Who governs the Swedish school? Local school policy research from a historical and transnational curriculum theory perspective

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In this article, we present a comparative research project on municipal school policy in Sweden 1950–2010 which in our view contributes to the research fields of education policy and curriculum theory. Our project which started in 2014 links to a line of international research on education policy concerned with the tensions between decentralisation and globalisation and comparative research investigating transnational transfers of education policy ideas. In this article, we provide some preliminary findings which display municipal school policy dealing with national and transnational school initiatives and affecting local school actions. Most of the findings in this article concern the time period 1950–1975, during which the present two Swedish school forms, Grundskolan (a 9-year comprehensive school) and Gymnasieskolan (upper secondary school), were introduced and established. We compare local policy, through six interrelated indicators, in two municipalities with different structures and origins. On the basis of our findings, we conclude that municipal school policy research in a comparative and historical perspective is an important field of research as it reveals the complexity of school governance. Historical studies of municipal school policy and practice are crucial for exploring different dimensions of curriculum theory, including the transnational dimension.

Keywords: local school policy; local school history; education policy; curriculum theory; globalization

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Who governs the Swedish school? Municipal-ity, school and state during 60 years of Swedish school reforms – in a world of change’ is the name of an ongoing comparative research project, which started in 2014 (Román, Hallsén, Nordin, & Ringarp, 2014). We analyse municipal school policy in Sweden during the period 1950–2010, examining six decades of recurrent school reforms. The 3-year project comprises five empirical studies and a concluding analysis.1

Empirical data are collected, mainly by scrutinising the municipal archives, primarily city council and school board archives, of the four municipalities of Stockholm, Malmö, Växjö and Tierp. In addition, we make use of data from other official and semi-official sources, such as the National School Agency and the Swedish Municipal Association (SKL) and its predecessors. We will also interview official representatives for complementary information.

The aim of this article is to present some preliminary findings from the project as an important contribution to the research fields of education policy and curriculum theory. The municipal aspect is, in both branches, in need of further investigation, especially from a historical perspective. In Sweden at least, local school history has mainly been restricted to portraying individual school actors (students, teachers and principals) and specific schools, or describing the efforts of national policy actors to implement national decisions and guidelines. Local school policy – which in the case of Sweden equals municipal school policy2 – has been a neglected field of research in Sweden, at least from a historical standpoint, especially compared to the number of national school policy studies. Studies of municipal school policy changes will also help to explore the concepts of nationalisation and municipalisation, labels used quite casually in the contemporary school debate in Sweden.3

In international research, ‘local’ seems to be the common word used in studies on policy making in cities or smaller communities. In this article, ‘local school policy’ thus refers to such policy making in a more general sense, while ‘municipal school policy’ more specifically refers to the administrative division in Sweden.

We will not explicitly discuss these concepts here, and neither will we explicitly discuss our findings in terms of effects on student outcomes, but we will address these aspects in future reports.

Notes:
1Román (2011, 2013a, 2013b, 2014) has carried out four previous historical studies on local school policy in Stockholm, which together work as pre-studies to our current project.

2In international research, ‘local’ seems to be the common word used in studies on policy making in cities or smaller communities. In this article, ‘local school policy’ thus refers to such policy making in a more general sense, while ‘municipal school policy’ more specifically refers to the administrative division in Sweden.

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The article is divided into three sections:

1. **Local school policy research in a transnational context.**
   A brief overview of the national school reform history of Sweden is followed by a presentation of our theoretical framework.

2. **Historical investigations.** We provide some preliminary findings, which show municipal school policy dealing with national and transnational school initiatives and affecting local school actions, by comparing Stockholm and Tierp, the largest and the smallest of the four chosen municipalities. Most of the findings in this article concern the time period 1950–1975, during which the present two Swedish school forms, Gymnasieskolan (upper secondary school) and Grundskolan (a 9-year comprehensive school), were introduced and established. This reform package will be referred to as ‘the reforms of the 1960s’. To a large degree, the contemporary Swedish school debate still revolves around the same questions that were posed when these two school forms were introduced. In order to make our point, we present six interrelated indicators, demonstrating the importance of historical local school policy studies, both as an object of study in itself and for investigating the multidimensional interplay between school policy – at different levels – and school practice.

3. **Concluding arguments for a comparative and historical approach to local school policy.** On the basis of our preliminary findings, we sum up and sharpen our arguments for historical and comparative local/municipal school policy studies as a contribution to the development of a historically oriented and transnationally informed curriculum theory.

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**The national school reform history of Sweden – a brief overview**

The Swedish national school reform history during the period 1950–2010 oscillates between centralisation and decentralisation. The initial Swedish school reforms of the 1960s were solidly planned in terms of time and resources, based on thorough investigation and school experiments led by researchers. The national school administrators were expected to maintain and develop the initial guidelines, and were given the main responsibility for carrying out reform adjustments on a regular basis (so-called ‘rolling reforms’, cf. Marklund, 1989). A bureaucratic machinery was established which in many ways marked a strengthening of national control over schools (Rothstein, 1986; see also Román, 2011, 2014).

Recurrent calls for increased decentralisation were heard in the 1970s and the 1980s. The school reforms in the 1980s and the 1990s emphasised the importance of local actors – politicians, administrators and school workers (Lundahl, 2005; Ringarp, 2011). The reforms of the 1980s implied changes that affected the local actors in contradictory ways. These actors gained influence, but at the same time they were also given greater responsibility. Gradually, the municipalities took over some key areas of responsibility from the state, including teacher employment and fiscal distribution of school resources (cf. Ringarp, 2011). The new comprehensive school curriculum of 1980 and the curricula of 1994 emphasised that schooling take place in municipalities and in their local schools. Instead of being governed by detailed regulations formulated at the national level I, a new kind of management based on objectives and outcomes was introduced in the early 1990s. The change in school governing in the 1990s was argued for from different angles. Proponents at both the national and municipal levels supported it because it allowed greater school variation, in terms of methods and content, school administration and school choice opportunities. Many of these proponents emphasised decentralisation as a way to vitalise democracy (Lundahl, 2005). Others emphasised the need to apply liberal market principles more within the public sector.

The transformations of the Swedish school system after 1950 have their specific national features, but also work within the context of a more general, worldwide modernisation process. Education after World War II has been promoted as a key factor for economic progress, national welfare and more equal or at least fairer distribution of educational opportunities and life chances (Waldow, 2014). The pace of educational reforms has varied, and while countries like West Germany and Austria kept the parallel school system, others, including the Scandinavian countries, paved the way for a unified system. But regardless of system all countries embracing industrialisation and economic growth saw the need to dramatically raise their educational standards, and their share of students entering upper secondary education and universities rose rapidly from the 1950s. International organisations such as UNESCO, the EU and the OECD came to play an important role for establishing a shared set of guidelines, forming what has been called an emerging ‘world education culture’ (Meyer, Boli, Thomas, & Ramirez, 1997).

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**Local school policy research in a transnational context**

From an international point of view, the Swedish school has been considered fairly homogeneous, with relatively small regional or social variations in education provision and student outcomes. The Scandinavian countries have gained an international reputation for being pioneers in terms of social engineering, including school adjustments. As researchers have pointed out, this has been an internationally reproduced and spread self-image, rather than an unquestionable state of fact (cf. Larsson, Letell, & Thörn, 2012, ch. 2; Nilsson, 1987). This self-image has also been strongly supported in the domestic school policy rhetoric. It is inherent in the slogan ‘a school for all’, a
claim that the Swedish school system must be equal: significant differences due to social or geographical conditions are not be tolerated. Accordingly, contemporary studies on Swedish schools and school policy have put the school as a national project at the core. But, from a research standpoint, this national bias has contributed to some municipal distress, especially with regards to studying municipal school policy from a historical curriculum theory perspective. This in turn limits the possibilities to test the assumptions of Swedish school homogeneity and/or increased decentralisation. Curriculum theory in Sweden, following the tradition of Dahllöf (1967, 1971), Lundgren (1972, 1977, 1979, 1984) and Englund (1986, 2005), emphasises the value of studying education in its socio-historical context, taking into account school politics, school administration and school practice. And, as said before, the municipal dimension is essential for understanding the interplay and tensions between national and transnational school initiatives and local school actions (classroom activities). Taking the history of municipal school policy into account is an important aspect of curriculum theory which we find has not been fully recognised in Swedish CT research. The socio-historical context in which historically oriented curriculum theory researchers have interpreted their findings has often been tied to the geographical borders of nation-states, emphasising a national focus at the expense of local and transnational school policy in relation to school practice.

Today there are a number of theoretical approaches in social science which claim that the changes taking place in the late modern society in general and in the public sector in particular are part of wider policy trends travelling beyond as well as within national borders (Karset & Sivesind, 2010). These theoretical approaches, ranging from New Public Management theories to neo-institutionalism, reflexive modernity, governmentality and system theories (Hopmann, 2008), all recognise globalisation as an important feature in this change, although their focal points vary. Following Hopmann (2008), we will relate our findings to this set of theories rather than using one of them as our starting point, and like him we stress the need to recognise that local and national conditions affect the reception and impact of transnational policy.

Another important aspect of the upcoming complexity captured by different globalisation theories is that both global and local forces challenge the national supremacy. In line with this set of theories, different branches of urban research, including urban politics/policy (see Mossberger, Clarke, & John, 2012 for a review, or Dannestam, 2009 for a Swedish example), describe and analyse the tensions and interplay between local, national and international arenas and actors. But researchers disagree on how the national supremacy has been affected. Some claim that the national scope of action has become far more limited as new actors have become important network players, while others claim that the national scope of action has changed rather than decreased. Either way, a prominent feature in this process of changed relations is that they are unevenly distributed. They affect different parts of the world, different countries, and different regions and communities in different ways. Large cities have been put forward as, in many cases, highly transnational. Generative concepts like ‘glocalisation’ (Brenner, 2004), ‘global cities’ (Sassen, 2001) and ‘creative classes’ (Florida, 2002, 2006), as well as ‘urban governance’ (cf. Pierre, 2011) all – in specific ways – highlight the connection between globalisation and the increased impact of urban policy, and how this in turn challenges the national political power, implying a shift from a Keynesian welfare state ideal to a more entrepreneurial governance approach. But this additionally implies that some communities – in rural areas or cities in areas where industry has declined – are less likely to be part of the global network building that is presumed to be taking place. In our project, one of our main objectives is to investigate how and to what extent global competition has affected school policy in different municipalities.

The argument of this article thus links to a line of international research on education policy concerned with the tensions between decentralisation and globalisation (Ball, Goodson, & Maguire, 2007; Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012; Ball & Junemann, 2012; Grek et al., 2009; Hopmann, 2008; Hopmann, Brinek, & Retzl, 2007; Karseth & Sivesind, 2010; Lundahl, 2007; Nordin, 2012) and comparative research investigating education policy borrowing and lending, that is, transnational transfers of education policy ideas (cf. Nordin & Sundberg, 2014; Steiner-Khamsi & Waldow, 2012). In this paper, we will argue for the need to approach municipal school policy from a historical perspective in a way that takes the transnational dimension seriously not just as a separate parameter but as a fundamental aspect permeating the entire analyses. This means analyses that incorporate local, national and transnational aspects in order to avoid one-dimensional and simplified interpretations of the complex processes of policy making taking place at the municipal level.

We use the concepts of policy and governance instead of politics and government/governing. Policy, in our case, refers not only to political practice in a formal sense but also to formal and informal political processes and products. Governance is, quite like policy, a concept given many definitions, although the common denominator seems to be its ability to cover the interplay between different policy actors, inside and outside the formal political institutions (cf. Stoker, 1998). In fact, both governance and policy have been claimed to provide a wider understanding of the complexity of politics and political action, and have both often been used to capture a political change that has taken place during the last 30 years or so: governing or government through politics has been replaced by policy
governance. In other words, this implies a change in how politicians perceive and perform their mission, suggesting that they have more or less abandoned the idea of treating political institutions, issues and actions as a self-supportive system in favour of a system with more blurred lines between politics and society.

But arguably this is not only an observed societal change but also a change in the way researchers approach political institutions, issues and actions. Although this new research approach has undoubtedly been launched as a tool for investigating actual political change, it may also work as a new way of investigating policy and politics in general, including historical reanalyses of policy actions from the past, which also take local actions into account. Policy making has always involved more actors than those who have been officially appointed, and it has never taken place solely at the national level (see Pierre, 2011).

**Historical investigations: some preliminary findings**

In this section, we will now present and compare some findings from Stockholm and Tierp. These locations have been chosen because in many respects they represent opposites with regards to size, location and educational resources. Our findings are preliminary – the Tierp analysis in particular is at an early stage – and possibly we exaggerate and oversimplify the differences between the two municipalities. But our main point with this article is to stress the perhaps obvious yet underestimated variety in municipal school conditions, and the seemingly unsolvable difficulties in reducing them – in this case the gap between urban and rural school governance as a historical fact. This comparative analysis primarily focuses on the period 1950–1975, although in some respects it covers longer time spans. We make use of the following six interrelated indicators to make our point.

1. General conditions
   Differences in geography, demography, political conditions and educational resources between the two case municipalities

2. Educational infrastructure
   The educational resources of the case municipalities when facing the reforms of the 1960s

3. National relations
   The municipal–national school policy relationship in the two case municipalities

4. Reform pace
   The temporal dimension of the municipal–national school policy relationship

5. Educational efforts
   Local initiatives for school experiments, research and development (R&D)

6. Transnational exchanges
   International aspects in local school practice and policy

The first two indicators cover more general conditional aspects, whereas indicators 3–6 cover aspects tied to our empirical findings. They are all interrelated, because (1 and 2) local variations regarding general conditions and educational infrastructure have affected the scope of action for different municipalities with regards to national school policy concerning (3) the capacity to exchange school policy, (4) the temporal consequences of the school policy exchanges, (5) the capacity to develop and support local educational resources, and (6) the capacity to exchange policy and education ideas beyond the national spectrum.

**General conditions: large capital city versus rural region**

Stockholm and Tierp differ in a number of respects, including geographical position, size and structure, political majorities and educational resources. Simply put, they represent a large city and a rural community, respectively (see Table 1 below).

| Municipality | Population | Area (km²) | Population density |
|--------------|------------|------------|--------------------|
| Stockholm    | 897,700    | 187        | 4,796              |
| Tierp        | 20,144     | 1,548      | 13                 |

Note: Based on statistics from SCB. www.statistikdatabasen.scb.se [Befolkningstäthet (invånare per kvadratkilometer), folkmängd och landareal efter region och kön. År 1991–2013].

The following section provides some basic municipal data to illustrate their different structures and origins. In terms of area, Stockholm is a tenth the size of the rural Tierp, 150 km north of Stockholm, but its population is 44 times larger than Tierp’s.

In Stockholm, there are still considerable divisions between different groups of students, brought up in different urban areas, in terms of socio-economic and educational resources. It is by far the most populated Swedish municipality and has, since 1850, experienced periods of strong population growth (1850–1960, 2000-) but also a period of decline (1960–1990) partly as a deliberate response to urbanisation as such. Stockholm has some large industries, mainly within the field of high technology, but is above all a national centre for commerce and administration. The socio-economic distribution is relatively uneven, with a large share of well-off inhabitants and a substantial share of low-income families. The political power in Stockholm has shifted...
between socialist and non-socialist majorities with periods where hinge parties have had significant influence. Generally, the population of Stockholm is (and has long been) well educated compared to other municipalities. In 2013, 55% of the adult population in Stockholm had some kind of tertiary education, while 11% had only a basic education (6 years in elementary school or 9 years in comprehensive school). Stockholm has also appraised independent educational alternatives more than most other municipalities. In 2014, Stockholm hosted 121 independent comprehensive schools and 71 independent upper secondary schools, whereas 145 comprehensive schools and 26 upper secondary schools were municipally run.

Tierp is a small municipality, although it is not extremely sparsely populated. It is situated quite close to Uppsala and Gävle and about 150 km from Stockholm, but still in a basically rural part of Sweden. Tierp used to consist of seven different municipalities, but in 1974 they were merged into one large municipality, following a national reform aimed at reducing the number of municipalities in Sweden (see Wångmar, 2013). During the 20th century, the community of Tierp evolved to become the largest community in the area, but it is still not the undisputed centre of the municipal region. Compared to Stockholm, Tierp has a more even socio-economic distribution, with a relatively small share of wealthy inhabitants. Industry and farming are prominent in the region. Tierp as a region experienced the urbanisation effects differently from Stockholm. Whereas Stockholm experienced both periods of growth and decline, Tierp has stayed at a standstill; its population has stayed approximately the same as in the early 1960s.

Tierp has politically been very stable. Since the merger in 1974, Tierp has been governed by a socialist majority. The level of education in Tierp is fairly low: 22% of all adults in 2013 had some kind of tertiary education, while 17% had only basic education. Finally, it is worth noting that all 11 schools in Tierp (one of which is an upper secondary school) are municipally run (2014).

Just by comparing Tierp with Stockholm with respect to size, location, socio-economic conditions and educational resources, it is obvious that these factors have substantially conditioned their municipal policies, including those concerned with planning and managing schools.

**Educational infrastructure in the 1950s and 1960s**

The school reforms introduced in the 1950s and 1960s faced different types of educational infrastructure, due to the different conditions of the municipalities. The urban municipalities usually had a diversity of schools at different levels prior to the 1950s, while some rural municipalities only had elementary schools. The standardisation aims inherent in the reform bundle therefore could not successfully be met by implementing standard solutions that were too drastic.

As the capital of Sweden, Stockholm in the 1950s and 1960s – in comparison to other Swedish municipalities/cities – held a particularly strong position with respect to schools, although it was not the capital of higher education. The old universities of Uppsala and Lund for a long time were ascribed higher academic status than their counterpart, Stockholm University. On the other hand, Stockholm University as well as a number of specialised academic institutions in the capital city, such as the Royal Institute of Technology (KTH), Stockholm Business School of Economics and the Medical University (KI), gained an increasing reputation for providing high-status education and research. All of these academic or semi-academic institutions were founded in the 19th century or at the beginning of the 20th century.

When it comes to school education, Stockholm has a very long history. Some of the schools in Stockholm even had medieval roots, and since at least the 19th century, Stockholm offered a quite diverse set of options, including all kinds of school forms: either study-oriented or vocational and either publicly or privately run. Prior to 1958, municipal responsibility for schools in Stockholm was mainly restricted to elementary schools, girls’ public schools, some vocational schools and a number of trial schools. Grammar schools were either nationally run or run by private owners. In other words, the parallel school system, which was to be replaced by a comprehensive school followed by a multi-tracked upper secondary school, held a strong position in the capital city. The national struggle between reform proponents and opponents which permeated the Swedish school debate in the 1950s was indeed a municipal concern in Stockholm.

The school reforms of the 1960s promised improved local conditions for education in Tierp. Few would argue

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5SCB, ‘Utbildningsnivå efter kommun och kön’, 2013, www.scb.se

6See Stockholms stad, ‘Grundskola och grundärskola’, www.stockholm.se/Forska/Grundskola/Grundskola/ and ‘Gymnasieskola och gymnasiesärskola’, www.stockholm.se/Forskn/Forska/Skola/Gymnasium/.

7SCB, Statistikdatabasen, www.scb.se [Sammanräknad förvärvsinkomst för boende i Sverige hela året (antal personer, medel- och medelinkomst samt totalsumma) efter region, kön, ålder och inkomstklass. År 1999 – 2012].

8SCB, Statistikdatabasen, http://www.statistikdatabasen.scb.se [Folkmängden efter region, civilstånd, ålder och kön. År 1968 – 2013].

9SCB, ‘Utbildningsnivå efter kommun och kön’, 2013, www.scb.se.

10The empirical findings in the following sections are, in the Stockholm case, based on the pre-studies by Roma (2011, 2013a, 2013b, 2014). The Tierp findings are based on our large collection of data from municipal school board protocols and attachments. We will generally not provide specific references in these sections.

11Today Stockholm holds a strong national academic position, at least judging from international rankings. See for instance the Times World University ranking of 2013–2014, where KI and Stockholm University are the two highest-ranked Swedish universities (36 and 103). www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/world-university-rankings/2013-14/world-ranking. [2014-09-29].

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that this happened at the expense of a strong grammar school tradition, since that tradition was comparatively weak. Accordingly, the national school debate of the 1950s between reform proponents and opponents was not a major concern in any of the seven municipalities of the Tierp region. Before 1970, there was only one grammar school in Tierp leading to a lower secondary school exam and a number of vocational schools, but no upper secondary education to prepare students for university. The lower secondary grammar school in Tierp, established in 1905, was, until 1944, run by the municipality unlike the public grammar schools of Stockholm, which had generally always been nationally run. Some of the municipalities in the region hosted vocational schools. Most students finishing elementary schools either started working (at a local industry, on a family farm or in health and social care) or they enrolled in some vocational programme. A few attended the lower secondary grammar school in Tierp, followed in some cases by upper secondary grammar school studies, though not in the Tierp region.

National relations
Stockholm and Tierp have had very different ties to the national school policy arena, which is of course largely due to their structural and geographical differences. Stockholm, as the capital of Sweden, has had a close relation to the national policy arena but also a long, solid municipal history. Stockholm consequently has often been open, rapid and self-conscious when acting on national school policy initiatives. It has, on the one hand, long been keen to claim its self-determination and independence from national supremacy. Stockholm’s elementary school system, for example, had its own local supervision instead of the regular national supervision to which most other Swedish municipalities had to adhere. Another example is the municipal research institute, which Stockholm established in cooperation with the Teacher Education Institute of Stockholm in the 1960s. On the other hand, Stockholm has been keen both to adopt national innovations in education at an early stage, and even to introduce new concepts and ideas which would later be spread nationally. Stockholm introduced the first 9-year schools in Sweden in the 1940s, and its large-scale school trials in the 1950s played an important role in launching the reforms of the 1960s (see section 2.5 below). Stockholm paved the way for these national reforms, and other reforms later on, and thus it has been a reform pioneer. The rapid changes in Stockholm due to a fast population growth, especially during the 1940s and 1950s, helped push the reform ideas with a force that was arguably stronger than in most other parts of the country. In other words, Stockholm as a strong and self-determined local policy actor has been a powerful exchanger of national reform ideas.

Tierp, in spite of being just 150 km away from Stockholm, represents another kind of national–local relationship, where the municipal school policy actors have generally had to await national approval and decisions before taking action. Tierp, representing the rural municipality, held a rather subordinate position in relation to interests at the national level. The implementation of the reforms of the 1960s in the Tierp region was to a large degree orchestrated by the National School Board and its regional administrative representatives, and was finally set by parliament and government decisions. The local policy actors’ ability to claim their self-determination was limited, since they had weak resources and were busy carrying out a municipal merger completed in 1974. In short, Tierp had scarce administrative resources compared to Stockholm, which could act more autonomously both on the school reforms of the 1960s and the administrative reforms of the same era (and Stockholm did not carry out a major municipal reorganisation).

In the case of Tierp and the reforms of the 1960s, it was not a question of national–local school policy exchange. To a large degree, Tierp school policy was supported and determined by national guidelines and directives, in combination with support and guidelines from the municipal association acting at a national level in order to promote municipal interests. Tierp had scarce resources to use for working out new ideas on how to organise and develop its schools. This does not imply that Tierp lacked local issues and initiatives, but they were mainly local and had only a minor impact at the national level.

Reform pace
The national–municipal relationship with regards to school governance and reform includes a temporal dimension. Stockholm took opportunities in the 1950s to try out and debate the pros and cons of the comprehensive school, and was determined in the 1960s to systematically launch the new reforms. In Tierp, the reform process practically did not start until the early 1960s, and the 9-year comprehensive school was not fully introduced until the late 1960s. The reforms of the 1960s met with positive political reactions in Tierp at an early stage. The national vision of a more uniform school was

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12 Later examples are the opening up for an independent school expansion in the 1980s and the reinstallation of an inspectorate in the 1990s.

13 This parallel merger process included another kind of national–local interplay where Tierp was clearly subordinate. To achieve the municipal merger, the Swedish Municipal Association (and in the 1960s its predecessors) provided the necessary plans, information and courses required to complete the merger reform, including a new school administration.

14 To illustrate this difference: Stockholm representatives played a very central role in the founding and development of the Swedish City Association, whereas the other six municipalities in the Tierp region belonged to the Swedish Rural Municipalities’ Association.
basically embraced by all parties as a way to improve the general educational level and to attract more people to stay or move into the region. But they had to wait a long time before it was accomplished, partly because of their subordinate position described above, and partly because of internal disputes regarding school location.\(^\text{15}\)

To conclude, Stockholm as a capital and a large city was faster to respond to school reform changes compared to a rural region like Tierp. New school organisation principles as well as new content and method ideals were generally introduced earlier in the large capital city, and with greater self-confidence. Thus it would be misleading to state that Stockholm as the large capital city has been more adaptive towards national school reforms than Tierp. Stockholm’s quick responses to reforms also indicate that the capital city could make use of its well-established local educational resources, locally interpreting the national reform changes and eventually spreading some of those interpretations at a national level.\(^\text{1}\) The small rural municipality, by comparison, experienced a delay in responding to the national reforms. It took time for the reform change to be implemented. Elementary schools continued to dominate in Tierp throughout the 1960s. According to the local school board protocols, when the 1960s reforms were finally implemented in Tierp, the process was not undertaken with a strong sense of self-confidence. It was more of a fait accompli, as the transformation was rather forcefully imposed on the municipality by the national authorities.

**Educational efforts**

In this section, we provide some examples of educational efforts in Stockholm and Tierp, which illustrate in greater depth the contrast between the scopes of action the two municipalities had when dealing with the 1960s reforms.

Most of the examples concern Stockholm, since there were comparatively few distinct educational efforts in Tierp. Again we should stress that we are using clearly contrasting examples for the purpose of making our point. We have other cases – for instance, within in the field of communication technology – which are more complex in terms of differences and similarities.

Stockholm has indeed been a pioneer when it comes to picking up and introducing new reform ideas. Stockholm has a long history of school experiments, and school research and development, indicating a consistency over time; initiatives taken in Stockholm have affected national reforms rather than being affected by them, such as with the song classes at the Adolf Fredrik elementary school, the 1947 schools (the integrated junior grammar school) and Pedagogiskt Centrum, the municipal school research institute of Stockholm.\(^\text{16}\)

In 1939, Stockholm had already introduced song classes within one of its 6-year elementary schools, Adolf Fredrik. To enter the classes starting at year 3, the young students had to pass a song test, but the test was open to all 9-year-olds in Stockholm. The song classes did not finish after year 6 but lasted three more years. The last 3 years led to a possible junior grammar school exam within the facilities of the elementary school. In fact, introduction of the Adolf Fredrik song classes (later renamed music classes) was the first school form in Sweden offering a 9-year integrated compulsory education. Later on the idea was modified by the municipal head of school into an ‘in-built junior grammar school’, which was introduced in Stockholm in 1947. The in-built junior grammar school worked as a buffer in the 1950s dispute over the pros and cons of replacing the old grammar school with a comprehensive school, followed by an upper secondary school. The junior grammar school substantially influenced the design of the final lower secondary school built in 1962 (grundskolans högstadion).

\(^{15}\)The political debates in Stockholm on the trial schools of the 1950s and the song classes are described in Román, 2011. The history of the research institute is presented in Román, 2014.
The Adolf Fredrik music classes form perhaps the most consistent expression of the strong municipal educational drive in Stockholm. They started out as an experimental novelty, but in the midst of the reforms of the 1960s they had almost become an anomaly, since admission to the classes was selective. But they were popular and a very good municipal brand, so they survived into the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1980s, they were close to being dissolved, or at least displaced from the inner city, but they survived once again because of a strong back-up line (in terms of cultural capital). Further, at this point, the music classes worked as a vehicle for introducing increased educational variation, opening up for profile schools, alternative pedagogy and independent schools.

Another interesting Stockholm example is the municipal research institute Pedagogiskt Centrum, founded in the mid-1960s and lasting until the early 1980s. Stockholm in the 1960s in many ways mirrored national actions with respect to educational planning and development. Stockholm had an ambitious professional development programme for teachers, and every organisational and educational aspect of launching the new school forms (9-year comprehensive school, upper secondary education, adult education) was thoroughly investigated. The research institute also clearly reflected national efforts. The institute aimed to provide research closely connected to classroom activities, in order to make it useful for continuous school development. On taking a closer look at the institute’s achievements, it seems it did not quite live up to the expectations people had for it, and eventually its justification was challenged. Critics argued that the research produced by the institute was addressing the academic world rather than the teachers. In order to be of municipal benefit, they argued, it would have to become more practice-oriented; otherwise, it would be just like any other national school research. The establishment of a municipal research institute was, in any event, another case advocating decentralised school research at least a decade before school decentralisation became a major national policy concern.

The Tierp example is really a basic matter of school organisation, but from the standpoint of a rural region, a matter essential for educational development: the location of the upper part of the comprehensive school (a lower secondary school), and the location of an upper secondary school. Tierp had been a vital rural environment, at least during the first half of the 20th century, but in the 1960s it was a rather uncertain region divided into seven small municipalities. The community of Tierp had evolved to become the administrative hub of the region, but it was not undisputed as the main town. The surrounding municipalities feared and sensed a negative development that threatened to make the northern parts in particular more and more peripheral. During the planning of the new merged municipality – a change that was met with mixed emotions – the location of schools was an important issue. Vendel, the most southern of the seven municipalities in the merged municipality, had already established a lower secondary school prior to the 1962 reform, and the community of Tierp was planning for another lower secondary school and was also the undisputed choice as the location of a new upper secondary school. But there was a prolonged struggle within the Tierp region concerning the location of a third lower secondary school in one of the northern municipalities. This posed a difficult dilemma.

For the three pre-merger municipalities in the north of the Tierp region, the establishment of a lower secondary comprehensive school locally was viewed as essential to their future aspirations. Providing 9 years of schooling locally, removing the need for long school bus transports, was seen as a key factor in order to attract people to stay and to move into the region, and thus stop the depopulation threatening the northern parts of the region. But they could not agree on where to locate it, and the depopulation prognosis worked as an argument against locating a lower secondary comprehensive school in the northern area. The construction of the 1962 comprehensive school presupposed a minimum size for lower secondary schools, since these schools were obliged to provide a variety of study options. The number of students in the northern region was considered too small. The National School Board decided to just allow one fairly large lower secondary school in the main town of Tierp, a school with about 700 students.

The examples above indicate substantial differences between the two municipalities: Stockholm made educational efforts in the 1950s and 1960s beyond organisation and beyond national demands. Tierp did not. This could in part be described as a difference in geographical justice from a national perspective: the urban centre being privileged compared to the rural periphery (thus prompting the announced purpose of the 1960s reforms as the reduction of such regional differences with respect to educational opportunities). But our examples also illustrate a similarity in terms of geographical justice from a municipal perspective. Both the music classes in the 1960s and the 1980s and the trial schools of the 1950s became important school policy topics in Stockholm. In these

17These two issues were definitely major concerns for all of the school boards in the seven municipalities during the 1960s.

18Geographical justice is a concept in progress, which tentatively covers considerations on and consequences of school reform with regards to the geographical distribution of equal and/or fair educational opportunities.
political disputes, they all were treated as a matter of geographical justice. Their most justified location was at the centre of the debate. Was it an advantage or a disadvantage in the 1950s for students to live in a trial school area (or to live in a grammar school area)? Should the music classes stay in the inner city or should they be decentralised, in order to attract more suburban students? Just as in the Tierp case, school location as a vehicle/obstacle for optimising geographical justice was at stake. We find this fundamental aspect of school provision – the actual location of schools – to be crucial for our project. Municipal disagreements on school location have involved other actors besides school politicians, administrators and professionals, such as, in our cases, parental associations, media, prominent intellectuals and local industries. School location issues show that the complexity of municipal school governance is far from a new phenomenon. As said before, school policy making has always involved more actors than the ones officially appointed.

Transnational exchange
The transnational activities performed within our case municipalities are traced mainly by searching for municipal educational efforts, including international elements of some sort, such as introducing new subjects or study programmes with an international direction, starting immigrant education, arranging study trips to other countries, or hosting school visitors from abroad.

Transnational influences or exchanges were quite rare in Tierp during the 1950s and 60s. But there are some examples. When introducing English as a subject in the mid-1950s in grades 5–7, the schools in Tierp were short of competent teachers and had to rely on the use of English courses provided by national radio. These programmes soon became an important part of English instruction in the schools of Tierp, even after competent teachers had been recruited. Despite its proximity to Uppsala, Tierp continued to be challenged by a lack of competent teachers in foreign languages. When English was introduced as a mandatory school subject from year 4 in the 1960s, the shortage became even more acute. The municipal school boards had to take extensive measures for primary teachers to attend special courses in Junior English Teaching, arranged by the Regional Board of Education. Except for occasional visits by missionaries describing their work in Africa, or looking at the world map during Geography lessons, the teaching in English seems to have been the predominant international strain in the Tierp schools during the 1950s and 1960s, judging from the protocols.

During the late 1960s and in the 1970s, employment immigration from Finland marked a new chapter in terms of internationalisation in Tierp. But despite recurrent information from the Regional Board of Education citing the need to provide adequate schooling for immigrant children, the Tierp school board(s) maintained a quite cautious approach, although they eventually adapted to the guidelines prescribed by the Regional Board.

Stockholm, in contrast, has held a more progressive attitude towards internationalisation, partly because Stockholm has acted as a role model for the Swedish education system as a whole. The Swedish school system in the 1960s and 1970s gained an international reputation for being the successful outcome of large-scale social engineering, and Stockholm soon became a popular destination for visits by international guests. During the 1960s and 1970s, people from all over the world came to Stockholm to witness the comprehensive school in action. The Stockholm school administration even set up a demonstration/trial school within their facilities, partly designed for the purpose of presenting the Swedish school to international guests. And although the Swedish school as a role model over time lost some of its attractiveness, Stockholm as a city has continued to work actively for increased internationalisation in schools. Striving for internationalisation has become part of a general policy statement to – once again – create a world-leading school ('En skola i världsklass' was the headline slogan of the Stockholm school policy programme of 2013).

Stockholm in the 1950s and 1960s naturally had a wider repertoire of skilled teachers when it comes to language instruction, including English, German and French, compared to Tierp. In 1971, Skanstulls gymnasium even offered Chinese as a third language (C-språk), on a trial basis. Unlike Tierp, where immigration was fairly limited, Stockholm had quite a diverse immigrant population early on. This has come to affect its schools in different ways. Although municipal immigrant education on a larger scale did not start until the 1970s, in the 1950s Stockholm already had a number of private schools with international origins and profiles. Some were founded after WW II (the Jewish Hillel School, the Estonian School, the Waldorf School) while others were rooted in the 17th and 18th centuries (the German School, the French School, the Catholic School). Together they contributed to laying the foundation for international profiling, both in independent and municipal schools. In the late 1970s, upper secondary programmes with an explicit international direction, like the International Baccalaureate, which in Stockholm started in a municipal school, began to expand...
the educational diversity in Stockholm. Since then it has included a number of internationally oriented profile schools, study programmes and subject courses.

This brief and very preliminary comparison between Stockholm and Tierp has probably missed some of the transnational activities taking place in Tierp. Still, it illustrates a radical difference in terms of transnational exchanges, well rooted long before ‘the era of globalisation’ (which usually refers to a period starting in the 1980s, as the term was coined or at least spread). While the large capital city has explicitly striven for increased school internationalisation and thus has facilitated such developments, school internationalisation in the small rural municipality has been more reactive in relation to external pressure, be it recommendations from the Regional Board of Education or immigrants moving in. In short, Stockholm – but not Tierp – at an early stage made preparations to adapt to future global changes (i.e. taking part in a world education culture and qualifying as a global city attracting creative classes, to recall some of the concepts introduced in section 1.3).

Concluding arguments for a comparative and historical approach to local school policy

In this section, we will try to sum up the main contributions of this article based on our empirical analysis and theoretical approach. Our conclusions are structured along the following themes: 1) the history of local school policy, 2) the varying balance over time between national and local school governance, 3) the regional and local differences in school conditions and policies, and 4) school policy corresponding to transnational/global policy. And finally, 5) historical local school policy studies as a contribution to the development of curriculum theory as a field of research. These five themes put together reflect the comparative and historical approach which our project subscribe to.

The history of local school policy

First, we stress the importance of historical studies describing and analysing local school policy in great depth. This is of interest for a wide range of readers: researchers, policy makers at different levels, practitioners and a public audience. In-depth studies will provide better insight into shifting local school conditions. Of course, mainly studying documents at the municipal policy level, as we have done, will not tell us what happened in the classrooms, but will tell us some important things about the local school conditions. Municipal/local school policy actors (politicians and administrators) have planned and decided on a number of important school matters, either freely or by interpreting national guidelines and decisions. They have especially had a say when it comes to school location and plans to construct and/or restore school buildings and school yards. This very material aspect of schooling is indeed a municipal concern (although the national school building regulations have been rigorous). Other such material aspects are school transportation, accommodation, heating, school meals and material supplies of different sorts. These material aspects make up the basic conditions for schooling. Arguably, such material conditions do matter for everyday life in school when carrying out curricular intentions, not least in rural areas. In addition, such issues are well suited for historically exploring the complexity of municipal school governance.

Varying balance over time between national and local school governance

In many countries, including Sweden, national and local governments have over the years explicitly shared the responsibility for their public schools. But in Sweden, as in other countries, the balance between national and local school governance has varied over time. Simply put, public elementary schools – and public girls’ schools – in Sweden were principally run by the municipalities (although, for the 19th century, it would be more accurate to say that they were run by parishes), whereas public grammar schools were nationally run. In the 1960s, school forms were replaced by a comprehensive school in combination with an upper secondary school, including both academic and vocational study programmes. A new kind of shared responsibility was introduced. In many ways, the national control over schools was strengthened, but at the same time municipal responsibility for schools was increased in other ways. The next major change was in the early 1990s, as the municipalities were exclusively made the principal organisers for public schools. On the one hand, responsibility for school resource allocation and for organising school activities is the responsibility of municipalities, but on the other hand, curricular and judicial guidelines and goals are set and controlled by national politicians and administrators. School renationalisation has become a popular political slogan in recent years, as a way to end the alleged municipalisation with regards to school governing. According to this critique, the increased municipal responsibility is a key factor in explaining contemporary problems in the Swedish school (mainly concerning student achievement and teacher performance and recruitment). From a research point of view, the political claim of renationalisation is interesting but somewhat confusing (see Jarl, 2012). Comparative in-depth studies of local school policy will definitely contribute to a more accurate and versatile understanding of the changing balance between national and local school governance.

Regional and local differences in school conditions and policies

A comparative study of local school policy will not only provide thicker and more nuanced descriptions and
analyses of how the balance between national and local school governance has changed over time but also show spatial variations. There are regional differences in school conditions and school policies. Arguably, variation in local school policy and school practice depends on the tightness of the national grip, so to speak. An excessive repertoire of detailed national regulations – perhaps like the school systems of the former Eastern European countries, which in some parts resembled the Swedish school system introduced in the 1960s – will lead to a quite uniform school system allowing for relatively few local initiatives. But not even the harshest national intervention could wipe out all the differences tied to geography, economy, demography and educational assets.

In other words, the local school policy response to national school policy differs among municipalities, due to their location and their socio-economic and educational conditions. This highlights the dilemma of equal educational opportunities and whether they require strong national uniformity and/or local sensibility for individual needs. The political shifts in Sweden in balancing national and local school governance to a large extent reflect changing attitudes towards the dilemma of equal educational opportunities. The school reforms of the 1960s, to which we have mainly restricted our empirical findings in this article, were fuelled by a strong support for establishing national school standards. The less extensive reform moves in the 1970s and 1980s in many ways counteracted the standardisation ideal, responding to a widespread and loud decentralisation movement. The reform shift in the 1990s opened up for increased municipal responsibility and a wider scope of action for local school actors in terms of deciding school content and school organisation. It also opened up for improved conditions for independent schools, and a more management-oriented school administration. Still, the shift in the 1990s paradoxically opened up for the next countermovement. The model restricting national governing to goal setting and outcome/output evaluation implied a stronger emphasis on outcome/output evaluation in due time. During the 21st century, a series of national tools for increased supervision and evaluation has been introduced and re-introduced, and the national curricular guidelines have been made more prescriptive. This oscillation between centralisation and decentralisation – possibly a Scandinavian speciality (see Hopmann, 2008, p. 431) – has, regardless of direction, been politically motivated as a means to make educational opportunities for students and regions more equal. But even today there are few historical studies on how the Swedish school reforms have affected regional and local differences regarding educational opportunities.

Local school policy corresponding to transnational/global policy

The balance between local and national school policy includes features that mirror the balance between national and international school policy. Different aspirations for internationalisation, through market mechanisms and through the political establishment of institutions, legislation, guidelines and so forth (and eagerly enforced at a discursive level by media) have been said to challenge national sovereignty. At the same time, our findings indicate that the extent of internationalisation differs between municipalities, depending on economic strength, demographic and educational conditions, and political leadership. The socio-historical as well as the political context of the specific municipality thus affects the ways in which internationalisation is facilitated and acted out. Our comparison between Stockholm and Tierp is also in line with Brenner’s (2004) claim that the impact of international trend is more likely to influence and benefit the urban area than the rural region, and we may suggest – at this early stage of the project – that this difference in impact with regards to school and school policy has increased over time, just as Brenner and others have stated.

Still, from a historical perspective, the tension between urban and rural conditions and policy options is not new. In Sweden, the decades prior to the 1940s marked an urbanisation breakthrough, transforming the countryside from a place that was prosperous to one that was losing population and was allegedly dying. The national school reform project of the 1950s and 1960s to a large degree manifested more equal educational opportunities as a way to diminish the growing gap between urban and rural regions. Local access to 9-year comprehensive schools and at least regional access to upper secondary schools were important means to make rural municipalities more attractive.

But the urban municipalities like Stockholm, at least in the 1950s and 1960s, had a more elaborated educational infrastructure to start with, compared to their rural cousins (like Tierp), and possibly both their school policy actors (politicians) and school actors (principals, teachers and students) met national directives with a different sense of local self-determination. Different but not necessarily stronger: a small municipal region like Tierp, which only hosted elementary schools prior to the 1960s, might very well have been quite reform resistant due to its lack of complex infrastructure, provided that its school actors were strongly rooted in the elementary school tradition. Urban school policy and practice could possibly have deviated less from national policy than local school policy and/or school practice. Not least in the capital city of Stockholm, the modern urban settings seem to have been quite open to embracing experiments, new inventions and technologies. Of course, large cities have also harboured strong institutions and actors who have claimed an interest in the ‘old school traditions’.
at the same time the well-established infrastructure has presumably given large city school actors more room to experiment, refine and restore, and the same arguably holds true with regards to the international dimension of local school policy.

The changes in power balance between international, national and local policy that have taken place in the last 30 years have, according to some urban researchers, transformed a number of major cities in the world into global cities, as Brenner (1998) and Sassen (2001) put it. Global cities are, according to Sassen, contemporary cities that operate in global economic, political and cultural networks which are more important for them than their national policy context. This definition is partly reflected in Florida’s (2002, 2006) concept of creative classes. According to Florida, the prosperity of cities and regions is dependent on their ability to attract creative people, including researchers, engineers, architects, designers and various kinds of artists. The creative class, Florida claims, is becoming the new aristocracy. To attract this group, a city or a region has to allow individuality, diversity and open-mindedness and to reward competence. In short, creative regions and cities – regardless of where they are located in the world – have more in common with each other than with regions and cities that are still based on linear hierarchical relations and skills rooted in the industrial era.

Whether Stockholm – being fairly small in a world perspective – would qualify as a global city attracting the creative classes is perhaps an open question, although it does fulfil many of the requirements listed by Brenner (1998, 2004), Sassen (2001) and Florida (2002, 2006). Our point here is rather to emphasise the need for historical and comparative local studies of rural and urban changes in a global perspective in our case concerning school and school policy, and not just studies investigating urban globalisation and urban governance as contemporary phenomena. In other words, we want to pose the question: To what extent are the observed local changes in Swedish school policy and school practice supporting post-industrial restructuring theories? Has the national impact on local school policy really declined, as government been replaced by governance? The national government’s role in a governance regime of today may of course be different from the government role of yesterday’s government regime, but it would be misleading to describe it as the rise and fall of the national state. Or as Pierre (2011) puts it: ‘it is equally clear that even today government is a key actor – if not the key actor – in governance’ (p. 19).

**Contribution to the development of curriculum theory**

The research field of curriculum theory has, in Scandinavia, developed in close connection with the emergence of national school reforms. Accordingly, the theory to some extent originated as a top-down structural model, taking changes in socio-economic and cultural conditions and their consequences for national school policy as its point of departure. Curriculum theory in the Scandinavian tradition clearly touches the classical didactic questions ‘What?’, ‘How?’ and ‘Why?’, but from a socio-historical system perspective rather than from a classroom perspective. Consequently, the socio-historical ‘why?’ question is emphasised. As the name suggests, curriculum in a narrow sense (curricular agreements and arrangements through politically decided curricular objectives and guidelines and subject syllabi) are considered to be crucial for schooling in curriculum theory. The school ideal of a certain era is to some extent manifested in national regulations and guidelines. But a wider definition of curriculum takes into account a series of discursive policy actions by a number of actors within different school policy-related practices: national, municipal, local and transnational. National regulations and guidelines of course are imposed on schools and municipalities more or less forcefully, but it is definitely not a top-down nor a one-way sender–transmitter relationship. As we have tried to show, municipal school policy actors at schools respond to, interpret and obstruct national decrees in different ways, and so do the local school actors.

The varying municipal and local responses (positive, negative or indifferent) to national decrees represent, if looked at from another angle, a major vehicle for future national reforms, where of course some actors and institutions will be more successful than others. In fact, this is where the transnational dimension becomes very relevant. All the educational transfers taking place in the last 100 years are not only a matter of declared and silent borrowing and lending between nations or between nations and international federations (cf. Steiner-Khamsi & Waldow, 2012; Waldow, 2009). They are also a matter of national and transnational borrowing and lending between federations, regions and cities, processes which in turn affect national education policy. This is why historical studies of local school policy and practice are crucial for exploring different dimensions within the field of curriculum theory, not least the transnational dimension.

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