

Article

Exploring civics in early 20th century Sweden: A study of final exam questions at four teacher training colleges between 1915 and 1937

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Keywords: civics, teacher education, Sweden, modernity

Highlights:

- Modern society is reflected in exam questions at Swedish teacher training colleges from 1914 to 1937.
- Despite not being part of the curricula, civics appear in final exams at four Swedish teacher education institutions.
- Some topics evolved, from hygiene-related questions in the 1920s to racial biology in the 1930s.
- 182 out of 924 exam questions can be classified as civics-related in Sweden today.

Purpose: This article's purpose is to examine the manifestations of the evolving modern society and what we now identify as civics or other contemporary social issues in the final examination questions from 1914 to 1937 at four teacher education institutions in Uppsala, Falun, Lund, and Landskrona.

Design/methodology/approach: The method can be described as a qualitative text analysis, primarily of examination questions. This analysis aims to gain insights into the examination questions' meaning and understand which concepts of knowledge, subject ideals, and contemporary inspiration emerge in the material.

Findings: The results are that 182 exam questions from a pool of 924 questions could be interpreted as civics in Sweden today. Most are questions about economics. Another finding is that citizenship education questions increase and evolve over time. Until 1921, there were nurture-related questions regarding physical education, technology, and organisation. In the 1920s, the focus of exam questions corresponding to civics shifted to themes of thriftiness, sobriety, and hygiene. In the 1930s, while thriftiness and hygiene continued, several questions related to racial biology also emerged during that decade.

Practical implications: Our results indicate that topics that we consider to belong to civics today existed long before the subject of civics was outlined in the curriculum plans.

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Suggested citation:

Andersson Hult, Lars, & Persson, Anders (2025). Exploring civics in early 20th century Sweden: A study of final exam questions at four teacher training colleges between 1915 and 1937. *Journal of Social Science Education*, 24(1).
<https://doi.org/10.11576/jsse-7454>

Declaration of conflicts of interests: No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

 Open access



1 INTRODUCTION

The history of social studies or civics in Sweden is a convincing and strong narrative based on curricula and textbook studies. The subject was first formalised in 1928 within secondary schools and was only introduced in the Swedish compulsory school in the 1960s (Tham, 1948).¹ Almost all research on civics and its history focuses on the period after the Second World War, the construction of the welfare state, and the subsequent introduction of the subject as compulsory in primary school. However, research indicates a prior societal need to complement the subject of history with a modernised and contemporary democratic dimension. Later, this evolved into the subject of social studies or civics (compare with Andersson Hult, 2021, 2023; Broman, 2009; Englund, 1986; Larsson & Ledman, 2023; M. Persson, 2018; Zander, 1997, 2001; Åström Elmersjö, 2021).

Already in 1965, Bromsjö problematised the narrative history of civics, tracing the origins of early civics back to the mid-17th century. This era matches the development of Sweden's modern administrative structures. Reviewing Hall's (1921) presentation of 19th-century secondary school plans, political science "*statskunskap*" is frequently mentioned. Although our study does not analyse curricula plans, we can ascertain that traces of the civics subject are evident even within the official educational frameworks. Here, we will examine how contemporary or social issues, or issues reminiscent of today's civics, were formed and formulated in a previously unexamined arena, namely in teacher training colleges and their final exams during the early 20th century.² The reason that we choose teacher education is based on the belief that, in a teacher training program, there can be more scope for modern and new ideas about subject knowledge as well as pedagogical skills (Bejerot & Hasselbladh, 2020; Eskilsson, 1996).

This study focuses on the years 1915–1937, which is around 30 to 60 years before civics were written to the curriculum in the Swedish compulsory school. The reason for selecting 1915 to 1937 is that teacher education reforms were introduced in 1915 and replaced by new reforms in 1938. The report of the commission and the new curriculum for the teacher training colleges that was introduced in 1915 were retrospectively described as an abandonment of the older education's clear focus on learning through memorising, religious upbringing, and methodology as a technique (Linné, 1996). The premise of the study is that contemporary or social issues, or issues reminiscent of today's civics, emerged in a societal context when Sweden was gradually modernised. The traditional pre-modern society was on its way to being replaced by new ideals and political solutions (Andersson Hult, 2024). In this turbulent time, between the traditional society and a more modern society, the school became a political issue, and there was an intense political debate about the role of education (Linné, 1996). The task of the school, with the assistance of the teacher, was to

¹ The Swedish subject "*samhällskunskap*" is not easily translated into an English-speaking context. Åström Elmersjö (2021) refers to the Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket), which states that "social studies" is the preferred translation for the subject in upper secondary schools, while "civics" is the preferred translation for the subject in compulsory schools. "Social sciences" is an umbrella term encompassing various disciplines within university-level research and academia. "Social sciences education" could be an appropriate definition when examining teacher education. Compare this with Sandahl et al. (2022), who use the term "Social science education". However, during our study period, teacher education was outside the university sphere. We will follow Eklund and Larsson (2009) in using the term "civics" in their historical analysis of teacher education in civics. According to the same authors, civics encompasses perspectives from social sciences such as sociology, political science, some geography, economics, and law, with a particular focus on issues of democracy and citizenship, while also incorporating historical perspectives. Consequently, civics in Sweden is broader than in many other national contexts.

² The Swedish name is "*folkskoleseminarier*", which could be translated as "elementary school seminars" or "primary school seminars" but in this article, it will instead be translated as teacher training colleges (Paksuniemi, 2013).

emancipate the student, reflecting the universalistic national modernist civic ambition (Andersson Hult, 2021). The significance of this connection with an increasingly modernised Sweden also makes the understanding of time important in the ambition to understand how the civics subject took shape before it was written into the curriculum (M. Persson, 2018). Swedish History professor Klas-Göran Karlsson (2004) traces the origins of civics in Sweden back to American educators like Dewey (1917), linking it to the Swedish welfare society and modernity. Thomas Englund (1986) engages in a similar discussion while analysing civic and political education from the late 19th century to 1982. Englund and Karlsson highlight a shift towards democratic values in post-World War II, showing earlier forms of democratic upbringing within history education. Therefore, ideas about a modernised history subject, or perhaps a new subject like civics, existed long before this was implemented in the curriculum in Sweden.

In Sweden today, the school subject of social studies or civics differs from many others in that it is not represented as a cohesive subject at the university level; instead, it consists of several university subjects (M. Persson, 2018). The subject stands on two pillars: one involves the reproduction of knowledge from university subjects, while the other aims at shaping or influencing informed students with citizenship education competence (Olson, 2020; Sandahl, 2014). In this article, the term “citizenship education” is used to describe the preparation for life in society. This concept contains attitudes, experiences, knowledge, abilities, and skills that teachers’ students require to be an active member of society and to how to act as a teacher in a democratic society. The concept also includes how the teacher students should act as teachers in a democratic society. This citizenship education aimed to support the teacher students in how they should influence their pupils. Sometimes, this type of education, as well as the exam questions, would border on other subjects.

To summarise, our understanding of how civics was practised in the early 1900s in Sweden is limited. While some researchers have studied its development in the political arena, few have focused on its implementation in teacher education. As a result, we know relatively little about the practical development of civics before it was included in the curricula. A hypothesis is that expressions of the subject of civics can be found in the exam questions.

The purpose of this study is to explore manifestations of the evolving modern society and what we now identify as civics or other contemporary or social issues in the final examination questions from 1914 to 1937 in four teacher education institutions in Uppsala, Falun, Lund, and Landskrona.

The purpose is concretised with the following two research questions.

1. Are there questions that are reminiscent of civics, with its various functions, expressed in the final examinations between 1915 and 1937?
2. Are the questions reminiscent of citizenship education, and how do the expressions in these questions change between 1915 and 1937 when society was becoming more modernised?

1.1 Historical context

In Émile Durkheim’s (1961/2002) *Moral Education (L’éducation morale)*, based on early 20th-century Sorbonne lectures delivered, among others, to teacher students, it is argued that education’s primary role is to transmit societal values, norms, and morality, fostering social cohesion. For instance, in a more traditional society, education is shaped by religious values, whereas education becomes increasingly secularised in a more modern society. Traditionally, religious values were central when teacher training colleges were founded in Sweden in 1842. A key requirement for admission to primary teacher education in mid-nineteenth century Sweden was memorising Luther’s Small Catechism and having a reasonable knowledge of biblical history. Other requirements

for applicants were the ability to read, write, and do the four arithmetic operations, but there were no requirements for knowledge of geography or history (Folkundervisningskommittén, 1912). Initially, only men could train as teachers, but new regulations in 1853 and 1858 opened opportunities for women (Florin, 1987).

This study focuses on primary teacher education in the early 20th century. A significant role in the modern project was assigned to the primary school teacher, whose professionalisation was to be achieved through education (Evertsson, 2012). A new generation of critically engaged teachers, influenced by a civic ideal, began to populate primary schools and teacher training colleges (Linné, 1996). Two former primary school teachers, Emil Hammarlund and Fridtjuv Berg, became involved in Liberal education politics, with Berg serving as Minister of Education from 1905–1906 and 1911–1914. A third example is the Social Democratic Minister of Education (1917–1919) Värner Rydén, who was also a primary school teacher. Rydén (1923) additionally published a textbook on citizenship.

A Committee for Compulsory Education, “Folk Education Committee”, was entrusted with the task of preparing a new primary teacher education reform. The reformation of primary school teachers’ education preceded the modernisation of schools where teacher students were expected to work. In the autumn of 1914, Berg, the Minister of Education, implemented the new regulations for teacher training colleges. The 1914 regulations for teacher training colleges were described as ambitious by both critics and advocates (A. Persson & Andersson Hult, 2024). The introduction of new directives aligned with concurrent initiatives, such as substantial investments in modern facilities like libraries, school gardens, and laboratories for teacher training colleges. Swiftly, the colleges welcomed a new cohort of educated leaders and educators. They collaborated under the new regulations until the next seminar reform in 1938.

2 PREVIOUS RESEARCH

At a broad level, this article touches upon two different research areas: the research on the history and origins of the Swedish subject of civics and the research on the practice of Swedish teacher education in the early 20th century. Regarding the latter, it has already been noted in other contexts that most studies on the history of Swedish teacher education have primarily focused on political policy documents and the issue of educational governance (L. Bronäs, 2009; Ekwall, 1987; Enlund, 1993; Eskilsson, 1996; Hallsén, 2013; Morberg, 1999; H. Persson, 2018; Skog-Östlin, 1984; Tegborg, 1969). As with much of the historical research on education in general, it could be argued in this context that the narrative of the history of teacher education also warrants the term “the black box of schooling” (cf. Cuban, 1993; Depaepe, 2000; Westberg, 2017). However, in a few cases, the focus has been on the practical implementation of activities, such as the study of exam questions. This has predominantly been done concerning broader educational issues rather than individual school subjects (Linné, 1996, 2010; Lundahl, 2005; A. Persson & Andersson Hult, 2024).

Research on the history and origins of civics explores how the subject is organised on the international stage in diverse ways (Löfström & Grammes, 2020). Regarding research on the emergence and development of civics as a school subject in the Swedish education system, it has almost exclusively been based on source material originating from the political formulation arena. In most cases, the studies have also focused on the period after World War II. For instance, Nicklasson (1983), Jarlén (2008), Grahn (2016), M. Persson (2018), and Öberg (2019) have, in slightly different ways, mapped the political dynamics that preceded the establishment of civics as a separate school subject in modern Swedish education. Sandahl (2015) and others highlight that the establishment

of the subject was closely linked to the modernisation of the Swedish school system, particularly during the 1960s and 70s, when it began to replace the traditional role of history.

In other cases, curriculum content has been analysed. For example, Sandin (2015) studied how societal descriptions evolved in the curricula of civics in Swedish post-war compulsory school. There are some differences in descriptions of the subject's content. While M. Persson (2018) emphasises the early student-engaging aims of the subject, Bjessmo (1997) claims that teaching was primarily dominated by fixed factual knowledge. M. Persson also describes how social and moral goals took precedence over scientific aspects, whereas Grahn (2015) highlights the aspect that the subject was shaped by a clearly modern, rationality-driven, and scientific ideal during the 1960s.

In several cases, descriptions of the development have also led to critical assessments of contemporary civics. For example, Bronäs and Selander (2002) argue that the subject initially aimed to explain the structure of society, then emphasised viewing societal issues from multiple perspectives, and eventually became a loosely connected collage of fragments in the 2000s. Åström Elmersjö (2021) examined changes in the goals for the subject in upper secondary school from 1970 to 2000, noting a shift from a focus on collective responsibility towards individualisation. Supported by textbook analyses, Larsson and Ledman (2023) illustrated how post-war civics transitioned over time from emphasising democracy and collective responsibility to prioritising individual interests and political content. Analysing textbooks from 1923, 1964, and 2012, they noted a shift from democratic form and political structure to a focus on content and a renewed perspective on changeability in the future.

This article also analyses how exam questions reminiscent of civics have changed, which has also been highlighted by other studies. Olson (2008) and Andersson Hult (2023) argue that citizenship education or issues reminiscent of today's civics existed in the 1930s but were not realised in the curriculum. It was formalised in the 1940s–1950s with a focus on change and cooperation, later shifting to growth and adaptation in the 1960s and to insight and democracy in the 1970s. Englund's (1986) classic study on civics and citizenship education in Swedish schools from 1880 to 1980 is extended through Olson's work. Olson highlights how market views transformed citizenship education in the late 20th century. Gustavsson (2014) argues that the subject of civics has outlived its usefulness in our late modern society. Samuelsson (2014) suggests that the organisation of Swedish civics from 1980 to 2014 into blocks reflects a blend of progressive, disciplinary, and postmodern perspectives. Apart from identifying exam questions that are reminiscent of civics, we will also discuss whether changes occur in questions like these in this article.

A key question for this study is how interwar civics or citizenship education is described in previous research. Nicklasson (1983) challenges the idea that early citizenship education was mainly based on political science, showing it was much broader, including economic, labour market, tax, family issues, and practical matters. A. Bronäs and Selander (2002) and Larsson and Ledman (2023) stress that civics of the 1920s and 1930s must be seen in the context of universal suffrage and political socialisation. Larsson and Ledman note that earlier primary schools did not focus on contemporary social issues, and in line with Bromsjö (1965), they link the demand for civics to universal suffrage. L. Bronäs (2009) observes that the shift in citizenship concepts from obedience to responsibility shaped interwar civic education in Sweden. Sandin (2015) argues that civics originated from the tension between legitimising and criticising the social order. Regarding the question of what motivates the inclusion of civics in Swedish schools, Åström Elmersjö (2021) distinguishes between the political motivations of early 20th-century citizenship education and post-war civics.

Overall, it can be stated that research on the Swedish school subject of civics or social studies and the history of teacher education has primarily been based on a political policy level. Additionally, there is only one context in previous research where these two areas have been combined, and that focuses on the post-war period (cf. Eklund & Larsson, 2009).

3 THEORY: MODERNITY AND CIVICS

The school, with an embryonic form of a civics subject connected with an increasingly modernised Swedish society, constitutes a central theme of this article. The results of this shift towards modernity include industrialisation, specialisation, rationalisation, secularisation, bureaucratisation and centralisation of society (Andersson Hult, 2024; Bauman, 1994, 1997, 1998; Giddens, 1996).

The Educational philosopher Gert Biesta (2006) discusses the role of education in modern society, asserting that the school's inherent role in modern society is to liberate children from their individual backgrounds. This is achieved by connecting them with a general and rational starting point. With this increased and liberating knowledge about society, the intention was to bring about societal change in the future (Englund, 1986).

This forward-looking modernist perspective came to extend the subject of civics. With its rationality, future optimism, pursuit of peace and its conceptual models, it could emancipate individuals and build new citizens (Andersson Hult, 2021; Karlsson, 2004; Tisdall, 2020; Zander, 1997, 2001). In addition to providing knowledge about society, there was also a fostering idea and other tasks for the school (Durkheim, 1961/2002). One task involved implementing modern educational methods, including pedagogical innovations, to adapt to and meet the new requirements arising from an increasingly modernised and industrialised society (A. Persson & Andersson Hult, 2024). Another task was to produce citizens who were well-equipped to understand and navigate the contemporary world (Durkheim, 1961/2002). This role extended beyond merely conveying traditional knowledge about society; it also involved active participation in modernising society, in line with the perspective of modernity, which was characteristic of the contemporary developmental pattern (Dewey, 1917; Højeberg, 2016). The uncertain future is, in the more modern society, entrusted to humanity, shaped by a harmonious blend of science, technological advancements, and a more pragmatic focus on utility. As discussed by Hammarberg in 2009, the presence of religious teachings in primary school, at least in theory, had to make way for such subjects as medical science. The educational mission of the school was to prepare students for active participation in democracy by providing practical, relevant and useful knowledge (Alm, 2002). Therefore, there were also considerations regarding political engagement, hygiene, and eugenics (Broberg, 1995; Hammarberg, 2009).

Civics were absent from the curriculum during the early 20th. However, the thesis of this article is that the modernised society of the early 1900s influenced schools and teacher education. The presence of civics can perhaps be observed in practical aspects such as examination questions. Bauman (1994) was not a clear critic of modernity, but he argued about the downside of the modernised society, namely an increased bureaucratisation with a culture of obedience. Based on Bauman's argument, the designers of examinations were not tasked with creating questions about civics; rather, as good bureaucrats, they were to follow the educational plans, which did not include civics.

This culture of obedience among bureaucrats is contradicted by others, such as Lipsky (1980), Lundquist (1998), and Rothstein (2001). They argue that the ideal bureaucrat also has – and had – room for autonomy and negotiation. In this context, the teacher educator who constructed exam questions had scope for action without extensive oversight from superiors (Lipsky, 1980). Goodlad (1993) develops this further, theorising that educational systems are shaped through negotiation at

various levels – a discussion that is general over time. The formal curriculum reflects compromises and societal values, with continuous interpretation and negotiation occurring between state policymakers. In teacher training colleges, an autonomous space is carved out where state intentions for subjects are interpreted and put into practice (Goodlad, 1993; A. Persson & Andersson Hult, 2024). The implementation of political policies is essentially a local negotiation between teacher educators and aspiring teachers. According to Goodlad's reasoning, various teacher education programs provide space for autonomy where the state's intentions regarding the functions of subjects are interpreted and operationalised into actual teaching.

4 SELECTIONS OF MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

The first selection step focuses on the period 1915–1937, based on teacher education reforms introduced in 1915 and replaced in 1938. In the second selection step, four teacher training colleges were examined: two for men (Uppsala and Lund) and two for women (Falun and Landskrona). Uppsala and Lund were in episcopal cities, while Landskrona and Falun were not, which was uncommon as these colleges were typically founded in episcopal cities.

The 1914 Commission report reveals social differences among the teacher training colleges. Landskrona and Uppsala had more students whose parents were elementary school teachers, clerics, and organists. Landskrona had a higher percentage of students whose parents were civil servants, while Uppsala and Lund had more students with agricultural backgrounds than Landskrona and Falun. Falun had a higher percentage of students with agricultural backgrounds compared to other female colleges (Folkundervisningskommittén, 1912). In 1914, teacher training was significantly modernised, and examination regulations were revised to include four parts: an oral exam, a practical teaching test, a Swedish essay, and an educational essay. In the new regulations, it was stipulated that these four examination tests were to be conducted “towards the end of the spring term” on the dates determined by the Board of Public Schools, based on the principal's proposal (SFS 1914:133, §59, p. 405). The written examinations consisted of a so-called Swedish essay and a pedagogical essay. In both cases, the principal, in consultation with the teachers, proposed several (usually ten) essay topics from which students could choose. The essay tests took place in a supervised examination hall, and the seminarians were given six hours to complete each essay. While the Swedish essay was expected to be written without any aids, seminar textbooks could be used as support when working on the pedagogical essay (§60). The essays were assessed by at least two teachers appointed by the faculty. If the assessing teachers disagreed on the grade, the principal or a third teacher made the final assessment. Grades and evaluations were then registered in a centrally produced form according to specific instructions (SFS 1914:133, §60, §64–65, pp. 405–406). These guidelines remained until the new statute in 1936/37.

In the third stage of the selection, we chose to focus this study on the essay questions in Swedish from the years 1915 to 1937. A. Persson and Andersson Hult (2024) had the centre of their attention on the pedagogical essays. The material is in the archives in Lund and Uppsala and in the Landskrona annual report (Folkskoleseminariet i Landskrona, 1915–1933). The material from the four elementary school teacher training colleges consists of 924 questions on the subject of Swedish. Most of the questions cover literary history, history, knowledge of Christianity, pedagogy, psychology, natural science, or geographical topics, as well as subjects such as gardening and music. The table below shows the themes that were relevant for the year 1918, on April 29, in the subject of Swedish teacher education in Landskrona. Among the various themes, the student could choose one.

Table 1. Exam questions on the subject of Swedish in Landskrona 1918

Exam questions	Subject	Civics academic focus or citizenship education focus
1. A longer quote by Esaias Tegnér	History of literature	
2. Data Our Christian baptism and its significance.	Knowledge of Christianity	
3. Laestadius and Laestadianism	Knowledge of Christianity	
4. Sweden's internal development during the reign of Karl XV.	History	
5. The Representation Question in 19th-century England.	History	
6. Electricity in household services.	Civics	Current societal issues
7. Karl Marx's economic views.	Civics	Economy
8. State measures for the benefit of manual labourers.	Civics	Economy/ Political Science
9. What I had hoped to gain and what I feel I have gained from my seminar years.	Pedagogy	

In 1918, exam question one was categorised as literature. Exam questions two and three focused on Christianity. Exam questions four and five were related to the subject of history. An observation can be made that the historical questions focus on governance, leaning towards political science or political history. The questions are categorised as historical, even though, for instance, the question of The Representation Question in 19th-century England lies on the borderline with civics. Exam questions six, seven, and eight were categorised as civics. Exam question six could potentially be categorized under the natural sciences, but ultimately, the societal consequences of electrification were considered, leading to the categorisation of the question as belonging to civics. Exam question nine focused more on pedagogy, although it could be seen as related to civics. It addresses the future role of prospective teachers and what they should impart in terms of citizenship. We decided to categorise it under pedagogical considerations.

The questions at the centre of this study are those reminiscent of today's civics in Sweden, thus encompassing inquiries related to society, contemporary issues, the civic education role of the subject, and the role of an elementary school teacher. Today's civics in Sweden comprises various scientific disciplines, including economics, sociology, political science, to some extent geography, and history (Bjessmo, 1992; Bromsjö, 1965; Vernersson, 1999; Eklund & Larsson, 2009; M. Persson, 2018; Sandahl, 2015;). Civics are also a subject of current relevance. However, its most important task is civics education, having a citizen education function. We have grouped the civics questions into categories such as economics, political science, social geography, current societal issues, and citizenship education questions; a division supported by Bromsjö, Vernersson and Bjessmo.

We have classified the exam question from 1918, "Electricity in household services", as a civics question in the category of current societal issues. The exam questions about Karl Marx we have categorised in economics. The exam question about measures for the benefit of manual labourers was interpreted as a political science question. In 1917, a question about "The Swedish Council of Ministers" was presented in Uppsala; it is clearly in political science. In the table from Landskrona,

there are no questions related to social geography, but in 1918 in Falun, there was a question that we categorised under social geography: “Our forests and their care.” The exam questions that were challenging to categorise were citizenship-forming questions. Sometimes, this type of “citizenship education” is close to other subjects. An example of this can be found in Lund in 1918: “How can an elementary school teacher outside of school contribute to raising public education?” During our categorisation work, we discovered that many questions are about citizenship education but are not strictly civics. The question from Lund could be categorised in pedagogy with a citizenship education expression. Another example is from Uppsala in 1933: “The significance of hereditary research for humans”. This question balances between leaning towards natural science or toward civics. These two examples will not be presented in a summary of the number of civics questions; however, they will be discussed in the analysis as an expression of modern society. Thirty questions were counted out. However, 34 citizenship education questions were included that were more focused on civics, such as a question from Falun in 1928: “Some comments on the temperance work in our country”.

The method can be described as a qualitative text analysis, the main material being examination questions. The purposes of this analysis are to gain insights into the meaning of the examination questions and to understand which concepts of knowledge, subject ideals, and contemporary inspiration emerge in the material. It is important to note that qualitative text analysis is subjective, and interpretations of the text may vary among different researchers. We have each read the questions several times and then discussed issues that lie on the borderline. As readers, we bring a pre-understanding and follow a research tradition. We are also influenced by our position in societal structures and our life-world, which affects our assumptions in reading and selection (Gadamer, 1994). To demonstrate various orientations and perspectives on examination issues in civics, several questions will be presented while maintaining transparency in the analysis (Andersson Hult, 2023; Danielsson Malmros, 2012; H. Persson, 2018). Finally, this study encountered no research ethics issues, as the materials in the archives were publicly available, and the questions could not be traced back to the individuals who constructed them.

5 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section covers the entire period in the results. The results are divided into three time periods to identify potential differences over time. The first was 1915–1921, when Sweden moved towards democracy, followed by 1922–1929, characterised by the young democracy, and finally, in 1930–1937, the concept of the welfare state, “*folkhemmet*”, took shape.

5.1 The entire period 1915–1937

Table 2. Questions following themes in the four teacher training colleges

Themes	Uppsala	Lund	Landskrona	Falun	ALL
Economics	25	13	18	14	70
Social geography	6	5	3	7	21
Political science	4	8	12	3	27
Current societal issues	7	7	10	6	30
Citizenship education	11	6	6	11	34
Total:	53	39	49	41	182

Above, the categorisation of the questions into themes is presented. The 30 exam questions, citizenship education questions, which border on other subjects, are not listed in the table. Throughout the entire investigation period, a significant portion of the exam questions have centred around economics. Over the entire period, 38 per cent of the questions were classified as economic issues. Examples of typical questions include topics such as “Sweden’s foreign trade” (U17), “The Swedish state’s sources of income” (F30) or “Our Swedish banks and their operations” (La32).

An interesting observation is that there are relatively few questions related to political science, and several of these examination questions were constructed in Landskrona. According to Bromsjö (1965), in the curriculum of Secondary Schools during the 19th century (Hall, 1921), the emphasis within civics is on the discipline of political science, but this has not been seen in our results. There is a continuity in that these questions prompt detailed explanations, such as “The power of the Swedish Parliament” (La25), “How self-government is exercised in our municipalities” (La29), and “The controlling power of the Swedish parliament” (Lu34). Landskrona had a similar question in 1931.

Furthermore, we have not categorised many questions as social geography. Most questions address the significance of raw materials and their impact on the national economy. Examples of such questions are: “Iron: its occurrence, production, refinement, and significance for our country” (U18), “Our country’s natural conditions for industrial work” (F22), “Our forests and their economic significance for our country” (L30), “The importance of forests then and now for our country” (F30), “The significance of coal and oil shale in contemporary culture” (U28). Other types of questions include “The European peoples” (U30), “Various types of national borders” (U33), and “Swedish small-scale farming today” (Lu31).

It is evident that there was societal influence in relation to the construction of questions reminiscent of civics long before this was formulated as a subject in the curricula. If teacher educators and teachers had been more like Weber’s (1904/2002) modern bureaucrats, there would perhaps not have been any civics questions. The test constructor had some leeway when constructing questions, besides the official curricula (Goodlad, 1979; Lipsky, 1980; Lundquist, 1998; Rothstein, 2001). M. Persson (2018) has also demonstrated that discussions on civics had existed in the United States for a long time. Society and social discussions impacted the content of schools without being explicitly written in the curricula.

Table 3. Themes divided according to three intervals

Themes	1915–1921	1922–1929	1930–1937	TOTAL
Economics	24	28	18	70
Social geography	6	9	6	21
Political science	7	8	12	27
Current societal issues	7	12	11	30
Citizenship education	8	13	13	34
Total:	52	70	60	182

According to Table 3, it can be observed that the number of questions we classify as civics was generally fewer between 1915 and 1921 but increased later. Exam questions we categorise as related to economics do not increase significantly. Social geography does not change over the investigation period. However, questions with reference to political sciences, current societal issues and

citizenship education increased during the investigation period. The 30 citizenship education exam questions that are not reported in the results in the table above increase. Initially, there are five questions in the first period, rising to 15 in the last period.

5.2 When Sweden moves towards democracy in 1915–1921

The period between 1915 and 1921 was a transformative time in Sweden. Internationally, it began with a world war, followed by the civil war in Finland and Russia. Nationally, Sweden's economy was modernised, but political power was initially conservatively outdated. Sweden was the only country in the Nordic region without universal and equal suffrage. There were hunger riots, and finally, a constitutional change was resolved in 1918, leading to universal and equal suffrage in 1921.

In the exam questions, the term modernity is used and mentioned in connection with certain economic issues, such as “Characteristic features of modern production organisation” (Lu20) and “Modern organisation of production” (F21). Organisation, as well as technology, is a significant element in the narrative of the modernisation process (Alm, 2002). Most exam questions discussing technical changes are found in the period 1915–1922; for instance, “The significance of electric power transmission, with special reference to our country” (U22) and “The use of electricity in the service of news dissemination” (U26). There are further questions about electricity but also other innovations such as the telephone (La17).

In Falun and Landskrona, there is also a discussion about “Cooperative enterprises” (F16) and consumer cooperatives. Landskrona has a few questions that would have stood out during the contemporary period, such as Karl Marx's economic views presented in the methodology section, as well as “The shortcomings of economic liberalism and how attempts have been made to remedy them” (La15).

The latter question encourages a more argumentative approach. The two women's teacher training colleges had questions between 1915 and 1921 about either the new constitution in 1921 or about women: “The Industrial Revolution and the women's movement” (F15), “The 1921 constitutional amendments in their historical context” (La21), “How our country obtained its current constitution” (La22), “The Swedish parliament after 1921” (La23). These types of questions were not present in Uppsala or Lund. There were no questions about the constitutional amendment in 1921 or the major societal changes taking place nationally and internationally.

In Falun, but especially in Landskrona, it could be decoded that the questions lean more to the political left between the years 1915 and 1921. Florin (1987) and Höjeberg (2016) discuss a self-image that school teachers had of themselves, where the school teacher represented the progressive, preferably liberal or social democrat. This identity may have existed among some test constructors in Falun and in Landskrona. The leading education policymakers within the Liberals and later the Social Democrats were also central figures within the elementary school teacher movement.

Citizenship education questions are somewhat fewer during this period than in later years. Questions instead related to physical education (U15) or the fostering of good habits. Various ideals of education also begin to emerge (U21). There are questions about the role of the elementary school teacher, such as “How can an elementary school teacher outside of school contribute to the improvement of public education?” or “Our contemporary work in public education” (La20).

The questions express trust in the role of the school teacher and modernistic knowledge hierarchies, where the teacher has more knowledge, thus having a mission of knowledge for the community. Höjeberg (2016) argues that the self-image of elementary school teachers was portrayed as

persistent individualists who fought for their schools against conservative farmers, simple-minded school board members, and ecclesiastical representatives.

Overall, the transformative time is not reflected much in the questions. In comparison with the student exam questions for secondary schools during the same period, the Great War is much more noticeable in these than in the four teacher training schools (Andersson Hult, 2023).

5.3 The young democracy 1922–1929

The Roaring Twenties were not as joyful in Sweden. The governments of the twenties were rather weak, and several of the governments resigned. Financially, Sweden did not flourish as the rest of the world did, and a significant economic issue for Sweden was deflation (Karlsson & Salomon, 2024).

The distinct political perspective expressed in the exam questions from Falun and Landskrona fade away in Falun. In Landskrona, the political and social issues continue, for example: “How the position of women has changed in Sweden over the past hundred years” (La27), “How the authorities, through their intervention, have sought to remedy the problems brought about by industrialism” (La23), “The power and powerlessness of wealth” (La25), “Legislation on workers’ protection” (La26). Improvements for workers and the presence of examination questions regarding the workers’ situation could be interpreted as a modern element. Work is central to modernity. Weber’s (1904/2002) idea of the Protestant ethic asserts that work functions to honour God. Bauman (1994, 1998) argues similarly that in modernity, avoiding work is stigmatised, while diligent work is praised, which aims to supply reliable labour to growing industries.

Delayed satisfaction in terms of material assets develops during modernity, which also resonates with Weber’s (1904/2002) Protestant ethic. According to Bauman (1997), immediately consuming one’s entire salary is considered inappropriate in modernity. It was wiser instead to save for something that others value as significant or invest in something for the future. Bauman has metaphorically likened the bank statement to a typically modern attitude: viewing life in the present as an investment that returns in the future. This message was communicated to the students in elementary school, and in the exams at the teacher training colleges, civics questions occur that touch upon this area: “Regarding the importance of simple living habits” (La26), “Hard work and capital formation” (U24), and “How can the elementary school foster its pupils in frugality” (Lu28). Questions about frugality arise occasionally during the entire investigation period.

Issues related to youth begin to emerge during this time, such as: “Contemporary youth movements (U23)”, “About the entertainment of our time” (Lu529), or “The Social Significance of Sports (F29)”. Norlin (2010) explores in his dissertation how community life, as an extension of the school day, provided additional upbringing beyond the traditional classroom. This extension into students’ leisure time created new arenas for personal development and civic influence. The home, like community life, is also connected to the school: “The School and the Home (U22)” and “The School in its Relationship to the Home and Society” (U28).

There are also questions about the role of the elementary school teacher in the civics education spirit, as we could see during the previous period: “The elementary school teacher and the educational activities in the region where he is active” (U24). Other issues are more general in terms of upbringing, such as: “The preservation of Swedish-ness abroad” (U29) and “What constitutes a good character?” (U29).

A moral issue discussed in all teacher training colleges is the question of temperance work and the prohibition referendum of 1922: “Reflections prior to the prohibition referendum” (U22), “Some perspectives on temperance work in our country” (F28). The temperance issues are also present in

the educational essays (A. Persson & Andersson Hult, 2024). According to Hammarberg (2009), warnings about alcohol were clearer in the late 19th century and early 20th century than during the 1920s. The issues of temperance are linked to health; several questions that arise in the twenties are connected to health, hygiene, or heredity.

The following exam questions are examples of this: “Public health efforts in our time” (La22), “Hygienic requirements for rural schools” (Lu28). In the Commission report from 1914, health issues were given more prominence, emphasising the importance of informing people about good hygiene (Hammarberg, 2009). In A. Persson and Andersson Hult’s study (2024), the results of their examination of educational essays indicate common themes related to health. An example of this is the significance of school baths, as discussed in Falun 1923. Health and hygiene were not only seen as medical concepts but also as a morally charged concept, to cleanse out the evil - impurities - and create a healthy and resilient body (Linné, 1996). According to Hammarberg, hygiene was considered not only as cleanliness but also as something preventive that could apply to clothing, food, and housing; in other words, to be “nice and tidy” or to be neat and orderly in appearance or habits. There was also a notion that cleansing people would equalise class differences. Health thinking took place in collaboration with medical science. In this way, doctors came to replace priests in the elementary school, according to Hammarberg.

In the early 20th century, the Swedish author, educator, and feminist Ellen Key criticises Christianity by advocating for a scientifically grounded evolutionism (Wikström, 2021). Heredity is also a topic that begins to be discussed among the exam questions: “Modern heredity doctrine” (La24) and “Practical significance of heredity research” (La27). In the late twenties, Uppsala asked about “Eugenic perspectives and issues” (U27).

5.4 The concept of the welfare state, “*folkhemmet*”, takes shape in 1930–1937

This is a somewhat brighter period for Sweden than for the countries outside of Sweden, although economically harsh times do occur in the form of a recession. Many countries in the world move towards dictatorship but Sweden strengthens democracy, and the expansion of the welfare state begins. In Swedish research, there has been a tendency to associate the welfare state or the modern impact in Sweden with the 1930s (Wiklund, 2006).

The financial crisis is partly evident in the economic issues in the exam questions of Uppsala and Landskrona: “The economic crisis, briefly mentioning its causes” (U32), “The issue of unemployment” (U33), “The right to work – a current problem” (U35), “The main deviations in contemporary economic life from the fundamental principles of economic liberalism” (L34). Questions on economics in the exams of Falun and Lund do not concern the ongoing economic downturn. There are some contemporary societal issues regarding what was happening in Germany, such as: “The consequences of the World War for Germany” (L 30) and “The Versailles Treaty and the current political situation” (L 35).

Questions about women continue to be included in Landskrona, but also in Lund: “Why has the woman’s struggle for civil rights faced resistance” (La 33) and “Man and woman in the job market” (Lu37). The likely explanation for the emergence of women’s issues in Lund is that Landskrona’s teacher training college education was to be discontinued, and in Lund, both women and men were to be admitted from that year onwards.

Orderliness, character, and thrift themes continue; “How can the school foster integrity?” (La 35), “Which qualities in our national character have most strongly shaped our history?”, “The struggle against national decline” (U34), and “The school and our people’s upbringing to thrift” (1936).

The word “hygiene” is used in a context other than the meaning of good hygiene practices, as in this case regarding the hygiene of the soul; “Hygiene of the soul and the significance of knowledge concerning this matter for the teacher in his work.” The opposite of hygiene and cleanliness is dirt, junk or filth, which is also used, for example, to combat so-called junk literature. According to (Karlsson & Schoenhals, 2008), it was modernistic language to use words like dirt, junk, and filth as a contrast to cleanness. This dimension in the teaching profession is, in other words, approaching a characterisation of the teaching profession that can also be perceived as problematic (Landahl 2006). Dirt or filth is material that is out of place, thus violating a certain notion of order. These exam questions lie at the intersection of civics and other subjects. They are presented as an expression of a more modern society where teachers, in their role, have a societal responsibility.

Health issues occurring in the exam questions in the twenties continued into the thirties, for example: “Our health and food” (F36). In the previous section, hereditary issues were discussed, and we could also see that a eugenic question was included in Uppsala in the twenties. In the thirties, hereditary questions persist, but eugenic issues become increasingly prevalent. Some examples are: “The significance of hereditary research for humans” (U33), “Eugenic questions” (L36), “Heredity and eugenics” (La32), “Eugenic questions of importance” (F31), “Eugenic perspectives on the population issue” (F35). The population issue is also discussed in other question forms, such as “Our country’s population issue” (U37).

These questions may have been introduced because some teacher educators sympathised with Germany (Samuelsson, 2023). Höjeberg’s (2011) thesis shows that the teaching profession unequivocally rejected Nazism, its ideology, and societal perspective, including its educational stance, due to conflicts with Swedish ideals. The questions about race should probably be seen as a result of modern society. Wikström (2021) shows, in her research on Ellen Key, who had progressive ideas about pedagogy, that eugenic beliefs were significant for Key. There seems to have been a connection between scientific knowledge, eugenic and modern pedagogical progressivism. The study of race was regarded as forward-thinking and indicative of a radical conception of humanity and a scientific approach (Linné, 1996). According to Samuelsson (2023), knowledge about race, eugenics, and racial biology was shared and disseminated in educational journals during the twenties, and this knowledge originated from prominent researchers and influential writers. Even within the state bureaucracy and politics, various racial perspectives were brought forward with connections to the world of education. Already in the 1918 school commission, it had been suggested that eugenics and racial biology should be included in the curricula.

Bauman (1994) argues that with social engineering and medical science, there was a modernist idea to improve humanity almost to perfection, like a well-tended garden. In this garden thinking, it becomes important to counteract bad qualities and promote good ones; methods such as social hygiene, sexual hygiene, and eugenics were used (Olsson, 1997). There was also broad political support for the sterilisation of mentally disabled and antisocial individuals (Broberg, 1995). It was considered uncomplicated to increase society’s control over people’s everyday lives through this kind of reform and information efforts (Olsson, 1997).

6 CONCLUDING DISCUSSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The dominant narrative in curriculum studies suggests that civics did not exist until after World War II, which aligns with the evolution of curriculum plans. However, supported by curriculum reviews dating back to the 1800s, Bromsjö (1965) contends that civics has deeper historical roots. Goodlad (1979) discusses the existence of parallel curriculum plans. Those who constructed exam

questions perceived a mission. At every step, the content and purpose of the mission were interpreted and handled. School and society went hand in hand, and the increasingly modernised society influenced the test constructors. The realisation of the political policy documents came to be like a negotiation between the test constructors and the curriculum about how a relevant exam question should be formulated (A. Persson & Andersson Hult, 2024).

In this study, we have selected 182 exam questions from a pool of 924 questions, which could be interpreted as civics today. It can be noted that what we term civics today existed long before the subject of civics was outlined in the curriculum plans. The subject of civics is a broad field derived from various disciplinary subjects. We could find questions oriented towards political science or leaning towards geography, but they are not so common. According to Bromsjö (1965), civics was mostly concerned with political science. However, in line with Nicklasson (1983), our results challenge the idea that questions of civics were mainly based on political science. Bromsjö is correct when it comes to the secondary schools where political science is explicitly mentioned in the curricula and political science questions appear in the final exams (Andersson Hult, 2023). Few people pursued a secondary education in Sweden during the period covered by this study. Perhaps there was an idea to educate an elite in secondary education, future civil servants who needed knowledge of political science.

Hirdman (1989) argues that modernity portrays a perception where women's roles are often invisible. If we only study exam questions at the educational institutions that exclusively educated men, this is true, but if we study exam questions at the educational institutions that educated women, we get a different picture. Perhaps the female identity became more pronounced when all the students were women, and the teachers adapted their teaching accordingly. The two female teacher education programs were more progressive in their exam questions at the beginning of the study period, whereas the two male teacher education programs were more traditional. In Lund, were presented mostly traditional questions, which is also reflected in their pedagogical questions (A. Persson & Andersson Hult, 2024). However, Lund transformed when the teacher training college became a college for women and men. This study does not investigate the existence of differences in knowledge cultures in teacher training programs, but there are indications that there may have been some.

Previous research (e.g., Carr, 1965; Englund, 1986) suggests that schools in the early 1900s primarily reproduced knowledge. However, our findings indicate a more nuanced view. While knowledge-reproducing questions were prevalent, many questions were constructed differently, potentially fostering argumentation and more open-ended writing (Linné, 1996). Further investigation into this topic is warranted in future research.

In civics, there is also a dual task which involves both providing knowledge about society and citizenship education. This division was also evident in the material. The citizenship-building or citizenship education exam questions changed over time. For example, until 1921, there were nurture-related questions regarding physical education, technology, and organisation. In the 1920s, the focus shifted to thriftiness, sobriety issues, and hygiene. In the 1930s, thriftiness and hygiene persisted, but several racial-biological questions emerged. This could be another side of modern society that, according to Karlsson and Schoenhals (2008), was characterised by a societal culture with a form of cleanliness obsession, paying significant attention to separating the new from the old, the normal from the abnormal, the clean from the dirty, and the healthy from the sick (Karlsson & Schoenhals, 2008). For instance, racial hygiene (eugenics) and research on heredity are phenomena that can be linked to modernisation and the increasingly tangible role of science in society

(Bauman, 1994; Broberg, 1995). This prompts us to investigate the responses provided by teacher students. Of particular interest is analysing the responses where the questions relate to hereditary issues and race biology.

This article is part of a larger project where materials in teacher education programs in related subjects like religious studies, geography, and history will be investigated further. These subjects were significantly influenced by society in the early 20th century. We also plan a comparative study of the education systems of Sweden and Finland in the early 20th century, focusing on teacher training programs. Due to language, the teacher training programs in Finland that will be in focus are the Swedish-speaking teacher training colleges in Nykarleby for men and in Ekenäs for women.

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Landsarkivet i Uppsala; Folkskoleseminariet Uppsala

F IIIa: *Skriftliga prov: folkskollärarexamen* [Written exams for graduation]

Landsarkivet i Lund; Folkskoleseminariet Lund

F IV: *Skripta i folkskollärarexamen* [Written exams for graduation]

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