

Panel B4: Transport infrastructure, the state and nation building

Panel organizer: Björn Hasselgren, Uppsala University, bjorn.hasselgren[at]ekhist.uu.se

The 19th century was a time of national redefinition in Sweden and many other countries in the Nordic Sphere. Sweden had "lost" Finland to Russia in the 1808-09 war and established a union with Norway from 1814. Denmark was in a process of geographical redefinition mostly to the south, which eventually led to war with Germany.

Transport infrastructure projects were a means of supporting the redefined geography of the nations and between nations. Sweden sought to reallocate interest from east to west, and the construction of Göta Kanal was an example of that, over time intertwined with political processes and economic growth. Norway, Denmark and Finland all initiated canal-projects which were gradually followed by and combined with railroad investments, often intended to connect distant parts of the countries to the more populated regions, but also shaping the national perception.

As the 20th century approached interest was partly redirected to air-transport and road-transport. National air-services and air-ports were established with different aspects of public and private sector involvement, but often with a strong national branding aspect. The national arena should be connected to global markets and regions.

The panel will discuss the role of transport infrastructure as a means for nation building and the different organizational and financing perspectives that were utilized in the establishment of these systems.

Current Nordic cross-border transport infrastructure planning projects and their contribution to a Nordic identity

Anna Lundgren, Nordregio

This research paper links to a research application aiming at comparing transport infrastructure planning in Sweden, Denmark and Norway to identify enabling and hampering factors for improved cross-border transport infrastructure planning. The research will focus on current transport infrastructure planning plans and processes.

National transport infrastructure plans and planning processes in the Nordic countries are to a large extent framed within the different national institutional contexts and dependent on past decisions and negotiations of competing interests as well as on different cultures, norms and planning practises. Hence, we find both important dimensions of path dependence and elements of increasing returns which are common in areas of large investments (the Hallandsås tunnel in the Southern part of Sweden is one example of this). The national framing along with the large public investments involved in transport infrastructure and the long-term structural effects on mobility patterns, make transport infrastructure a vital component in nation building and in sustaining a national identity.

In this research we will redirect our focus from the national to the Nordic perspective, and explore how large transport infrastructure investments contribute to the construction and sustaining of a Nordic identity.

Three case studies of transport infrastructure planning projects that are currently on the political agenda will be included in the study; the road and railway connection between Helsingborg, Sweden and Helsingör in Denmark, the railroad between Stockholm and Oslo and the road connection between Hemavan in Sweden and Mo-i-Rana in Norway. Parallels will be drawn to previous large Nordic cross-border transport infrastructure investments and their contribution to a Nordic identity.

Nation-building or Nordic cooperation? - The Chicago Conference 1944 on civil aviation and the conflicting position of the Nordic countries.

Lars Fälting, Uppsala University

Jan Ottosson, Uppsala University

The aim of this article is to interpret the positioning of the Scandinavian countries during the 1944 Chicago conference on civil aviation. We will discuss the various views expressed during the Chicago conference from the Nordic countries, with special interest in the various positions taken by the Scandinavian countries. Further, we will show how the Scandinavian countries defined their positions, and how they tried to influence the major powers during the conference. Most of earlier research has discussed the interaction between United States and Great Britain, and their different views on bilateral and multilateral agreements in the shaping of the civil aviation regulatory regime. However, one aspect, which has not been discussed in earlier research concerns the positions taken by the small states in the periphery of Europe. We will especially discuss the role of Norway and the Swedish positions during the conference, based on archival material. Further we will illuminate the conflict between nation-building and the possibilities of Nordic cooperation in the new era of the making of civil aviation in the shadow of WWII.

Göta Kanal as a national-identity shaping transport infrastructure project

Björn Hasselgren, Uppsala University

Sweden's national identity was challenged in the early years of the 19th century as, after the war against Russia 1808-09 Finland was lost and, partly as a consequence, a liberal revolution ending the supreme reign during the Gustavian in March 1809.

Having lost all its land-areas east of Sweden the country had to refocus its geopolitical position in a European perspective. The main actors behind the 1809 revolution were inspired by liberal views relating to both the political and constitutional setting to be preferred and with a liberal view on trade and industrial policies. New trade-patterns had to be fostered, connecting the Swedish harbours and towns situated at the east-coast with the west-coast and further trade-routes via the Nordic Sea.

The ideas relating to building a canal connecting the Baltics and the North Sea had been discussed over time in Sweden. Until the last years of the 1700s however, a lacking passage through the difficult falls at Trollhättan had hindered most of these plans. With the Trollhätte Canal in place new possibilities were opened for a continuation of the earlier plans for the Göta Kanal-project.

Besides being one of the largest infrastructure projects to date in Sweden Göta Kanal, and as such of a particular interest for economic historians, the project as described above also was an important measure for the new regime of post 1809 to reconstruct the image of Sweden. Prosperity in the agricultural sector, furthering of trade in general and a support to industries along the canal-stretch were all mentioned in the argumentation for the canal. As the project was initiated, and during the prolonged construction phase from 1810-1832 a number of additional arguments in support of the canal were added, such as defense-policy, innovation in the technology-industry in Sweden in general and as a possible means of connecting Sweden to Norway, the new western outpost of the Swedish realm following the 1814 union of the countries.

The events in relation to Göta Kanal from a nation building perspective will be further outlined in the paper/presentation. An ongoing research project regarding Göta Kanal at Uppsala University/Economic History Department is one starting point, another being a recent PhD-project by Gauchet (2020), focusing on the political and national identity related aspects of the Göta Kanal-project.