

„The Great Longing for Railways“ – How the Periphery Became Connected with the Centres of Industrialisation

Veranstalter: International Railway History Association and the Centre for Urban History of East Central Europe

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The conference targeted an important question of our world system in modern times: the relationship between peripheral and flourishing centres of modernisation. In his keynote speech RALF ROTH (Frankfurt am Main) pointed out the distinction between multidimensional visions and purposes of railways and its enshrined use in many regions of the world's periphery. When railways began to revolutionize the transport systems in the middle of the 19th century many people were optimistic and full of hope about the positive effects the new technology would have on society.

Indeed, the railways impacted on society in a variety of ways. They solved more or less all transport problems hindering trade so far, distributed the raw materials necessary for industrialisation, and attracted labour forces for the newly erected manufactures. One would mention here also migration initiated or supported by railways in the whole transatlantic world.

The practise of modern transport spread with no less enthusiasm in countries which lacked experiences with modern industry so far. Elites in rural regions of the Northern, Eastern and Southern periphery of Europe and other parts of the world were longing for a modernisation of their economy and wished to take part in the success story of modern technology, engineering, and manufacture. They were convinced that economic strength would lead to political power and would pave the way for independence and sovereignty. Given this context, the railways became a central key technology and therefore focus for fundamental political debates, and of course for heavy investments in the

construction of railway lines too at the borderlands of Western Europe.

The question raised in the opening lecture did not only concern the European periphery but was relevant in most other parts of the world as well. Peripheries of economic backwardness include territories of the Russian, Chinese, Ottoman Empires, furthermore the numerous colonies of Great Britain, France and other European countries and also most countries of Latin America. Did railways contribute to wealth and welfare there as envisaged? Did these infrastructures close the gap between periphery and centre? 150 years later, one must confess, obviously not – or not in the way as it was foreseen. The question is why not? A first look at the European railway network around 1900 or 1910 shows remarkable distinctions in the degree of density of the network in West- and Central Europe and the rest. Moreover, the networks at the periphery of the core had been constructed with a delay of two or three decades. Then it would be important to consider the breakdown of all four empires that dominated the Eastern-European space before World War One. On the one hand this opened the way for an independent development of railways in the Baltic States, Poland and the Ukraine, and in many other parts of the Eastern European world, but the fate of these new states was not what one could call a stable and successful development but was shattered by following wars and serious attempts of a fundamental revision of the post-war state system.

Together with shifting borders the railway systems of Eastern Europe suffered from destruction and more or less permanent periods of reconstruction that lasted several decades. Delays in construction, less density, political and administrative orientation, instability of borders, all together, this was the reason why railways in Eastern Europe did not show the same revolutionary effects as in other parts of Europe and this had enormous consequences. The societies in Eastern Europe never had left the path of a „catch-up industrialisation“ (nachholende Industrialisierung). The question was if the detailed analysis of certain railway lines would approve this thesis. The panorama described in the opening lecture was also applied to other

regions of the world.¹

This led to some fundamental consideration about the relationship between centres and peripheries and therefore to the theory of Immanuel Wallerstein. An American social scientist and social historian who started as an expert of post-colonial African affairs, his research interest shifted more and more to theories of the global economy on a macroscopic and critical perspective. Wallerstein locates the origin of the „modern world-system“ in Western Europe and the Americas. An initially only slight advance in capital accumulation in Britain, the Dutch Republic and France, due to specific political circumstances at the end of the period of feudalism, set in motion a process of gradual expansion. As a result only one global network or system of economic exchange exists. By the 19th century, virtually every area on earth was incorporated into the capitalist world-economy. This capitalist world-system is far from being homogeneous in cultural, political and economic terms – instead it is characterised by fundamental differences in social development, accumulation of political power and capital.

Wallerstein drew the conclusion that there is a fundamental and institutionally stabilized 'division of labour' between core and periphery: while the core has a high level of technological development and manufactures complex products, the role of the periphery is to supply raw materials, agricultural products and cheap labour for the expanding agents of the core, because economic exchange between core and periphery takes place on unequal terms.²

This context delivered some interesting questions: Which hopes and desires came along with railway construction in these regions of the world? Are there similar visions as in Eastern Europe to become part of a more developed economic space and can we trace comparable discourse patterns which linked the level of railway infrastructure to aspirations of economic and political independence of the region? Did the connection of peripheral rural regions to larger transport networks if the core widened or diminished the gap between the two hot spots and the periphery of the world system? Finally: Did the railways

contribute to the industrial development of the country as a whole in such a way that they succeeded in catching up with the leading economies of the West?

The papers and the debate indeed circled around these problems. There was a close and narrow focused debate on railway construction and railway systems in parts of the world which did not belong to the two main spots of the world system, i.e. Western Europe and the United States. The papers delivered a lot of valuable information about the beginnings of railways in Latin America, a region in Africa, the periphery of Europe in the South and of course above all in Eastern Europe. Much was said about the differences between what the railways were foreseen for before they were constructed and about their real effects after construction. In this respect it is important to mention that many projects failed in their strategic outlook. Numerous planned connections from Europe to Asia had mostly not been realised – with the exception of the Transsiberian Railway and parts of the railway project to Bagdad. Transcontinental lines in South America failed as well as in Africa, but they were early realised in Europe in the 1850s and a decade later in the United States. Many projects at the periphery served only few interests in the multitude of purposes railways can be used for. This was very clear the result of the contribution of ANDREAS BEER (Rostock). His paper about

¹ Joachim Becker / Andrea Komlosy (Hrsg.), *Grenzen weltweit. Zonen, Linien, Mauern im historischen Vergleich*, Wien 2004, und Andrea Komlosy, *Grenze und ungleiche regionale Entwicklung. Binnenmarkt und Migration in der Habsburgermonarchie*, Wien 2003.

² Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System*, Bd. I: *Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century*, New York/London 1974 (dt. *Das moderne Weltsystem. Die Anfänge kapitalistischer Landwirtschaft und die europäische Weltökonomie im 16. Jahrhundert*, übersetzt von Angelika Schweikhart, Frankfurt am Main / Wien 1986); ders., *The Modern World-System*, Bd. II: *Mercantilism and the Consolidation of the European World-Economy, 1600-1750*, New York 1980 (dt. *Das moderne Weltsystem, Bd.2, Der Merkantilismus: Europa zwischen 1600 und 1750*, Wien 1998), und ders.: *The Modern World-System*, Bd. III: *The Second Great Expansion of the Capitalist World-Economy, 1730-1840's*, San Diego 1989 (dt. *Das moderne Weltsystem, Bd. 3: Die große Expansion: Die Konsolidierung der Weltwirtschaft im langen 18. Jahrhundert*, übersetzt von David Mayer, Wien 2004).

railways in Latin America demonstrated that only short lines from the rural hinterland to the harbours at the coast served above all the interest of American fruit companies. The lines did not form a network and they had no connections to neighbouring countries. So, a third outcome of the conference was that most projects at the periphery did not lead to rapid industrialisation as it was thought before construction.

So far this picture fits very well into the theory of Immanuel Wallerstein. The question is still why? The papers about Northern Nigeria from SHEHU TIJJANI YUSUF (Leiden) and EMILIE COTTET DUMOULIN (Savoie) about the European transport backbone via Savoy gave some hints. The complex causes of the increasing world market drove the use of the railways in a certain direction with sometimes astonishing results: the mighty power of the British administration in Nigeria did not have the power to break through their interest against the demands of the world market. In this particular case the Nigerian farmers made advantage of it and shifted the use of railways from transporters foreseen for cotton from the colonial administration to transporters of ground nuts as the indigenous people of North Nigeria were interested in. This is a result one would not have awaited from our understanding of colonial rule. However, this mosaic piece fits very well in the picture of the Indian railways were also the interest of the British colonial administration had dominated the construction of railways but which were then partly transformed to means for the indigenous people which became more mobile by railway use.³ The example of the Savoy region showed in addition the ambivalence of strategic railway routes. Even such corridors or transport axes were successfully introduced this not necessarily must be of advantage for the region in all respect. The region became connected with the centres of industrialisation moreover it became part of the centre itself. But this meant on the one hand less flourishing industry but a decline of its traditional economy as textile and mechanic manufactures which could not stand the competition with producers from other regions. On the other hand the railways opened new perspectives as for example tourism.

Eastern Europe seems to fit in a similar panorama. The conference schedule included a lot of examples as the contributions of IHOR SIOMOCHKIN (Lviv, Ukraine) about railways in Galicia and the Bukovina, IHOR MELNYK (Lviv, Ukraine) about the line from Cracow via Lviv to Czernowitz, ZORIANA MELNYK (Lviv, Ukraine) about the borderlands of Russia and the Habsburg Empire, ANDREJI KISHTYMOV (Minsk, Belarus) about railways to Lithuania, SERGEY LYUBICHANKOVSKIY (Orenburg, Russia) about the Orenburg-Tashkent railway and IHOR ZHALOBA (Kyiv, Ukraine) about the railway network of Galicia. Many of these papers underlined the idea of a limited use of railways in these peripheral regions. In the first run dominated freight transport of raw material from agricultural production and wood and then at second passenger transport and its effects for mobility and migration. All these railways were more or less related to rural regions.

The discussion about this aspect was intensified by the papers of GABOR JEGER (Miskolc, Hungary) on the role of narrow gauge railways for the rise of rural regions in Hungary and of STEFAN BRAUCKMANN (Hamburg) who contributed on the role of narrow gauge lines in a country of the core, Germany. All presenters agreed that the high expectations of the beginning were not fulfilled. The gap between the core of Europe and the centre was not closed up to World War One. But although we find impressive examples of a heavy industry in the Don region of Ukraine and of course in Czech, parts of Hungary and Poland later on this type of industry unfold its dynamic when the industry in the West already turned to new dimension and even more complex structure of different kind and the gap between the economy of the core and the periphery remained stable. This is a second outcome that would fit in the painting drawn by Immanuel Wallerstein.

The conference had further inspiring results: IRYNA AHIYENKO (Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine) spoke about the „Emergence of a

³ Diane Drummond: Britische Erzählungen über den imperialen Fortschritt durch den Eisenbahnbau und die Reaktionen der Völker in Indien und Afrika darauf (1850 bis 1939), in: Zeitschrift für Weltgeschichte 12 (2011), 2, S. 107–140.

railway network in Ukrainian lands” and of the political role of railway jubilees in present Ukraine. NADJA WECK (Vienna) contributed together with IHOR ZHUK (Lviv, Ukraine) to the main railway station of Lviv and representatives of the city who presented an overview of the future planning for the station rounded up long series of papers and demonstrated that cities in this region served as Wallerstein would have put it as a core to the periphery and a periphery to the core.

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Conference overview:

Ralf Roth (Goethe-University, Frankfurt, Germany): Introduction into the conference

A. At the periphery of the World and of Europe

Andreas Beer (University of Rostock, Germany): The Great longing for Railways in Latin America

Emilie Cottet Dumoulin (University Savoie, France): When the railway must turn a periphery backbone of European transit : the case of Savoy (1850-1880)

Shehu Tijjani Yusuf (University Leiden, The Netherlands): The Great Longing for Railways’: How the Baro-Kano Railway connected Northern Nigeria with Centre’s of Industrialization

B. Regions in Eastern Europe Part I Ukraine

Ihor Siomochkin (Ukrzakhidproektrestavratsiya, Lviv, Ukraine): A Railway Connection between Galicia and Bukovina

Iryna Ahiyenko (Dnepropetrovsk National University of Railway Transport, Ukraine): The emergence of a railway network in Ukrainian lands: outlining a chronological framework

Ihor Melnyk (Halytska Brama newspaper, Lviv, Ukraine): Attempts to Incorporate the Cracow – Lwow – Czernowitz Railway into the Transcontinental Line to India

Ihor Zhaloba (National Aviation University, Kyiv, Ukraine): Railways in Galicia

C. Regions in Eastern Europe Part II others

Iosif Marin Balog („George Baritiu” Institute of History Cluj-Napo, Romania): Between centre and periphery: the role of connecting Transylvania to the Railways Network of the Habsburg Monarchy in the Mid-Nineteenth Century

Zoriana Melnyk (Ukrainian Catholic University, Lviv, Ukraine): Railways in Imperial Borderlands: A Comparison of the Russian, and the Austrian Case

Andreji Kishtymov (Institute of Parliamentary and Enterprise Development, Minsk, Belarus): Polessie roject - Lithuanian Railways

Sergey Lyubichankovskiy (Orenburg State Pedagogical University, Russia): „CARAVAN TRACK” RESTORATION: The Orenburg-Tashkent railway and its influence on development of the Orenburg region

D. Connecting Rural Regions

Gabor Jeger (University of Miskolc, Hungary): Relationship between the narrow gauge railways and the rise of rural regions in Hungary

Stefan Brauckmann (University of Hamburg, Germany): Connecting rural areas – The Prussian „Kleinbahnen” [light railways] and the railway infrastructure company Lenz&Co 1892–1945

Roman Konchakov (Tambov State University, Russia): Railway construction in the Central Black Earth Region: High Hopes, and First Disappointments

E. Lviv: a Centre and its Station

Nadja Weck (University of Vienna, Austria): The Railway Station as Stage. Reports on the Opening of the new Train Station in Lviv’s Daily Press

Ihor Zhuk (Ukrainian Catholic University, Lviv, Ukraine): Ludwik Wierzbicki - engineer,

architect, researcher, public figure

Yuriy Kryvoruchko (Chief Architect of the Lviv City Council, Lviv, Ukraine): Reconstruction and reorganization of the territory, adjacent to the Railway Station in Lviv

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