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*, considered 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 patriarchal authorities. Aesthetic governing is a synoptic power that works through a distribution of the sensible and the dissemination of a compelling vision of the future.<sup>105</sup> In the case of the Swedish school exhibitions, we might call this the aesthetics of comprehensiveness and the cultivation of a popular desire for such a future.

Third, governing by aesthetics using exhibitions to disseminate ideals and exemplary objects for governing purposes is quite a balancing act between external and internal policy influences. Sweden chose to display material and objects that were not necessarily representative of the quality of Swedish education but of the ideal of the *folkskola*. Compared with other investigations of the effects of the World's Fairs on educational departments,<sup>106</sup> this article illustrates not only cultural transfer between different countries, but also the tension between a country's international self-image and its national self-image. In the effort of 'branding the nation' (and its education) abroad, there is always a risk that the claims will not hold up when reviewed in the homeland. In the case presented here, there might have been a conflict between two strategies to promote reforms – one based on a graceful ideal and one on a graceless reality. Progress and policy reforms can sometimes be understood in relation to this tension between an international and a national self-image. In Sweden, the National Building Plan for schoolhouse architecture started to have an impact on the building

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103 Cf. Dittrich (2010).

104 Cf. Dittrich (2010).

105 Ghertner (2010); Ghertner (2011).

106 Dittrich (2010); Lawn (2008).

of new schoolhouses in the late nineteenth century.<sup>107</sup> The “fame” of the exhibitions probably had little to do with this, at least in a direct way. But it may have given the young nation-state the confidence to continue with its efforts.

The rise of the comprehensive and compulsory schools was aligned with the hope and ambition to construct a new kind of society, one that was technically advanced, orderly, hygienic and more egalitarian. Education could serve this society through its *form* and *content*. Today, there is often a stronger emphasis on comparability and statistical results than on content.<sup>108</sup> An important feature of the objects and schoolhouses at the World’s fairs that really differentiated them from contemporary data about education is that they could be walked around (or even inside), studied closely and seen in relation to other things, from different angles. Therein lay much of their power.

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107 Johannes Westberg, “Referring to International Examples, Adjusting to Local Realities: Swedish Nineteenth Century Rural Schoolhouses,” *Bildungsgeschichte. International Journal for the History of Education* 5, no. 1 (2015b), 25–40; Westberg (2015a).

108 Bernd, Zymek, “Nationale und internationale Standardisierungsprozesse in der Bildungsgeschichte. Das Deutsche Beispiel,” *Jahrbuch für Historische Bildungsforschung*, Jg 13 (2007), 307–34; Bob Lingard and Shaun Rawolle, “New Scalar Politics: Implications for Education Policy,” *Comparative Education* 47, no. 4 (2011), 489–502.



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