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# Rudolf Steiner Education and Waldorf Schools: Centenary World Maps of the Global Diffusion of “The School of the Future”

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## Abstract

Three world maps of Rudolf Steiner education and Waldorf schools are presented on the occasion of the centenary of the world’s leading alternative education paradigm. The three cartograms document the current global diffusion of: (a) Waldorf kindergartens (n=1958 in 70 countries); (b) Waldorf schools (n=1184 in 67 countries); and (c) the total educational entities of Waldorf schools and kindergartens taken together (n=3142 in 74 countries). The first Waldorf school, Freie Waldorfschule Uhlandshöhe, was founded in 1919 in Stuttgart, Germany, by the tobacco industrialist, Emil Molt (1876-1936). The pedagogical leadership for the school was provided by the Austrian New Age philosopher, Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925). The Stuttgart school was envisioned as a model school offering an alternative vision of education, and one which could be replicated elsewhere. The maps reveal that a century later, Waldorf/Steiner education remains predominantly a Eurocentric phenomenon, dominated in Europe by Germany, and dominated in the world by Europe. Germany leads the world with 565 Waldorf kindergartens and 245 schools, followed by USA with 154 Waldorf kindergartens and 124 schools. The maps bear witness that a century after the founding of the first Waldorf school, Emil Molt’s initiative, and Rudolf Steiner’s educational ideas, have diffused throughout the world, with Waldorf educational enterprises now established in 74 countries.

## Keywords

Emil Molt, Freie Waldorfschule Uhlandshöhe, Stuttgart, Waldorf/Steiner, Steiner/Waldorf, Waldorf100, Alternative Education, Cartograms

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## 1. Introduction

A century has passed since Emil Molt (1876-1936) and Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) established the first Waldorf school at Stuttgart, Germany, the Freie Waldorfschule Uhlandshöhe. Emil Molt wrote, of the launch on 7 September, 1919: “This day was indeed the high point of my life” [1]. The school enrolment was 256 students in 1919 [2], and that rapidly grew to 897 students in 1925 [3], who were by then housed in a purpose built school. Students included the children of workers from Emil Molt’s Waldorf cigarette

factory, and the children of Anthroposophists who came from as far away as Australia [4].

Emil Molt (Figure 1) was a vegetarian tobacco baron, the manager and part owner of the Waldorf Astoria Cigarette Company in Stuttgart [5]. Emil Molt bought the Restaurant Uhlandshöhe set high on the hill overlooking Stuttgart, along with surrounding parcels of land, for his new school. In 1919 he declared: “Let us show the world that we are not only idealists, but also people of practical deeds” [6]. Emil Molt described his new enterprise as “the school of the future” [6]. The creation of the school was reportedly described by Emil

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Molt as “the climax of his life” [5]. The school was described by Berta Molt, his wife, as “his life’s work” [1]. In 1919, Emil Molt was at the peak of his health and wealth.



**Figure 1.** Emil Molt founder of the first Waldorf school [source: 7].

Cigarettes were one of the few ‘comforts’ for soldiers of World War 1 (WW1). They were standard issue for soldiers in the field, they were included in food parcels from home, and in Red Cross parcels. Cigarettes served as a de facto currency for soldiers. While competitors struggled to secure raw materials of cigarette production, Emil Molt took some strategic actions that enabled the company and himself to grow rich, sourcing tobacco via Switzerland [8]. By war’s end, Emil Molt was a rich man, in a troubled and broken country.

Rudolf Steiner was the charismatic New Age philosopher and founder of the Anthroposophy Movement. He had relocated from Berlin, Germany, to Dornach, Switzerland, shortly before the outbreak of the Great War (1914-1918). He was in the process of constructing the impressively quirky, foundational building of the Anthroposophy Movement, the Goetheanum (it opened in 1920). Rudolf Steiner’s settlement was set on the hill overlooking the village of Dornach, a short tram ride from Basel, Switzerland, and a three hour drive to Stuttgart.

Rudolf Steiner was keen to see the practical application of his Anthroposophy, eager to see concrete fruits of his philosophy. His theoretical interest in ‘The Education of Children’ was one of long standing [9, 10]. When Emil Molt approached him with the idea for a new school, Steiner readily and wholeheartedly embraced the idea. At the

opening of the school, on 7 September, 1919, Rudolf Steiner called for “social restructuring ... amid the chaos of ... our present times”, and declared that the Waldorf School would “be fashioned out of what we believe to have won from spiritual science” [11]. In 1919, Rudolf Steiner was at the peak of his vigour and vitality.

Beyond the effervescent bubble of optimism of this new educational venture, the situation in the Germany of 1919, in the aftermath of the Great War, was grim. “By the Spring of 1919, nothing was left of what had been called Germany and little remained of what had been Europe” [Lathé & Whittaker in 12]. The palpable enthusiasm for war of 1914, had given way to the harsh reality of sacrifice, privation, and, eventually, of defeat. Steiner wrote that: “After such an experience, retrospection is in order, for this experience has proved that the opinions of half a century, especially the dominant thoughts of the war years, to be tragically erroneous” [12]

Britain’s Blockade of Germany was effective in staunching the flow of imported food to Germany [13]. Germany had relied on imported food, so the effect was immediate: “on the 1st February [1915] the German government ... placed the whole nation on rations” [13]. “The turnip remained the staple of the German diet throughout the remaining two years of the [First World] war” [14]. “The preferential treatment given to the military resulted in the fact that the army consumed 30% of total bread grains and 60% of all cattle and pork in 1918” [14]. “Food provisioning of the German Army was sufficient ‘because civilians starved to ensure the soldiers ate’” [14]. George Bernard Shaw wrote: “To win the war ... We starved the children of Germany” [in 15].

Germany’s children of 1919 were under-nourished, underweight, poorly clad and shod, some were orphaned, some were fatherless. Some fathers returned maimed and disfigured. Mothers were shattered by the privations of war: “mothers sacrificed their health to feed children and husbands ... overall, girls suffered more than boys, women more than men” [14]. World War 1 (WW1) in Europe was not just a soldier’s war, it was a total war.

The initial students of the Freie Waldorfschule Uhlandshöhe were children traumatised by four years of war. Their sufferings were far from over. In 1920, food production in Germany was half of the prewar level, and it took a decade to regain prewar food production levels [14].

Amidst the sea of tragedies, turmoils, and social unrest, and looking beyond the immediate turbulence, Emil Molt spoke of his vision: “my wish is that this undertaking of ours may happily thrive ... that this school will become a garden and a fountain of everything that is good, beautiful and true” [6]. A century later, that original Waldorf school in Stuttgart is

flourishing and there are now thousands of Waldorf/Steiner schools and kindergartens around the world.

Waldorf education has survived the vicissitudes of the past century. In its early formative years, came the Depression and runaway-inflation in Germany [3]. The Anthroposophical Society in Germany was banned in 1935 [16]. The Stuttgart Waldorf school was closed down by the Nazi regime in 1938 [16]. The school buildings and grounds were requisitioned and occupied by the Nazis. The school was fire bombed by the Allies in 1943 [17]. All Waldorf schools within their jurisdiction were banned by the Nazis, but by that time there were Waldorf schools established elsewhere, including in Britain (from 1922) and in USA (from 1928), and they kept the light on for Waldorf education throughout the maelstrom of World War 2 (WW2). Waldorf education was born in Germany in the aftermath of WW1, and it was born-again in Germany in the aftermath of WW2. When the Nazi regime was finally swept away, Waldorf school properties were regained, and the vision of a “school of the future” was rekindled once again.

The present paper maps the current global presence of Waldorf/Steiner education and this is presented as three world cartograms.

## 2. Methods

There were two primary data sources tapped for Waldorf/Steiner schools and kindergarten data. The Waldorf World List: Directory of Waldorf and Rudolf Steiner Schools, Kindergartens and Teacher Training Centers Worldwide is maintained and published by Freunde der Erziehungskunst Rudolf Steiners and the International Association for Steiner/Waldorf Early Childhood Education (IASWECE). The current hardcopy issue is dated April 2019 [18] The World List reports 1183 Waldorf/Steiner schools in 66 countries (Note that their stated total of ‘1182’ of the World List (p. 10) is a miscount). The present authors have added one Waldorf/Steiner school in Myanmar [19] to bring the total to 1184 Waldorf/Steiner schools in 67 countries, and this is the data set mapped in the Waldorf/Steiner schools map (Figure 3).

For Waldorf/Steiner kindergartens, IASWCE maintains and presents an online database at <iaswece.org> which can be interrogated on a country-by-country basis. For the kindergartens data, where there was a difference in the count between the published World List and the online database (at October 2019), the higher value count was used. The present authors have added one Waldorf/Steiner kindergarten in Myanmar [19] to bring the total to 1958 Waldorf/Steiner kindergartens in 70 countries, and this is the data set mapped in the Waldorf/Steiner kindergarten map (Figure 2) and for

the Waldorf schools and kindergartens aggregated data map (Figure 4).

The IASWECE website explains that: “IASWECE Member Country Associations ... carry responsibility for the recognition of kindergartens and training courses in their countries. Kindergartens and early childhood programs in countries that are not IASWECE Members are included on the IASWECE World List if they have an official license to use the name ‘Steiner’ or ‘Waldorf’ or if they have been recognized by IASWECE” <iaswece.org>. The jointly published list states that: “This World List Update includes kindergartens recognized either by IASWECE Member Associations or, for countries that are not IASWECE Members, by application directly to IASWECE. 89 kindergartens that were formerly on the IASWECE World List of Kindergartens but have not yet completed the process are not included in this 2019 updated list ... Once they have completed the process and been officially recognized, they will be added to the World List” [18].

For the purposes of the present paper ‘Waldorf education’, ‘Steiner education’, ‘Waldorf/Steiner education’ and ‘Steiner/Waldorf education’ are treated as interchangeable terms, and not for the purposes of differentiation. The question of the name of the original Stuttgart school’s pedagogy has been present from the outset. The Stuttgart school adopted the name ‘Waldorf’ after its funding source, viz., the cigarette factory of its benefactor, Emil Molt. When Rudolf Steiner was asked directly (in 1920), his response to the proposed name “Rudolf Steiner Schools” was: “Under no circumstances can we do that” [2]. In fact, schools have adopted various combinations and permutations of ‘Waldorf’ and ‘Steiner’, for example: Glenaeon *Rudolf Steiner* School (Australia); Tarremah *Steiner* School (Australia); Willunga *Waldorf* School (Australia); Scuola *Steiner Waldorf* Aurora (Italy); Escola *Waldorf-Steiner* El Til·ler, (Spain); and Escola *Waldorf Rudolf Steiner* São Paulo (Brazil) (italics added by authors).

The cartograms of the present paper are created by beginning with a Peters projection of the world (the reference map, Figure 5). In such a map, equal areas of the map represent equal areas of the world (i.e. countries on the map are represented true to their actual size relative to other countries [20], as distinct from, for example, a Mercator projection where territories are progressively more and more distorted as the poles are approached. The Peters projection map is a density equalising map, where the density of the parameter mapped (territorial area) is equal across the whole map.

Conceptually, the territories are then deflated of their territorial area (TA), leaving the territorial ‘bladders’

empty, and then re-inflated with the territorial parameter under examination (PUE), in this case, the number of Waldorf schools and kindergartens. The original total area evacuated is conserved (i.e. replaced) in the new PUE map. In the event that the PUE is globally distributed proportionate to the TA, then the map of the PUE will be unchanged (from the reference map). Where the PUE is more dense in a territory (than the global density of the PUE) then that territory will appear 'fatter' in the new map. Where the PUE is less dense in a territory (than the global density of the PUE) then that territory will appear 'skinnier' in the new map. The present authors have previously produced such maps using the worldmapper algorithm <worldmapper.org> [21, 22].

The data mapped appear in Appendices A & B.

### 3. Results

Three world maps are presented, viz., Waldorf kindergartens (n=1958, countries=70) (Figure 2), Waldorf schools (n=1184, countries=67) (Figure 3), and Waldorf schools and kindergartens (n=3142, countries=74) (Figure 4). A reference map is included for comparison (Figure 5).

In reading the maps (Figures 2, 3 & 4), where a particular country approximately matches the reference map (Figure 5) this means that the density of the PUE in the territory, of the parameter examined is close to the global density of the parameter. Where a country appears larger than in the reference map, then the density of the PUE is denser in the territory examined than the global density. Where a country appears smaller than in the reference map, then the density of the PUE is less dense in the territory examined than the global density of the PUE.

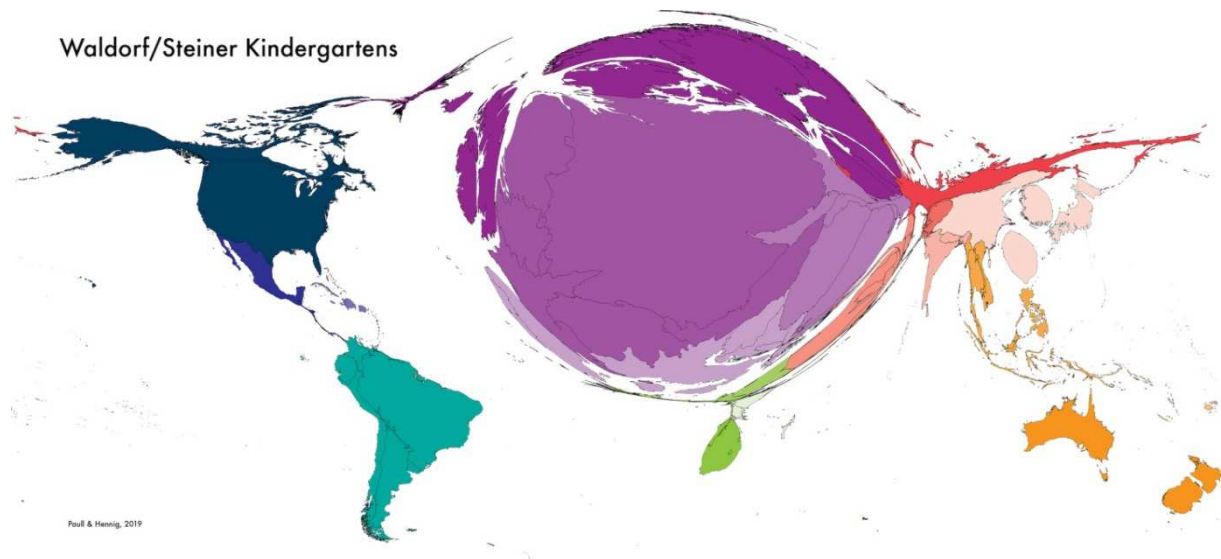


Figure 2. World map of Waldorf/Steiner kindergartens (density equalising cartogram).



Figure 3. World map of Waldorf/Steiner schools (density equalising cartogram).

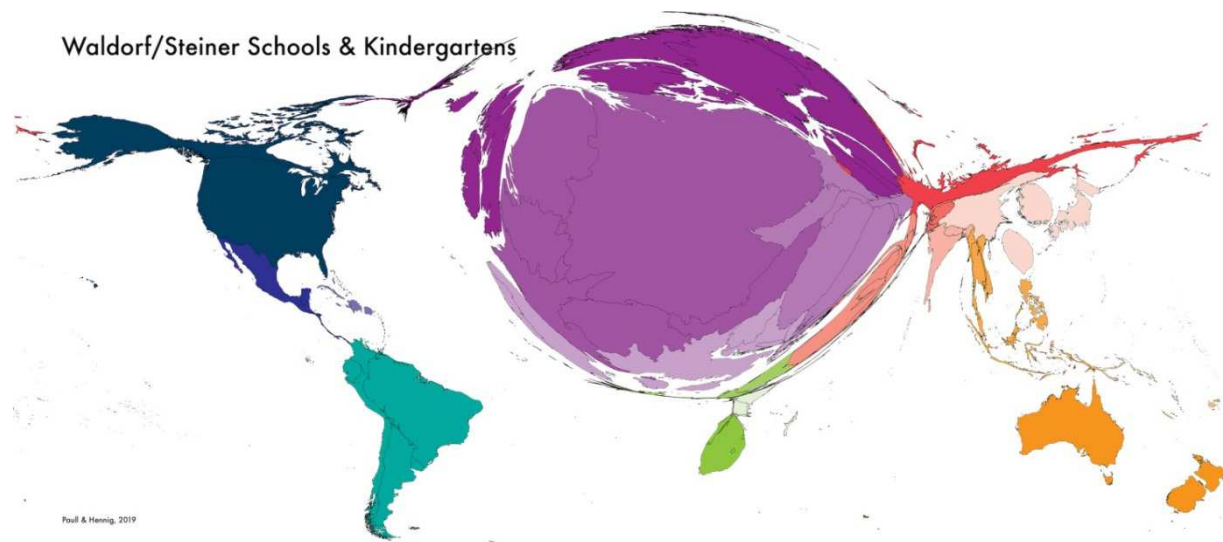


Figure 4. World map of Waldorf/Steiner kindergartens and schools (density equalising cartogram).

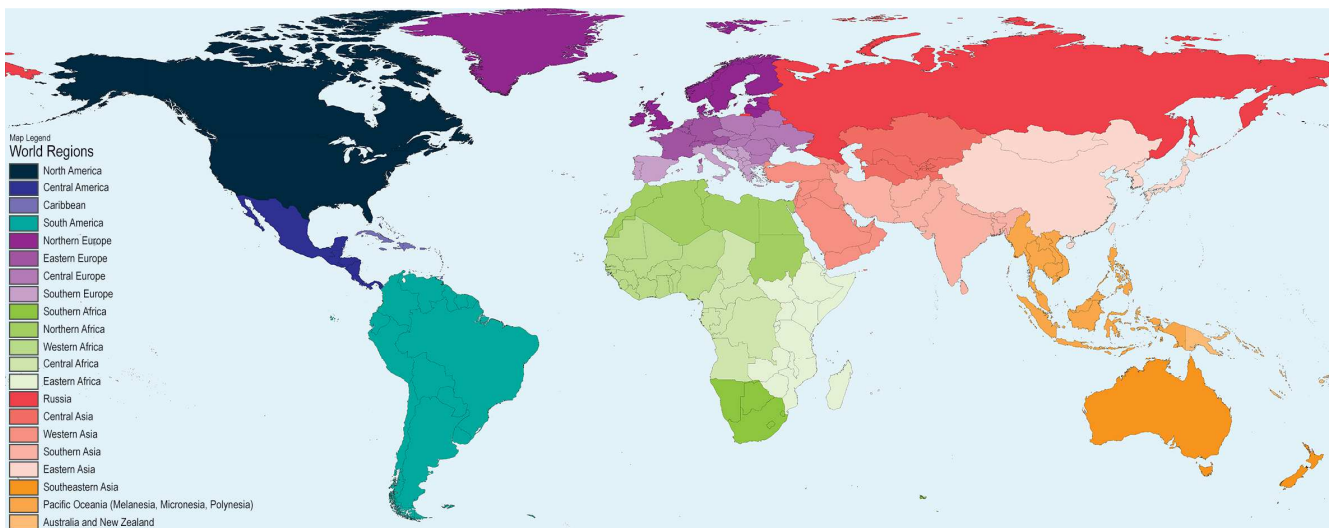


Figure 5. Reference world map (Peters projection).

## 4. Discussion

Emil Molt was the ‘white knight’ who financially enabled the founding of Waldorf education. Rudolf Steiner provided the pedagogical direction. For both men, the Stuttgart school was a beginning, the prototype for an alternative education paradigm, a proof of concept.

Rudolf Steiner commented in 1919 that: “We created the Waldorf School as an example” [2]. He was keen to propagate his education ideas to the Angloworld, giving lectures and courses at conferences and summer schools at Stratford-on-Avon, Oxford, Ilkley, Penmaenmawr, and finally Torquay [23-25]. The Stuttgart example has now, over the course of a century, settled in 74 countries. The original school founded by Emil Molt and Rudolf Steiner in Stuttgart in 1919 is flourishing and continues to serve as a model school of Waldorf education [26]. The current enrolment of

the school is close to the enrolment of 1925 (c.900 students) although the facilities are greatly enhanced.

For the present paper, in each case, the map is the message. The maps presented illustrate that Waldorf/Steiner education is a worldwide phenomenon, and that the global diffusion has been extensive, although very uneven.

In the three world maps of Waldorf/Steiner education, Europe is the dominant presence in the world, and Germany is the dominant presence in Europe (Figures 2, 3 & 4). Europe is represented most strongly in the three maps, with Germany accounting for 28% of the world’s Waldorf kindergartens, along with the Netherlands and Sweden (accounting for 4% each), and Denmark, Hungary, Norway, and Switzerland (accounting for a further 3% each). Germany accounts for 21% of the world’s Waldorf schools, and the Netherlands accounts for a further 9% of the global total.

After Germany, USA accounts for 8% of the world's Waldorf kindergartens, and 10% of the world's Waldorf schools. The first Waldorf school was founded in USA in 1928 [27]. Brazil accounts for 4% of the global total of Waldorf kindergartens.

Within the extensive global diffusion of Waldorf/Steiner education, the maps show that kindergartens and schools have generally diffused hand-in-hand with each other (so that Figures 2 & 3 are very similar), although differences are apparent. In Australia, for example, we see that the Australia of Waldorf schools (Figure 3) closely resembles the Australia of the reference map (Figure 5), showing that the uptake of Waldorf schools in Australia is comparable to the average global uptake rate. Whereas, the Australia of Waldorf kindergartens (Figure 2) is a shrunken version of the Australia of the reference map (Figure 4) showing that the reported uptake of Waldorf kindergartens in Australia is considerably below the average global uptake rate. The Australia of the aggregated map of kindergartens and schools (Figure 4) shows a territory intermediate between the Australia of Figure 2 and Figure 3.

Globally, for every 20 Waldorf kindergartens there are 12 Waldorf schools, and in almost all countries, the number of kindergartens exceeds the number of schools. Australia is an exception here (with 30 kindergartens and 58 schools), and, taken at face value, this suggests that there is the capacity for more Waldorf kindergartens in Australia. In China there are 37 Waldorf kindergartens and six schools. This ratio divergence from the global pattern indicates the capacity for more Waldorf schools in China. It may reflect that Waldorf education is relatively new to China, and that Waldorf kindergartens are the vanguard of Waldorf education, and that more schools will follow.

Rudolf Steiner observed that "a first step cannot immediately be perfect" [28]. He added that "we are not people in an absolute sense, but people of a quite particular age" [28]. In these seminal comments, Rudolf Steiner foresaw the evolution of Waldorf/Steiner education, and its adaption to the time and place and people of the milieu in which it is planted. Rudolf Steiner was a pragmatist, and what he proposed in education, as in agriculture, were "hints" that should be tested and developed with the view to adopting and propagating what works [29]. Kaizen, constant and never ending improvement, is the concept that applies.

How does an idiosyncratic, early twentieth century, pedagogy adapt and evolve for the twenty first century, and for cultures very different from the Germanic culture in which it was born? It is the perennial question for Waldorf advocates. For

example, the use of chalk and blackboards was defended (to the first author) at a recent Waldorf conference (Der Stuttgarter Kongress 2019) on the basis that Rudolf Steiner used chalk and blackboards, and it was always thus. To progress the issue, do we argue for some mystical properties of chalk dust or do we just accept that that was the prevailing technology available to Rudolf Steiner, and wonder, that if he strode the Earth today, would he still be using that dusty technology, or adopt a whiteboard or a data projector?

## 5. Conclusion

Waldorf education is the world's leading alternative education system. At the seventy fifth anniversary of Waldorf education (in 1994), just 37 countries were identified as hosting Waldorf/Steiner education [30]. By the one hundredth anniversary (in 2019), 74 countries are hosting Waldorf education. How will Waldorf/Steiner education look in another century? For Rudolf Steiner, Anthroposophy was a quest, not a landing point, a process of evolving understandings and practices, and certainly not dogmas. Anthroposophy "does not administer dogmas" declared Rudolf Steiner [32]. These same attitudes apply to the offspring of Anthroposophy, including Waldorf education.

All education faces challenges for the future, some of that stemming from the ubiquity of digital technology, along with the ubiquity of facts-at-your-fingertips [31]. Waldorf education offers analog education in a digital world. It has a long history of providing children with direct learning experiences through doing, whether it is through play, games, art, craft, dance, music, gardening, or science. This contrasts to the mediated experience that digital media offer. Waldorf will need to continue its evolution of child-centered leaning, to avoid getting stuck in dogma or ritual, to adapt and acclimatise to local mores, and to claim its future, and reify Emil Molt's vision as the "school of the future"

## Acknowledgements

The present paper relies on the databases of Waldorf education maintained by Freunde der Erziehungskunst Rudolf Steiners and the International Association for Steiner/Waldorf Early Childhood Education (IASWCE), and on the Worldmapper algorithm for creating the cartograms. The three maps of this paper will be available for download and free use under a CC-BY-4.0 licence at <commons.wikimedia.org/>.

## Appendix

**Table 1.** World tally of Waldorf schools and kindergartens (alphabetical by Country).

Country	Kinders	Schools	Total
Argentina	21	15	36
Armenia	1	1	2
Australia	30	58	88
Austria	38	21	59
Belgium	26	31	57
Bosnia-Herzegovina	1	-	1
Brazil	87	35	122
Bulgaria	1	1	2
Canada	24	19	43
Chile	12	4	16
China	37	6	43
Colombia	4	4	8
Croatia	6	2	8
Czechia	8	19	27
Denmark	67	15	82
Dominican Republic	1	1	2
Ecuador	6	-	6
Egypt	1	1	2
Estonia	12	10	22
Fiji	1	-	1
Finland	42	25	67
France	22	17	39
Georgia	2	1	3
Germany	565	245	810
Great Britain	40	29	69
Greece	3	-	3
Guatemala	-	2	2
Hungary	57	43	100
Iceland	3	2	5
India	11	7	18
Indonesia	1	-	1
Ireland	18	5	23
Israel	40	23	63
Italy	38	33	71
Japan	16	7	23
Kazakhstan	-	1	1
Kenya	3	2	5
Kyrgyzstan	-	6	6
Latvia	4	2	6
Liechtenstein	1	1	2
Lithuania	15	4	19
Luxemburg	1	1	2
Malaysia	1	1	2
Mexico	16	13	29
Moldova	1	1	2
Myanmar	1	1	2
Namibia	1	1	2
Nepal	2	1	3
Netherlands	80	109	189
New Zealand	20	11	31
Norway	54	32	86
Peru	4	3	7
Philippines	6	4	10
Poland	11	7	18
Portugal	4	5	9
Puerto Rico	1	1	2
Romania	32	17	49
Russia	36	21	57
Slovakia	4	2	6
Slovenia	20	5	25
South Africa	15	15	30
South Korea	13	10	23
Spain	19	15	34



Country	Kinders	Schools	Total
Sweden	76	45	121
Switzerland	76	32	108
Taiwan	20	3	23
Tajikistan	-	1	1
Tanzania	1	2	3
Thailand	6	3	9
Turkey	2	1	3
Ukraine	4	4	8
Uruguay	1	1	2
USA	154	124	278
Vietnam	5	-	5
Total	1958	1184	3142

Table 2. World tally of Waldorf schools and kindergartens (numerical ranking by Total).

Country	Kinders	Schools	Total
Germany	565	245	810
USA	154	124	278
Netherlands	80	109	189
Brazil	87	35	122
Sweden	76	45	121
Switzerland	76	32	108
Hungary	57	43	100
Australia	30	58	88
Norway	54	32	86
Denmark	67	15	82
Italy	38	33	71
Great Britain	40	29	69
Finland	42	25	67
Israel	40	23	63
Austria	38	21	59
Belgium	26	31	57
Russia	36	21	57
Romania	32	17	49
Canada	24	19	43
China	37	6	43
France	22	17	39
Argentina	21	15	36
Spain	19	15	34
New Zealand	20	11	31
South Africa	15	15	30
Mexico	16	13	29
Czechia	8	19	27
Slovenia	20	5	25
Ireland	18	5	23
Japan	16	7	23
South Korea	13	10	23
Taiwan	20	3	23
Estonia	12	10	22
Lithuania	15	4	19
India	11	7	18
Poland	11	7	18
Chile	12	4	16
Philippines	6	4	10
Portugal	4	5	9
Thailand	6	3	9
Colombia	4	4	8
Croatia	6	2	8
Ukraine	4	4	8
Peru	4	3	7
Ecuador	6	-	6
Kyrgyzstan	6	-	6
Latvia	4	2	6
Slovakia	4	2	6
Iceland	3	2	5
Kenya	3	2	5
Vietnam	5	-	5

Country	Kinders	Schools	Total
Georgia	2	1	3
Greece	3	-	3
Nepal	2	1	3
Tanzania	1	2	3
Turkey	2	1	3
Armenia	1	1	2
Bulgaria	1	1	2
Dominican Republic	1	1	2
Egypt	1	1	2
Guatemala	-	2	2
Liechtenstein	1	1	2
Luxemburg	1	1	2
Malaysia	1	1	2
Moldova	1	1	2
Myanmar	1	1	2
Namibia	1	1	2
Puerto Rico	1	1	2
Uruguay	1	1	2
Bosnia-Herzegovina	1	-	1
Fiji	1	-	1
Indonesia	1	-	1
Kazakhstan	-	1	1
Tajikistan	-	1	1
Total	1958	1184	3142

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