

The Political Economy of Transport Policy and Planning in the Baltic Sea Region: Evidence from Four Trans-European Network Projects

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*A human right, a human pleasure, an economic resource and a servant of economic activity:
transport is many things to all people*

European Commission, Directorate General Transport, 1994:1

In the 1990s, the advent of the European Union and the breakup of the Soviet Union have brought profound new challenges to all levels of planning and policy making across the European continent. A new, increasingly border-free «Europe of Regions» is emerging, constituting a new, supra-national geography. Within the context of European cohesion, integration, and enlargement, the expansion and optimization of transport infrastructures is one of the most hotly debated issues. Twentieth century transport innovations have caused dramatic increases in the accessibility and mobility of goods and people, arguably even providing the original, spatial foundation for European integration long before the political idea of the European Union was born.

Today, transport infrastructures are now no longer simplistically assumed to be guarantors for accelerated economic growth. The inter-regional effects of highways and high-speed railways are particularly complex, generally disproportionately benefiting areas with existing agglomeration economies (Hey et al. 1996, SACTRA 1998, T&E 1995). But this has not deterred the European Union from declaring that the completion of a Trans-European Transport Network (TEN) is a prime prerequisite for the successful economic integration of Europe. Since 1992, the European

Investment Bank, the «house bank» of the EU, has allocated 42 billion Euro towards infrastructure projects related to European integration.

Using a case study approach, my dissertation investigates the planning and implementation of (sections of) this Trans-European transport network in the Baltic Sea region. Are there any discernable objective and consensual principles (such as the EU goals of cohesion and sustainable development) that guide the decision-making process for these projects? Are TEN projects yet another example of large-scale, top-down planning? Do we find any of the open, collaborative, and participatory structures that are the ideal of sustainable and communicative planning (Fischer and Forester 1993, Healy 1992)? How were these projects selected and conceived, who participated in the planning process, who was excluded, and how were the responses of affected localities and regions varied? A major contention of the dissertation is that EU institutions such as the EIB, the DGs and the EU Phare program are not sufficiently transparent and accountable to the public. Using a regime theory-inspired framework, I investigate potential systemic advantages of economic over social interests, and hope to disentangle a complex system of multi-level governmental decision-making and governance.

An important hypothesis to be tested in the dissertation is that any region's ability to adequately assess and finance plans for additional and upgraded infrastructures is highly dependent on its political and economic integration into national and international structures. This requires the development of a framework for identifying «variations in national legal and constitutional structures and administrative and professional cultures» (Healey and Williams, 1993:701). The Baltic Sea region is particularly interesting here in that it lies at the intersection of what Newman and Thornley (1996) identify as Germanic, Scandinavian and Eastern European legal and administrative 'families.' It also consists of a mixture of EU (old and new) member states and transition countries. Of the latter, all countries but Russia are expected to join the EU in either the short (Poland, Estonia) or medium term (Latvia, Lithuania), so that a convergence in planning systems and administrative structures is expected.

At the same time, even in unified Western Europe, considerable differences continue to exist among scholars over «correct» approaches towards European-level transport planning and policy. Expanding on Masser, Sviden and Wegener's (1992) identification of three main European development paradigms of «growth,» «equity,» and «environment,» I therefore develop a quintuple typology of transport development approaches from the literature (see table 1). A major challenge of the dissertation is to see not only how these different approaches shape local and regional outcomes, but also how this typology intersects with the identified classification of different local planning cultures and European regimes.

The following case studies have been tentatively selected: 1) the Via Baltica coastal highway between Estonia and Latvia, 2) the A20 highway in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern in eastern Germany, 3) the A4 highway between Katowice – Krakow or the high-speed rail line between Berlin and Warsaw, and 4) the Øresund road-rail bridge between Denmark and Sweden.²¹ Together, these projects involved planning institutions from nine different countries (including Brussels and the EIB headquarters in Luxembourg) and consist of both new construction and upgrading projects.

Stage of My Research and What I hope to Gain from the Workshop:

Drawing from a significant amount of preliminary research as well as closely related non-profit sector and consulting work I will present my full proposal package to my committee and the interested public in September 1999. The AESOP workshop would thus present me with an invaluable opportunity to refine my hypotheses, to consider additional research questions, to rethink the selection of the case studies, and to make important adjustments to the overall research design where necessary.

²¹ This project has of course already been studied extensively by other scholars in the region, so that more secondary sources will be used for the documentation of this case study than for the other ones.

What else I hope to bring to the workshop:

My planning education has been bi-national and internationally-oriented throughout. Having lived and studied in the US for the last 5 ½ years, I have long struggled with the striking differences in both theoretical and practical approaches to planning in the US compared to my native Germany. My international advocacy work has also exposed me to planning environments in Western and Central Eastern Europe, as well as Latin America and Africa. I have found that planners in the developed world can learn a lot from the often much less «planned» environments in the South that are often so rich in informal collaborative processes and institutions. I have also worked extensively on feminist and gender perspectives on transportation and urban planning. I thus hope to contribute planning knowledge and experiences to the workshop that point beyond mainstream European and American approaches.

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TABLE 1: TYPOLOGY OF APPROACHES TO TRANSPORT POLICY AND PLANNING

Approach	Overriding Concern	Emphasis On	Key concepts
<i>Modernization</i>	Economic Growth, Efficiency	Market Economy	Competition, Economic Advantage, Technological Solutions
<i>Institutionalist</i>	Governance, Geopolitical Structure	Institutions (Bureaucracies)	Integration, Planning Cooperation, Spatial Metaphors
<i>Political Economy</i>	Equity Social Justice	Society (Disparities)	Redistribution, Power Struggle, (Urban) Core vs. (Rural) Periphery
<i>Post-Fordist</i>	Nature of (Capitalist) Development	Mode of Production/ Consumption (Processes)	Networks, Information, Flexibilization, Adjustment, Uncertainty
<i>Environmental Sustainability</i>	Environmental Degradation	Nature (Physical Environment)	Ecology, Sustainability Externalities, Habitats, Carrying Capacities