



# Lobbyism in Swedish school and education.

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Anna Jobér, Jakob Billmayer, Magnus Erlandsson,  
Margareta Serder, Malmö University, Sweden



## Opening the door to lobbying

Magnusson, 2018:

Public actors in Sweden have cooperated with private actors outside the formal public governmental structure for a long time and in various forms.

Between 2011 - 2015 SNAE and its activities were e.g. built on external and internal networks, the authority was formed with unclear boundaries and strongly influenced by external stakeholders.



SNAE: "We have also met with researchers, interest groups, trade unions, industry representatives and other authorities. Through these collaborations and consultations, we have broadened and deepened our image of how the syllabuses work in practice, discussed proposals for guidelines for a future revision and obtained views on syllabuses drafts."





A recent example of close collaboration between public and private companies or organised private companies:

#skolDigiplan

A year-long collaboration on digitalisation.

Concerns one of the major changes in curricula and practices in the schooling system in recent years.

Driven by and established through an extensive collaboration between private and public actors.

## Stepping into the lobby

- widespread practice across the globe (Althaus, 2007; Garsten & Sörbom, 2017)
- in US or EU, lobbying is a legally protected and regulated form of representation and dialogue between political actors and interest groups (Nothhaft, 2017).
- research often from political science perspective (e.g. Boräng & Naurin, 2016; 2022; Strömbäck, 2011).

Researchers (e.g. Nothhaft, 2017) generally agree that it involves legal attempts to influence decision-makers to exploit, “(...) or change or prevent changes to legislation (...) or system of rules” (SOU 1998:146, p. 75).



Behind the door.

What are private actors saying in the Education Inc interviews?

“We had in our business plan that we would really lobby and drive this change processes. And we have done that, in our own way, by influencing a lot of people around us, in some form. [. . .] It’s principals, school people, politicians, whatever that may be. Then we could have done it even more from my perspective. There have been a bunch of politicians that we have really influenced. A little high and low and a little different levels. And lots of wine . . . We did what we could. But if we had unlimited resources, I would have hired two people who did just that [lobbying].” (Martin, founder and former CEO of company A) (Jobér, 2023)





“. . what we did before, especially via the IT companies, we did a lot of lobbying and attended Fridolin [former Ministry of Education] to get . . . Especially in this era and this industry we are in now, where so much is happening, we know more than the school knows. And I would say that I think it is a result of the lobbying that we got two sentences [into the text] actually. (Oscar, Head of school affairs, Company B)

One see it as ordinary everyday work: "Yes, but oh my God. And there is no difference from anything else. It is more like the word has some kind of special meaning maybe, otherwise it is very much everyday work" (Christina & Hugo, Organization B). (Jobér, 2023)



One acknowledges the controversiality:

” . . a referral organization, because we are an organization, not an individual company . . . . And that’s what appeals to me there, to be an official part in this debate. We do not have to lobby in the same way, but we are housetrained in these matters . . . . ”  
(Oscar, Head of school affairs, Company B)

In Oscar’s way of speaking, there is a nuance to his words – housetrained (Swedish: rumsrent, literally meaning clean room), thus showing that lobbying is seen as something politically incorrect even though it is asked for and something desirable from the governmental point of view. (Jobér, 2023)







## Walking in the lobby

Pilot study:

Questionnaire, March – May, 2023

A digital anonymous survey regarding lobbying in the education sector was distributed among 18 significant actors (governmental bodies, companies, trade unions, and organizations)

54 responses were received, exceeding expectations.

Note: Very hard to reach the largest actors (Google or Microsoft). There are no emailadresser, no contacts, Only FAQ or community-pages. Also tried to reach them through Allabolag.se. I.e. the largest actors can't be reached. All other actors we have contacted have answered in some way.



## Results:

A lot of long answers in the open-ended questions.  
Frustration, anger, ambiguity

50 % of lobbying happens on a national level (in contrast to international: local level)

Of those who used lobbying, it has foremost concerned steering document.

Conferences (fairs) common places for lobbying.

Lobbying often relates to commercialisation in some way.

Thinking that it can be as positive as it can be negative.

Has grown into an industry, with great risks of corruption.

Something that should be better controlled. For example, that politicians/high-ranking officials should not be able to drop out of lobbying without a grace period and that it should be clear which senders are involved.

A way for groups in society to raise their heart issues.

An opportunity to present thoughts, information, opinions. Unfortunately with own financial interests in many cases - then it will be bad.

An opportunity for special interests to make money from the common.

Dangerous to society

Legal corruption

Exploitation and opportunism

Devastating for Swedish schools

As a way of influencing the democratic process in a way that the ordinary voter cannot.

To shine a light on an important issue or a way of spreading fake news - the divisiveness again

The biggest reason why I don't want to live in Sweden right now is that I don't want to work in a Swedish school.

Get rid of it as quickly as possible. It is a cancer that will segregate and eat the school.

A way to bypass democracy

I am a bit divided but I work with and for people with intellectual disabilities. An opportunity for certain groups to make themselves heard. A big risk, however, is that money and contacts come before knowledge.

An opportunity for certain groups to make themselves heard. A big risk, however, is that money and contacts come before knowledge. Here, lobbying needs to be strong to bring about change. At the same time, when strong groups have strong lobby votes, it is more doubtful.



## Moving further, opening more doors: Literature review (to be submitted)

A systematic review was conducted (Hart, 2018; Eriksson Barajas, et al 2013).

Three searches were conducted in December, 2023 using Eric via Ebsco host.

Word used in different search strings: lobbying, education, school, policy, “interest groups”, “interest-based”, “public relations”, political, process, “policymakers”, influence, “decision-making”  
NOT: higher education, adults.

Time span: 2013-2023

Peer-reviewed

Full paper

Different results, some overlappings, after double checking and comparison: 42 articles chosen for further analysis.



The analysis is ongoing.

The first analysis show that the research comes from the Global north.



Länder som finns representerade är:

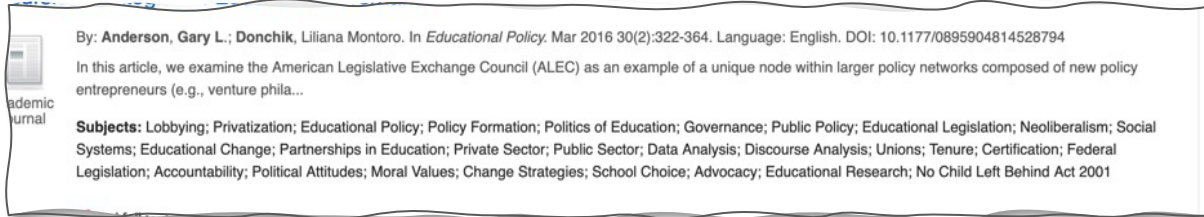
UK:	3
USA:	11
Europe:	1
South Africa:	3
Canada:	1
Belgium:	1
Australia:	3
China:	1
Jordan:	1
Finland:	1
Frankrike	
Indonesien:	1
Japan:	1
Slovenien:	1
South America:	1
Taiwan:	1
Turkiet:	1

Färdig att måna på ena sidan är just politisk, politisk, lebb

None of the authors "returns", no prominent figure or strong research group.



Subject words were gathered, alphabetically organised, read through and clustered.



A number of themes emerged showing some topics/issues more common.

In contrast to the Swedish research (very few though!), international studies tend to centre around vulnerable groups and the efforts of interest groups to empower them.

Topics such as social justice, civil rights, activism, and minority groups are frequently explored, as are those related to literacy and reading skills.









## Conclusions

Sweden expects and requires the participation of interest groups, companies, and actors in decision-making, political processes, etc.

Sweden has a unique system with a well-developed welfare state, a system that also opens for profit on welfare means.

This implies interest groups, companies, etc. can influence processes that create profits or benefits for themselves. Demonstrated by e.g. the Education Inc. project.

It can be positive to have a large possibility of influence; this perspective can be seen in the international field, as shown in the research literature review.

It can be problematic if certain groups gain advantages and power, as shown in Swedish research (Jobér, 2023; Serder 2023) and in the pilot study.

Overall, a significant lack of systematic and fundamental research on lobbying regarding education.

A general lack of knowledge regarding the phenomenon lobbying itself.



## Understanding lobbying and the activities going on

A larger project is about to be launch to explore the defining characteristics of lobbying within the Swedish compulsory school system.

Main questions:

How do key actors in the Swedish school system define and describe lobbying?

Who is involved in activities that key actors define and describe as lobbying?

Where, when, and how does lobbying occur and with what content and purpose?

Niklas Luhmann's system theory, focusing on his perspective on communication

Interviews

Document analysis





# Thank you for listening!

Contact:

[anna.jobber@mau.se](mailto:anna.jobber@mau.se)



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