

# The Swedish Educational Reform and Segregation

## Increasing awareness about the effects

### Introduction

During the 1970s, Sweden was one of the most equal countries in the world, when it came to income. Since then, income inequality has greatly increased, a pattern which can be seen in most of Western Europe. Sweden has also seen a steady stream of immigration since the latter part of the twentieth century. This has brought an ethnic segregation, where people of non-European descent often live in the same areas, separate from areas dominated by people born in Sweden. In conjunction with this ethnic segregation, one can also see an increase in socioeconomic segregation, where people are separated on the basis of class and economic resources.

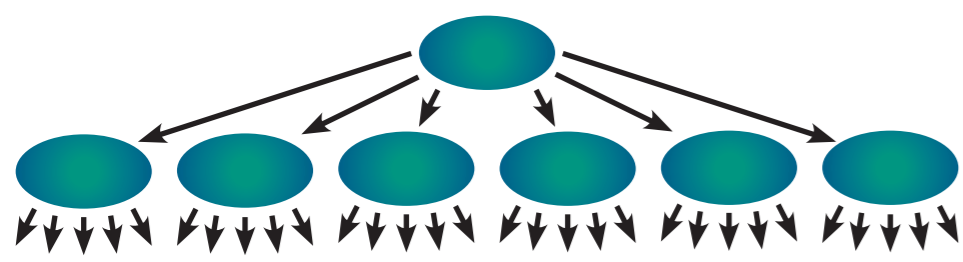
It was from this "current situation" our work stemmed. We wanted to tackle ethnic and socioeconomic segregation in Sweden, and we had identified the Sustainable Development Goals we were setting our aim towards, as shown below. We decided to tackle this issue through the school system. In 1992, Sweden enacted one of the largest reforms in its history. Aptly named the Private School Reform, this piece of legislation would allow private schools to compete on similar terms as public schools and receive a tax-funded voucher for each student. The rationale for this, was that not only would the schools benefit from being subject to the mechanisms of a market, but this would allow for a diversity of education never seen before. Parents could run schools where municipalities weren't able to, and private schools with unique programs and teaching methods could be started. Parents and students were then free to choose whichever school they wanted.

What in fact instead happened, was in stark contrast to these intentions. Profit-seeking companies took over the market and instead of a diverse selection of schools, chains of similar schools emerged. Perhaps more troublesome, and more relevant pertaining to our cause, the consensus is that this reform has increased segregation, rather than counteract it. Much of this is due to how parents and students in fact choose which school to attend. It was from this context, we decided upon an approach to tackle segregation.

### Approach

What we wanted to do, was to create a nuanced and holistic summary of the reports and studies already available. We felt that the issue was not that there wasn't enough information on the topic, but rather that the information wasn't in the hands of those who needed it. We therefore decided to email our report to 2 000+ local politicians. This would hopefully inform them, and motivate them to take action, thus generating the impact we were seeking.

#### Our idea of distribution



Emailing in bulk is nothing revolutionary, but we don't know who is a possible key player. Exponential distribution increases the likelihood of reaching a key player, whether it be in Kalmar or Stockholm.

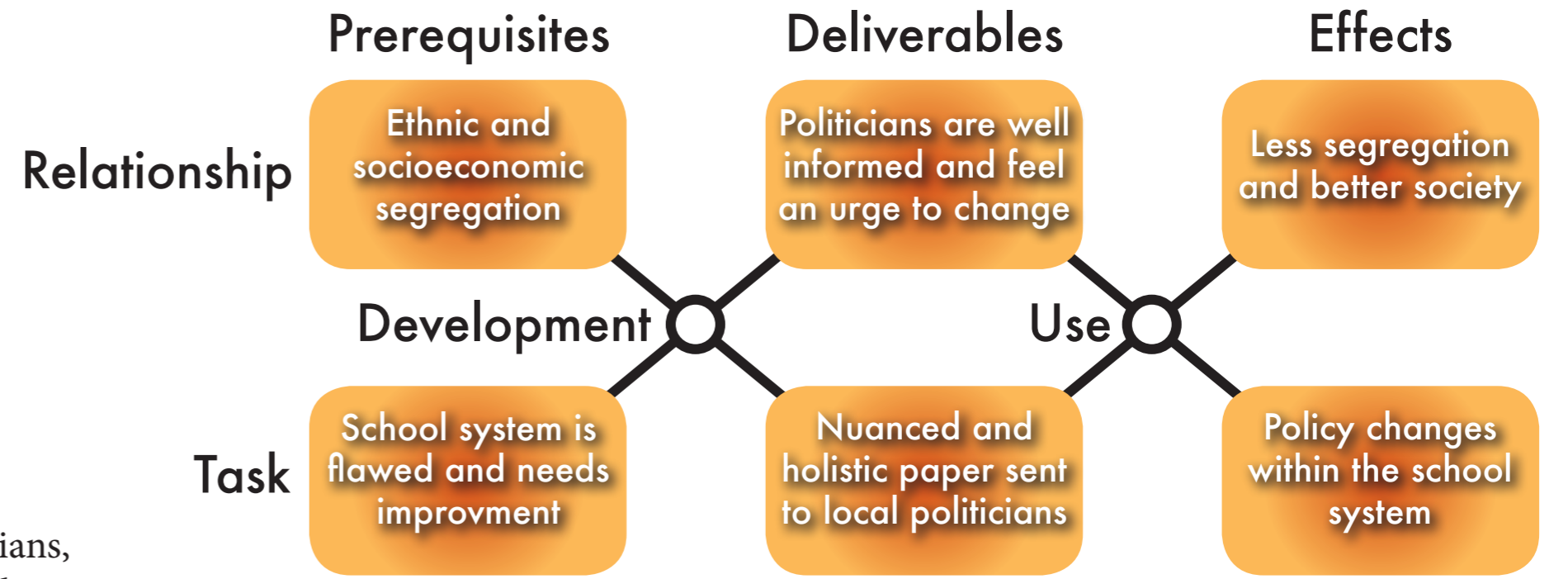
#### The change process



### Intent

When the approach had been decided we identified the importance of remaining fact-based and nuanced throughout our process. Our intent was never to provide our own opinions and recommendations, as this would defeat the purpose entirely. We wanted to inform the local politicians, who quite understandably might

not know the ins and outs of the school market. Instead of changing opinions we wanted the opinions of the politicians to be well substantiated and based on facts. Furthermore, we wanted to contribute to the debate regarding the school system becoming less polarized and focused on particular issues, such as profit ceilings or religion in school. Instead, the public debate should be able to discuss what effects the system as a whole in fact has. The X-model above was used extensively during our process, and illustrates perfectly what we were aiming towards. There was of course a lot of focus on the task at hand. The prerequisites were set and our deliverables would be our report and the distribution of said report. The intended effect was of course for the politicians to take legislative action, or something to the like. The people, or relationships, of this project were always kept in mind though, and it is evident from the illustrations above how the prerequisites, deliverables and effects differed.



## Sustainable Development Goals



The connection to this SDG might seem obvious, but does segregation, and lack of equality, really affect the quality of the education? It would seem as though it does, and this quote from UN's website on the Social Development Goals perfectly outlines why working with these matters is of importance, when improving the quality of the education our children receive: "Equity issues constitute a major challenge in education according to a recent assessment. In all countries with data, children from the richest 20 per cent of households achieved greater proficiency in reading at the end of their primary and lower secondary education than children from the poorest 20 per cent of households. In most countries with data, urban children scored higher in reading than rural children."

This SDG sets its aim not only at inequality among countries but within them as well. Having a system of education which reduces, rather than increases, segregation, is therefore key when it comes to increasing equality.



A system of education which further perpetuates segregation is undoubtedly problematic if one wants to achieve sustainable cities and communities. We run the risk of forming separate societies with vastly different conditions. Rapid urbanization brings its challenges, but a system of segregation where only the sufficiently wealthy can afford adequate living conditions, is no system at all. The sustainability of our cities and communities is therefore contingent upon the issue of segregation being tackled.

### Lessons learned

- 1 There was a great deal of scepticism initially as to whether a report like ours would even be read. The response we have received since has been very encouraging though, which has taught us: 1) the importance of identifying the correct change agents and 2) our capability as students to provide new perspectives and knowledge to others.
- 2 The flow of work, with continuous feedback from our peers, was an entirely new way of working for all of us. We were constantly reminded to think of our intended effects, rather than just moving on with the task at hand. This was perhaps key to us getting the impact we did.
- 3 We were given the advice to use the brand of SSE to gain media attention. We opted out of this as our goal was not to bring attention to ourselves, but to effectively enable change. In hindsight, maybe media coverage would have helped us with this. The lesson we take away is sometimes there are unexpected routes to the effects you are after.

#### Not everyone may like what you do...

"I can now conclude that the Stockholm School of Economics has become a den for the "identity crazed leftist ideological tendencies based on post-modernistic ideologies (A development from Marxism-Leninism). Sure, it is OKAY that you reference, and in some matter propagate for, LO:s ideas about the reform and then provide a negative view over one of the greatest thinkers in the area - Milton Friedman. Something that lies completely in lines with today's leftist ideologies within our higher-education nowadays. I, myself, have worked over 35 years within the Swedish Educational System and I see completely different problematic areas within my profession than simply the educational reform."

#### As long as the right people do

"After 15 years in my profession as a teacher I can, based on my own experiences, confirm the contents of the report. Thank you for a good report - I just hope that my party colleagues will learn from the facts contained within"

"Thank you for an important compilation about a urgent and current matter"

"Always interesting with new takes on well-known issues"

"...I have sent the report to the chairman of "Idéburna skolors riksförbund" (National Association of Idea-driven Schools), Håkan Wiclander"

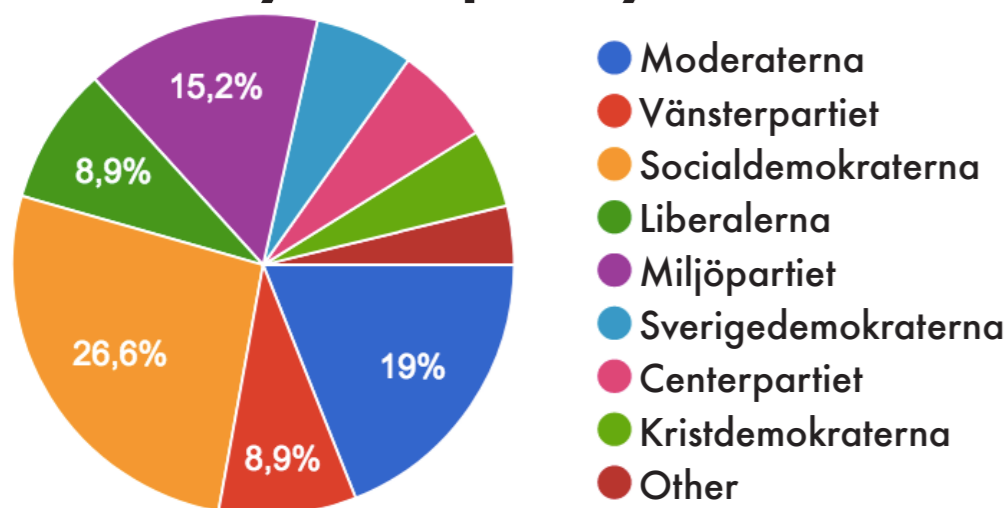
"Great initiative to write the report! It might not change my already critical stance on the matter - but I got more in-depth information about the situation and why it might be problematic"

#### Our comments on the results

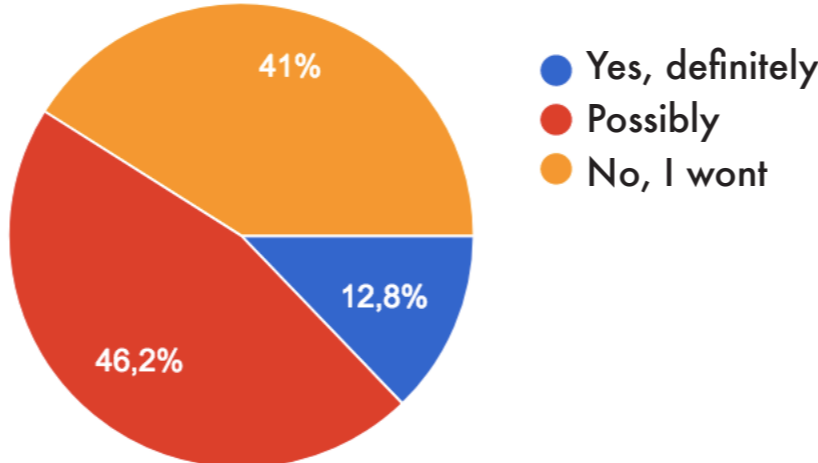
In conjunction with our report, we sent out our survey to the local politicians. We received 78 responses, but that number is sure to increase substantially as the report was sent out only days before this poster was made. The responses are seen to the left, and especially the rate of people who said they would take action, as well as forward the report, is highly encouraging. Some quotes from various local politicians can be seen above, as they had the option to leave comments in the survey. We were pleased to learn that one of the politicians took it upon themselves to forward the report to Håkan Wiclander, chairman of the National Association of Idea-driven Schools. This is the sort of outreach, to key players, which we intended for. Furthermore, we have been invited to "Röda Korsets Folkhögskola" to talk more about our report. This is highly encouraging, as it is a testament to our message being well-received.

## Results

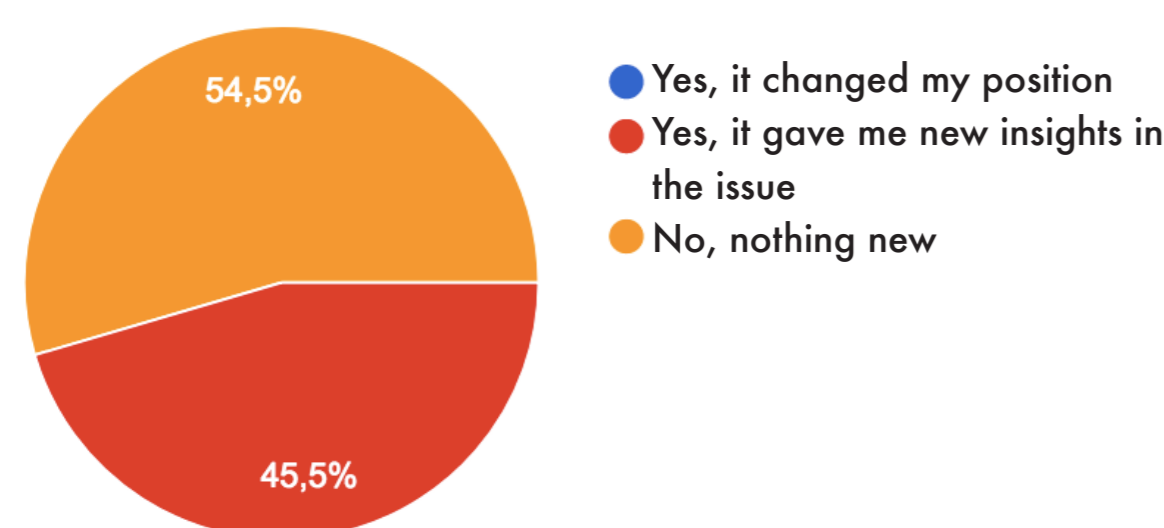
### What is your party affiliation?



### Will you take action after receiving this info?



### Have you learned anything new?



### Will you forward this to anyone?

