

The development of Swedish education during the last decades

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Until the 1950's the Swedish education system was in many ways very similar to other European education systems. Traditionally, Sweden had been influenced by German education. In the period after the Second World War the Swedish government introduced a far reaching reform program that also included education. The purpose was to increase access to education and to create a system with a high degree of equity. Inspiration came from other reform movements in the UK and USA and from the ideas about progressive education. This development continued until the end of 1980's. During that period Sweden was considered as a model by many countries.

Gradually, the Swedish model became controversial. As a part of a critique of the strong state initiatives were taken to provide more freedom of choice. Inspiration came from the new wave of neoliberal policies in the UK and in USA. This had an impact on Swedish education. Radical reforms in Sweden were sometimes referred to models in other countries.

When Swedish results from international studies like PISA are used to analyse the development of education in Sweden it can be noted that there has been decreased achievement and equity. This has created an intense discussion with references to other countries. Finland is often used as an example, but also some of the Asian countries, but there is scepticism about borrowing models from other countries.