

Case Study

The ideas of sustainable development during the students' religious education in Swedish female schools at the beginning of the 20th century

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Abstract: This article explores the role of female education in Sweden in the development of religious education and its role in the sustainable development of primary school pupils at the beginning of the 20th century. For this purpose, a retrospective analysis of contemporary thematic content was conducted. Archival documents from the Stockholm Archives were used for the article to ensure a reliable result. Based on an analysis of regulatory documents (Protocols of the Swedish Parliament and Protocols of the General Church Meeting), the archives of four private schools (The school of Anna Sandstrom; The co-educational school of Sofi Almquist; New Elementary School for Girls or The school of Anna Ahlmstrom; The school of Anna Rönström), the author concludes that teachers of these institutions: 1. use religious orientation materials for general education; 2. draw on religion as an instrument to show pupils their connection with other components of the environment and to convince them that all components are connected and that the expected future depends on each individual; 3. show pupils the connections amongst the society – people – nature and the necessity to multiply all their resources.

Keywords: Religion education, Primary schools, Female education in Sweden, Sustainable development

Introduction

Today, world civilization is at a critical turning point – the transition to the digital level. I do not know if this is good or bad, but ignoring it is a dangerous reality. In addition, the first questions are "What should a person of digital reality be like? What specialists will be in demand? What the new generation should be prepared for?". However, behind all this, the moral and aesthetic culture of the individual is very often forgotten. But what about it? Is it not so important, and the main thing is that education should train a person who can ensure the functioning of artificial intelligence, and that is it? Digitalization, artificial intelligence and clip thinking are the realities of our time, which leave no room for a strict moral attitude among the younger generation. Without ethical and aesthetic culture, without the spiritual and mental development of the individual, there can be no

future or development of society.

Thus, the question is about the formation of concepts of sustainable development among the younger generation and the need to find a comprehensive solution to global problems – environmental, economic and social. Today, there are several interpretations of the concept of "sustainable development" by modern researchers and teachers (Table 1).

Taking all the above definitions into account, in the context of this article, education for sustainable development is understood as a concept that helps the students to identify themselves as part of society and to preserve the potentiality and experience of past generations to make rational use of it in the present and to reproduce it for future generations. The beginning of the 20th century was an essential historical stage for the development of Swedish education to understand the role of religious education in the

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Table 1. Interpretations of the concept of “sustainable development” by modern researchers and teachers

Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development our Common Future	A process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development and institutional change are made consistent with future as well as present needs. (UN. Secretary-General & World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987)
UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles)	A development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. (UCLA Sustainability)
Both A.	The definition of sustainable development is that each generation must be able to benefit from the heritage of previous generations and is obliged to maintain potentiality about the needs of future generations. (Both, 2022)

implementation of the ideas of sustainable development. It was during this period (in 1919) that a rethinking of the content and importance of education for the development of society took place in Sweden – memorisation of the catechism was abolished; RE became more standardized; the number of teaching hours of reading, writing, and counting increased. In addition, the female education was significantly reformed in 1927, thanks to which the female education was also developed (Börjesson, 2016). In the development of ideas of ESD in Sweden at the beginning of the 20th century, the role of female schools was quite significant due to the active social and educational activities of their founders. That is why studying this article becomes essential and will help to clarify the ideas about the formation of ESD through religious education in the Swedish education system throughout the 20th century.

Methodology

Field of research

The main goal of this research is to show the influence of Swedish female education on the content of RE and how it promotes the sustainable development of primary school pupils at the beginning of the 20th century.

Sweden is a country that supports the initiatives for implementing sustainable values at different levels – national and international (in details available in the research "European Legal Framework for Education for Sustainable Development: Implementation in Sweden"(Chorna, 2023, a). Therefore, defining the role of female education (at the beginning of its construction) helps to complete the understanding of the formation and development process not only of Swedish female education, but also enables the understanding of its role in the formation of education for sustainable development during the Religious Education of primary schoolchildren at the beginning of the 20th century.

Sources of data

The resource base for research is:

1. The research system SöderScholar (internal library system of Sodertorns University – Stockholm, Sweden)

is used to determine to what extent the problem has been studied. This made it possible to search 256 databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, SAGE, etc.

2. Archival materials from female schools (containing curricula, lists of textbooks used for religious education, etc.) are available at the Stockholm Archives.

Materials

Books, articles, reports, archival materials, etc.

Methods

The research used methods, such as studying, analysing, and synthesizing thematic publications and content from professional websites for teachers.

Results

The factors that influenced the development of ideas for the sustainable development of religious education in Swedish Female Schools at the beginning of the 20th century

The transformation of the Swedish education system at the beginning of the 20th century is characterised by many factors that prompted a revision of the content of religious education in female schools, thereby promoting an understanding of the importance of introducing ideas of sustainable development into the educational process. To begin with, let us outline what factors are generally capable of influencing the development of the education system. For example, R.S.Dodiya, in the research article "The Factors Affecting the Education System of a Nation" (Dodiya, 2018, pp.87-91), convinced that the main factors are:

Historical and cultural – Democratic decentralization; education extension; development of industrial and technical education; foreign influence; the factors of conventionality and inequality – affected the educational system of the country for a long time;

Nation's Life – perspectives – Equal educational

opportunities for all; education for individual freedom and human welfare; innovations and changes through education, social, economic and industrial development through education; Satisfactory quality and fulfillment of educational needs; National reconstruction – each country must develop its own strategy and plan for progress and take a path according to its purpose and goals;

Political – Impact of democratic political system; national identity – many issues in educational development hinge on the decision made by the Government – reforms, laws, etc.;

Social – Impact of the social impediments on education – educational development depending on many social markers – social policy, unemployment, etc.

Scientific – Scientific and technology education; educational research; scientific and educational development – the activities of educators and researchers (adaptation of existing theories, development of new ones, foundations of schools, etc.). The author concludes that every factor is essential in its impact on the education system. Some factors are responsible for the expansion of education; some make way for the new flows coming into education– science and technical education, and some factors present the aims of education, which can be seen in the perspectives of every nation's life. There are also certain factors that show the impact of particular political systems, scientific advancement, social changes and developmental planning on the education system (Dodiya, 2018, p. 89).

In addition, a thorough analysis of the factors that influence the development of the educational system L.Mățã (Mățã, 2012, pp.1222-1230) convinced that there are eight categories (*cultural* – age, experience, gender, ethnicity, teaching philosophy, cultural appropriateness; *economic* – ability to obtain resources, resource support; *political* – decision making, participation and involvement, government and other agencies, education law; *organizational* – professional development needs, teacher training, class size and workload, beliefs and attitudes toward innovation; *psychological* – understanding/knowledge of the innovation (need, clarity, complexity, and practicality), ownership of innovation, personal concerns, communication, leadership and administration; *pedagogical* – teaching experience, teaching method, educational objectives, educational content, teaching strategies, evaluation strategies; *legal* – respect of professional ethics code, professional ethics; *technological* – ability to handle ICT, access to audiovisual resources) and two levels of factors for curricular innovation – external and internal.

Taking these into account, there could be main factors that influenced the development of the role of religion education in Swedish schools for the sustainable development of pupils. The factors can also be divided into external and internal.

External (factors that do not depend on the country's development) – relevance of environmental, social and economic problems around the world – Sweden is a

country that always supports all environmental initiatives; global migration of people – the presence of a large number of emigrants in the country encourages the development of a mechanism for a tolerant attitude and the creation of conditions for supporting other religions and cultures. Internal (factors that depend on the country's progress) – development of science – activities of international and Swedish educators (international and Swedish), progress of society, development of mass media for teachers and pupils.

The study identified events that have directly or indirectly influenced the development of ideas for education for sustainable development during religious education in Swedish female schools, such as:

1. "The Century of the Child" by E.Key (1900) – the author was convinced that the connection between religion and nature is the basis of the children's "world picture", and that is why children should understand that they are part of the Big Nature – System. There is no "correct" or "incorrect" religion; faith is an essential ethical tool for the sustainable thinking development of pupils. (Key, 1912)

2. The transformation of Swedish educational institutions (1905) – the new statute of the Secondary Gymnasium divided the school system into two parts; the lower one was free of Latin, and there was less Biblical material, which means that the educational content became scientifically oriented and helped teachers explain the role of the nature and society in earth development in the future to their pupils. I think it was the first profound change in the Swedish educational system during the last century, and it was one of the significant factors that led to the educational reform in 1919. As a result, "both history and Christianity were used to reinforce the image of a peaceful and stable nation and cover up social upheaval and inequality" (Index to the protocols of the Riksdag with appendixes: 1900-1910, 1913, p. 85).

3. 1900 – 1927 – Activity of the Swedish government and the Religious Council in education.

The Swedish Parliament supported the need for RE and EE in primary school – introducing and improving health education in school, sufficient funds for the publication of textbooks on religion and nature, and activities for protecting natural monuments (Protocols of the general church meeting 1908, 1908, p.112). All these factors directly or indirectly influenced general state policy in education.

The activities of the Church Council also played an important role. The considerations of its protocols convinced the Swedish Church to support the postulate that Christian education should be remained in schools. However, if the parents are deeply religious people (and not Christians), they could exempt the child from the religious education. Furthermore, it is essential that the Swedish Church connects the religious textbooks with an understanding of biblical principles.

In other words, the vigorous activity of the Swedish Parliament and the Church Council helped to expand the

function of Swedish religious education.

4. 1919–1920 – The curriculum of primary education was changed – the curriculum stipulated that in the regular form of primary education there should be 30 hours of reading per week and that the focus should be on Christianity, Swedish, arithmetic and geometry. (*Index to the protocols of the Riksdag with appendixes: 1900-1910, 1913, p. 187*).

5. 1925 – The World Conference of Life and Work (in Swedish – Stora ekumeniska mötet) was held in Stockholm – the main topics discussed were economic and industrial problems, social and moral problems, international relations, education and ways to promote cooperation between the churches and their associations at the federal level (*McLeod, 2008, p. 56*).

As could be noticed that the point in question of this conference was very multifaceted and concerned not only religion but its role in society. It included three main components of sustainability – economic, ecological, and social. It shows that the church's influence is much more significant than could be imagined at that time.

Thus, in one way or another, all the events mentioned above have influenced the transformation of the content of religious education in Swedish schools in general and in schools for girls in particular.

The content of religious education in Swedish female schools at the beginning of the 20th century for implementing the ideas of sustainable development

In 1927, a new school reform was introduced, which allowed girls to receive a state education on the same terms as boys. More and more girls transferred to the new co-educational schools, but many female schools continued to develop, especially in the larger cities. As the female schools received municipal support and were free of charge, many girls remained there (*Börjesson, 2016*).

An essential role in the evolution of didactic and methodological approaches to the sustainable development of educated pupils was also played by the results of the actions of Swedish educators in the last century – it was the opening of private schools. Few of them were more conspicuous.

The school of Anna Sandström

The school of Anna Sandström existed from 1883 to 1939 as a school for girls and then as a co-educational school in Stockholm at Karlavägen, 25.

According to A. Sandström, the students' knowledge is burdensome for them, and already strained minds and memories can leave a confusing impression and perhaps instil an aversion to religion itself. That is why for pupils at age of primary school, religion should only be an exciting story with educational potential for moral education and an opportunity to talk about important things – God, love, belief, tolerance, and so on.

As a textbook for religious education, the teachers of this school used the Bible, the catechism, and the history of religion, and it was a typical content and way of using

religious material for education – the biblical text is used for teaching the pupils to read and write, to understand the most important historical events and their influence on the development of society.

Sandström A. was convinced that religion must be "a subject that above all should be spirit and life, and not a dead understanding" (*Sandström, 1880, p. 19*) and the content of the Holy Bible should be learned in history classes and shows the stage of humanities' development, because "in the past, people learned the catechism by heart without understanding it; now one must learn both the catechism and the explanations and also understand the latter" (*Sandström, 1880, p. 19*).

The main principle of this school was interdisciplinarity, which means that "the main aim was also to collaborate the various subjects as much as possible into a unity so that, e.g. church, literature and art are placed in the closest connection with political history, just as geography with geology and biology" (*Nordic family book, 1916, p. 671*).

The co-educational school of Sofi Almquist

It was one of the first co-educational schools in Sweden, which existed from 1886 to 1936 at Nybrogatan 19 in Stockholm. Material could be found in Stockholm City Archive that helps to understand the content of religious and ecological education in this school, which influenced the introduction of the ideas of sustainable development into the educational process in the future.

The content of RE mainly teaches the pupils the history of religion in Sweden from its beginning and forms their ideas about historical events and their consequences for society's development. The pupils also read many Bible texts about cooperation with the people around them and with the environment. In the curriculum for religious education, we could find an extensive list of psalms. Analysing the text for reading, we could also say that the ideas of the students' religion and sustainable education are essential for an author. There are texts about God and his role in life. These texts help students to understand that God is everywhere and he helps to recognize the difference between "good" and "bad". A good example of this is the story "The God See Us" (*Almquist, 1919, p.1*), which illustrated to children that the results of all their actions are visible to others and God – "that God sees us everywhere, no matter how dark it is" (*Almquist, 1919, pp. 1-2*).

In addition, S. Almquist recommended reading many religious texts such as "The Shepherd and the Lamb", "Prayer", "Christmas Hymn for Children", and "The Christmas Tree", which could help teachers to diversify the learning process. However, some texts also express the idea that society is more important than any individual personality– "Hymns for children", "Fear God and love the fatherland". For example, in poetry, we can find this idea in the text "What will you love?" (*Almquist, 1919, pp.1-2*):

What will you love

More than yourself has loved your home,
Your mother's prayer, your father's commandment,

But the motherland is more than them.
And more, far more than all, your God!

Here we can see a precise gradation of students' values (from more important): "God" – "Motherland" – "Family" – "I". In other words, students should evaluate their actions in relation to religion, society and opinions.

Thus, the views of S. Alquist once again confirm the thesis that religious education in Sweden at the beginning of the 20th century contains a piece of ideas for students' sustainable development.

New elementary school for girls (Ahlmstrom's school)

Many materials from this school are available in the Stockholm City Archive (Stadsarkivet). This school existed as a private school from 1902 to 1972 and was then converted into a municipal one. An analysis of the teaching content of this school revealed that religious education in the primary school classes was limited to learning Bible stories (the content appropriate for the student's age), Luther's catechism and Psalms.

Furthermore, the subject "Nature" had its potentiality for pupils' sustainable development. For example, "the study on nature mainly followed the development of the seasons. Animals and plants were observed both in the classroom and in outdoors. With this purpose, a small farm was created, where the children's other work was concentrated. Some excursions were undertaken. The children presented what they saw in pictures by drawing, modelling and cutting the coloured paper" (*Account of the new elementary school for girls, 1906, p.9*). Thus, accustoming children to caring for the environment and attaching creation to it, the teachers show the importance of each student's actions to the future development of the surrounding world.

Anna Rönström's school

The school of Anna Ronstorm was a typical female school at that time. It was founded in Lund in 1871 at Storasödergatan 63. The analysis on public and educational actions of Anna Rönström is very useful for fully understanding the features of religious education for students' sustainable development. As Schånberg noticed (*Schånberg, 2010, p.1*) that Anna Rönström's views on life and morals were based on Christian faith and her pedagogical approach. Everything happened with a connection – Society, People, Nature.

The ideas about the connection among society, nature and people were based on the postulates of faith and were implemented in Anna Rönström's school, which also could be treated as an educational precondition for sustainable development because the teachers convinced the students – they are part of the environment and their actions influence the development of society in generally and particularly for an individual.

It also confirms this idea in Anna Rönström's "School speech from 1895–1920". There are presented text of a lot of speeches and authors' views, such as:

1. Education is started in the direction of society, based on God's rules– on the first page of the Bible, you all have heard what it is told that God created everything in a carefully determined order. It is in God's hands to decide when such a time will come and how long it will last. But it is good to say confidently: "It is in God's hands. And what was originally left in his hands is keeping in safe by us" (*Rönström et al., 1922, p. 16*).

2. Everything created by God and each person is a part of the Nature, that's why first of all pupils should understand its laws and only follow that law of society – "we can learn most from the life of nature if we see it as a relation to our own, because it is so that the life moves in nature not entirely different from the life that moves within ourselves. Therefore, most great educators have also insisted that people should live as close to nature as possible" (*Rönström et al., 1922, p.18*).

3. Faith is one of the powerful instruments that help to understand pupils' ways of interacting with the outside world – "The wonder of all that God has created gives a rise to humble worship – thus helps us to tie the bond called religion. Anyone who does not recognize this bond – or someone believe that they can live without religion –becomes, as it were, a link in nature, a natural object like others. Still, he becomes perishable like them" (*Rönström et al., 1922, p. 43*).

4. Outdoor activities are the best learning method for environmental studies – "out in nature, especially the little ones around you. It is out of books and homework to play in the free nature. Yes, it is well thought out. Playing is a wonderful thing. It is the child's natural activity. (*Rönström et al., 1922, pp. 94-96*).

Thus, a content analysis of archival materials from several Swedish Female Schools made it possible to understand the religious education and its potential for introducing the ideas of sustainable development into the educational process.

Discussion and conclusion

Within the framework of this article, the reasons were analysed for the development of religious education in Sweden at the beginning of the 20th century in the context of the transformation of female education. The results of an analysis of archival documents from four female schools (which existed at the beginning of the 20th century in Stockholm and Lund) are presented. However, the article only shows the experience of four schools, which presents a partial picture of the educational potential of religious education in the development of Swedish female schools. The archival materials only prove that there was such a potential in the school, but not find out to what extent a more thorough study of religious education content in female schools in Sweden at the beginning of the 20th century is required.

This study suggests that the activities of Swedish

educators and their work to reform the content of religious education in girls' schools provide the opportunities for the development of ideas that are related to the development of teachers.

1. use religious orientation materials for general teaching (for example, get through religious texts in history classes to illustrate the development of humanities stage) – A. Sandström, E.Key, etc.;

2. utilize religion as an instrument to show pupils their connection with other components of the environment and to convince them that all components are connected. The expected future depends on each person– E.Key, A.Ahlström, A.Rönström, etc.

3. Show pupils the connection between society, people and nature, and the necessity to multiply all its resources – A.Rönström, E.Key, S.Almquist, etc.

It is also worth noting that specialized magazines and newspapers for teachers ("Hertha. The Journal of the Swedish Women's Movement", "The Newspaper for Stockholm Folk Schools") and for students ("The Children's Newspaper for Folk Schools" (since 1950 renamed "Kamratposten") also contained materials that directly or indirectly contributed to the implementation of ideas of sustainable development in the system of religious education at the beginning of the twentieth century. The research material is devoted to studying this issue – "International and Swedish Periodicals as A Tool for Disseminating Pedagogical Ideas of Sustainable Development" (Chorna, 2023, b).

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Conflict of interests

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