

ADULT EDUCATION IN SWEDEN, SOME OBSERVATIONS AND COMMENTS

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ОСВІТА ДОРОСЛИХ У ШВЕЦІЇ, ДЕЯКІ СПОСТЕРЕЖЕННЯ ТА КОМЕНТАРІ

Анотація

Стаття аналізує сучасний стан освіти для дорослих в Швеції та завдання, які суспільство має змогу вирішувати завдяки їй. Автор доходить висновку, що в сучасній Швеції ідея освіти протягом всього життя все ще не стала загальним трендом. Поширеним залишається уявлення про те, доросла людина, яка отримує освіту, або не мала змоги зробити це в свій час, або іммігрувала в країну та отримує професію для інтеграції в суспільство, підвищення кваліфікації співробітників зазвичай відбувається не в закладах освіти, а в межах компаній. Проте існує розвинута система навчальних закладів для надання різних типів освіти дорослим слухачам. В статті розглядаються принципи організації та фінансування освіти дорослих. Автор також наводить статистику, що демонструє, як освіта дорослих сприяє підвищенню їхніх доходів у короткостроковій та довгостроковій перспективі. На думку автора, якщо освіта дорослих розглядатиметься як *“life-long education”* (освіта протягом всього життя), якщо дорослі матимуть змогу отримати другу або третю спеціальність, це сприятиме вирішенню багатьох актуальних проблем, які стоять перед суспільством.

Ключові слова: освіта дорослих, людський капітал, ринок праці, іммігранти.

Annotation

The paper reviews the current state of adult education in Sweden and the goals Swedish society achieve by providing adults with various types of education. The author states that the idea of life-long education does not appear to be strong in the Swedish educational system whereas the idea of “one life – one career” is still dominating. Thus adult education appears to be focused on integrating immigrants and satisfying local labor market needs especially elderly care and childcare. Professional training is very extensive but largely remains within organizations and corporations. The author also states that there is a well-developed network of educational institutions for adults in Sweden providing different types of education ranging from apprenticeships to popular education. The paper gives a review on how adult education is organized, managed, and funded. The statistics showing how getting a second chance education increases an employee’s immediate and long-term income is presented.

According to the author, adult education seen as life-long education as well as opportunities for an adult to change their career and get another profession could provide a solution to many challenges the country is currently facing.

Key words: adult education, human capital, labour market, immigrants.

The Swedish adult education expanded at the end of the 1950’s as a means to have an active labor market policy at the initiative of the Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions, and in order to meet the demands of a rather quick change in the Swedish industrial landscape by exploiting the citizens’ intellectual potential to the full and implementing a more democratic approach to education. (Rubenson, 1994).

The idea of life-long education, where an individual goes in and out of educational organizations, does not appear to be strong in the Swedish educational system. The typical idea is that you do your elementary school, gymnasium and then you go to work, or more frequently, to university, earning a degree and then starting a career with a company, where you get further professional training. Adult education was traditionally organized mainly for those who dropped out of their education path.

Adult education appears to have four different goals: 1) to enable individuals to develop their human capital, 2) to create equality, i.e., to give everyone a chance, and a second chance to get educated, 3) to support the labor market through giving vocational training, and 4) to integrate immigrants in society, mainly through teaching Swedish.

Adult education in Sweden is mainly organized by the government and internally in organizations and corporations, and to a lesser degree by private organizers. Most governmental adult education is organized in municipal adult education (MAE), but to a small degree it exists also at universities, for example supporting professionals, such as medical doctors, and performed as business studies for executives. Adult education is also performed in-house, within organizations and corporations, but does not appear to receive any attention from researchers. Finally, there is also a rather important stream of adult education in Sweden, called *Folkbildning*, i.e., the popular education. It has been part of the social democratic labor movement, and is organized through organizations, with the aim of increasing the educational level of individuals, originally, mainly the workers (Gougoulakis, 2016). These educational efforts are either organized as lectures taking place at organizations, or as meetings at someone's home, termed a study circle.

Governmental adult education is performed at elementary level, gymnasiums, folk high schools, polytechnic schools, universities, art and cultural education, and Swedish language education for immigrants. Mostly

adult education is organized by the municipalities, of which there are 290 in Sweden, as the government on the organizational local level bears responsibility for, among other things, basic education. Typically, they organize elementary level and gymnasium level. The actual teaching is conducted by the municipality or by private firms, including for-profit corporations.

A recent study of Swedish MAE (Muhrman & Andersson, forthcoming) shows that 1) adult education is performed through both municipal and private schools, 2.) it comprises school education, apprenticeships and distance learning, and 3) the education tends to be oriented towards the labor market, from the perspective of the employers' needs and integration of immigrants into Swedish community.

Adult education works towards one goal – to develop the human capital of an individual, mainly through giving a second-chance education. The second-chance education appears to be rather efficient for an individual, i.e., concerning human capital development. The study by Nordlund, Stehlik, & Strandh (2013) devoted to differences between Swedes with low education and those who attended a second chance education in the years 1992-2003 found that those with adult education increased both their immediate and long-term income. Another study done by Stenberg (2010) found that those attending MAE during 1994-96 increased their earnings through attending one year education, specifically, males increased their earnings by 6% and females – by 4,5%. I have not found any study through my very restricted literature search that has studied the performance of adult education in the pursuit of other education goals, such as equality, labor market flexibility and integration.

The adult education organized by the government is free of charge for the students, in the sense that the student has no tuition fees to pay. Instead, it is the government that pays for the education. A student can receive, within some limits, loans and grants from the government, with the condition that the loans have to be repaid during their working life according to their capacity to pay.

Some, typically, unemployed, also had the opportunity to get one year of financing, constating of 80% of the previous wage. Thus, there are hardly any strong financial limitations for an individual to be engaged in this kind of adult education.

Municipal adult education is a rather extensive activity, with about 7% (400.000) of the adult population in the age of 20-64 engaged in one or more courses. Of these, 137.000 studied Swedish, i.e., 35% of the students were clearly immigrants, probably from the most recent inflow caused by the refugee situation of 2015 and beyond. Thus, adult education appears to be focused on integrating immigrants and satisfying local labor market needs especially elderly care and childcare.

The execution of adult education organized through the government has been privatized with high speed, with 15% performed by private firms in 1997, and 50% – 2021 (Muhрман & Andersson, forthcoming). Most private firms are for-profit companies. The municipality is, however, responsible for the quality assurance of the education.

The double marketization, with private companies and local labor market demand, appears to create some tensions among the teaching staff and their professional values, where values of education standards and job security for teachers are downplayed. For example, Muhрман & Andersson (forthcoming, p.16) writes: “The strong focus of local MAE on the labour market and integration seems to be in opposition to the policy concerning individual needs as a starting point and the aim of personal development.” The municipalities, with their responsibility for quality assurance, also experience quality problems among the educational organizations (Andersson & Muhрман, forthcoming).

I have not found studies showing the extent of other types of adult education, such as in-house education, i.e., performed inside organizations and corporations, or the extent of adult education performed at universities.

Therefore, I cannot describe the extent of adult education and how it is divided between governmental and private initiative.

My personal impression is that life-long education with emphasis on continuous education within a single career is not emphasized in the educational system but is probably most performed within organizations and corporations. Additionally, life-long education in the sense of changing the individual's career path through gaining a second and different advanced education doesn't appear to be common. It could, however, happen in the MAE vocational training. But the main impression is that Sweden is still occupied by the idea of "one individual –one career".

The initial stress on equality appears to have diminished as a driver of adult education (Rubenson, 1994), which could be a consequence of the ideological drift of Sweden from social democratic values to liberal values.

Another possible explanation to the drift noticeable in Sweden in the recent years from the idea of equality to labor market needs and integration is the refugee crisis the country has experienced since 2015.

Due to the refugee crisis and the inflow of immigrants lacking Swedish language skills and many being uneducated, not knowing even the alphabets, adult education provided by the government has been focused on integration and, to a certain extent, labor market needs, and to much lesser degree on equality and developing human capital. According to my knowledge, no initiative has been taken to enlarge adult education. Maybe because Sweden is still stuck in the idea that an individual is supposed to have one career during their lifetime, where the individual gains experience and makes educational efforts within the organization where the individual works. However, with a more flexible labor market and values of flexibility, there could be a development towards more of lifetime learning that can be performed outside the organization, for example, at schools and universities. But the idea of one lifetime career could also be replaced by the idea that an individual should or

could change their career over the life course, thus promoting, not lifelong learning but a second career learning. However, due to the ongoing consequences of the refugee crisis in Sweden, that presently consumes so many resources, attention and societal energy, it is not likely that such forward looking development will occur in the nearest future.

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