

A Pan-European, competitive public transport system

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History

Appearing at the World Society for Ekistics Symposium in Berlin, October 2001, precisely 30 years after having entered the postgraduate class at the Athens Center of Ekistics, meant so much more than nostalgia. It meant the possibility to close a wide circle, coming back to those ekistic principles which more or less have guided me through my career.

In Athens I studied Ekistics, of course, and especially the Scandinavian branch of the Ecumenopolis concept. This pro-

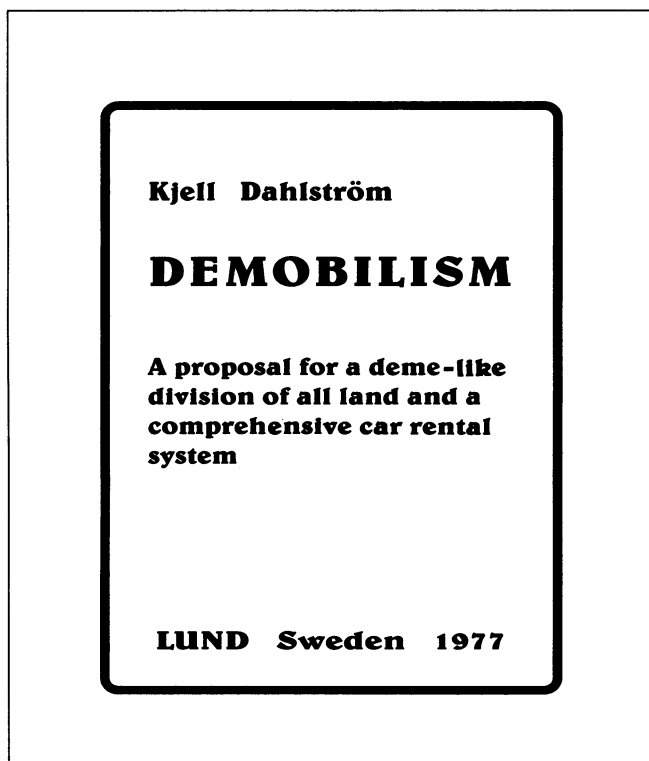


Fig. 1: A Pan-European, competitive public transport system.

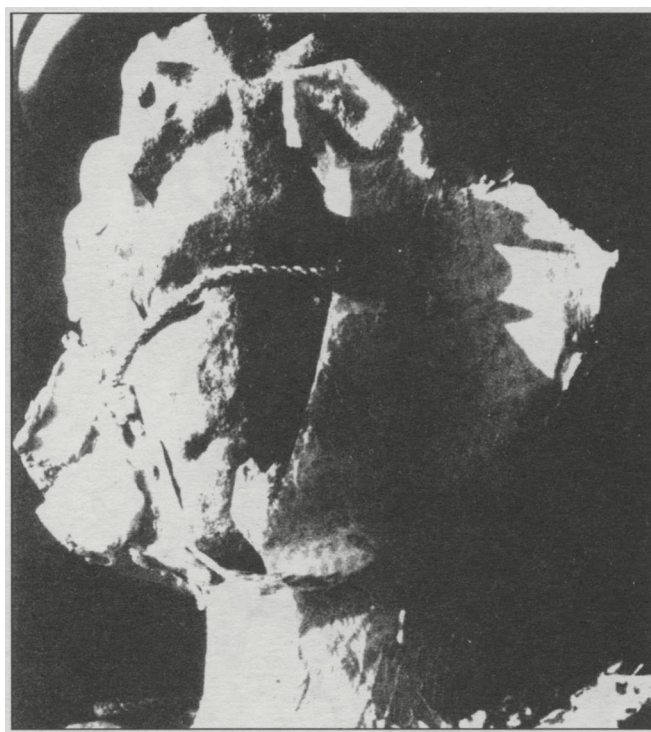


Fig. 2: The Caryatids, who had supported the Erechtheion on the Acropolis in Athens for 2,500 years, had deteriorated so rapidly in the last 25 years, due to fossil-powered automobilism, that they had to be replaced in the 1970s by plastic models. Which should have been moved – Cars or Caryatids?

duced as a result a paper on The Scandinavian Capital Triangle where I argued for a somewhat revised setting of Ecumenopolis in Scandinavia.

After my year in Athens 1971-1972, I wrote my thesis at the Department of Architecture, Lund, Institute of Technology. The title of the English summary of the thesis – *Demobilism* – was a play on words (fig. 1).

The first part played on the Greek word *Demos* (municipality or people) as the thesis analysed and argued for neighborhood planning ideas. The last part played on the word "mobile" because a proposal for a car-pooling system was launched in the thesis and supported by an actual car-pooling experiment. There was of course a criticism involved around the automobile society which was depicted by the wounded Caryatid at the Erechtheion in the 1970s – Cars or Caryatids? (fig. 2).

I continued by carrying out research projects on car rental

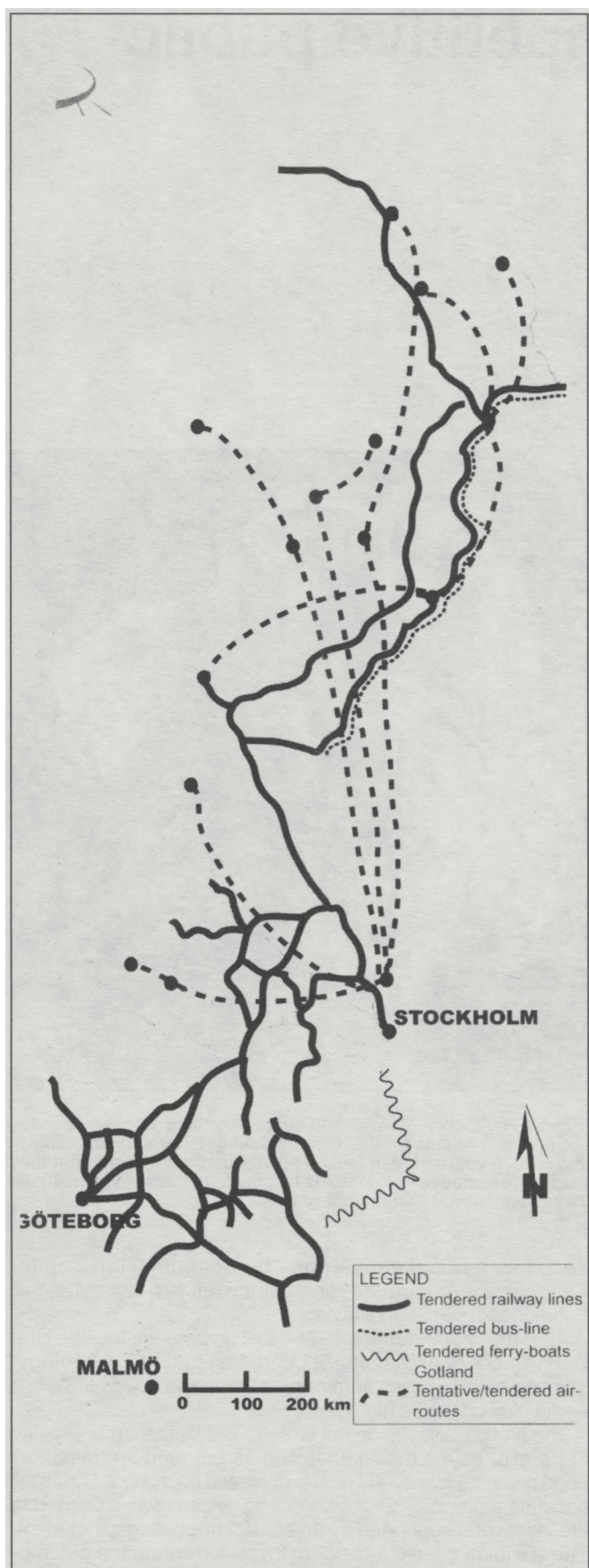


Fig. 3: Tendered lines by different modes of passenger transportation in Sweden.

and car-pooling systems. Today these ideas are developing rapidly in residential areas and towns in many parts of the World. They are also closely linked to Public Transport in the current concept of Mobility Management.

Through the 1980s and 1990s I worked with the Green Party in Sweden as Party Secretary, a deep experience in all aspects. The physical basis of Ekistics certainly has links to green thinking and a sustainable development of all human settlements and infrastructure.

After two decades of politics I have now, as Director-General of the Swedish National Public Transport Agency since 1999, focused once again on the interplay between transport and settlements as I did 30 years ago in my basic ekistic studies.

The link between ekistic analysis and public transport planning concern

Our authority is placed under the Ministry of Industry. Our duty is to tender passenger transport operations which would not be carried out on a commercial basis and we shall also make cooperation possible between different operators and different modes of transportation. Thus we differ from the only known authority in the European Union which has part of our duty. That is the Strategic Rail Authority in the UK which obviously only deals with tendering of rail service while we also tender bus, air and ferry boat service (fig. 3).

We are concerned with interregional and even cross-border transport while local authorities take responsibility for regional and local transport. The interregional focus makes my present-day map of Swedish interregional links a blueprint of my study in Athens 30 years ago! The further development of Central Place Theory by C.A. Doxiadis in his Ekistic Theory inspired me to study the pattern of regional centers in the southern and by far the most inhabited area of Sweden. The structure I found was the same as many regional scientists have also witnessed, and it is clearly a structure which certainly has to be understood and respected while developing interregional public transport service and making major investments in new infrastructure today (figs. 4 and 5).

Tendering and developing public transport

Tendering public transport operations is a well-known activity in many European regions. When it comes to the national scale, however, we see problems arising. These problems are mainly based in the culture of national monopolies for railway companies. Though a competitive culture is the aim of the European Union, especially France and Germany say their national railway companies, SNCF and DB, are rejecting proposals to change. The Commission has tried to put forward proposals for the railway sector and for "public service obligations" in passenger transport but to my knowledge these efforts have not progressed so far. If traffic jams and congestions are to be combatted efficiently, we certainly need more progressive thinking in the European passenger transport sector as a whole. Networks must be put together over ancient borders. A lot of work is certainly under way in the name of Trans-European Networks (TEN) and heading east in the Commission's process known as TINA (Transport Infrastructure Needs Assessment). We are, however, still waiting for a decisive political will to appear on the European scene if a radical change in the passenger transport sector is to be possible. The immense losses of environmental qualities, capital and human life due to inefficient traffic operations cannot prevail in a Europe which honors the idea of sustainability.

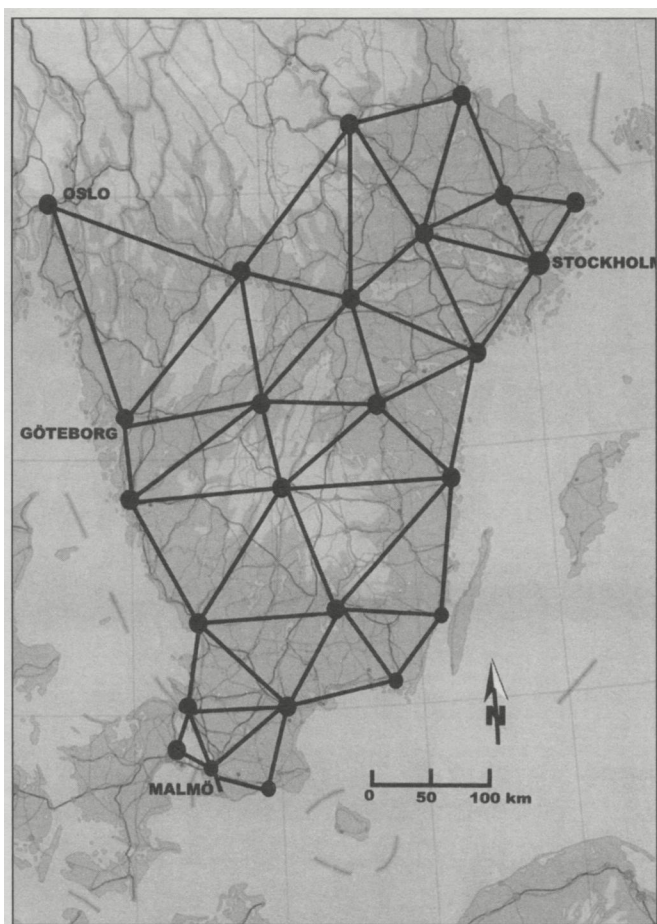


Fig. 4: "The Scandinavian Capital Triangle" study, as developed by the author in Athens at the Athens Center of Ekistics (Source: S-ACE:101:281/30.7.1972), analyzed links between major regional centers.

Passenger transport in Sweden is basically provided on commercial terms and increasingly in a competitive environment. All former monopolies and government enterprises with exclusive rights have been restructured into limited liability companies operating solely on commercial terms. The Agency believes that well functioning competition in all fields of public transport will bring about modernization and development of the industry through new ideas, products and markets and that consumers will benefit from an increased variety of services. However, Sweden is relatively sparsely populated and there are regions with insufficient demand to form a basis for viable commercial traffic. The role of the Agency in this respect is to procure traffic services by public tender following Government approval. Ferry services to the island of Gotland, night trains to the northern part of Sweden, bus services along the northern coast and regular air routes from small inland municipalities to Stockholm are current examples of such tendering (see fig. 3). Tendering proposals are based upon traffic and bottleneck analysis as well as an assessment of alternative means of transport and their accessibility. So far the Agency considers public tendering to be the single most important tool at its disposal to achieve the overall policy aims.

In its long-term vision the Agency foresees a transport market that forms a natural part of people's daily life and where the extent, quality and flexibility of the passenger transport system makes it the main alternative for increasing numbers of people. The Swedish Parliament has, furthermore, decided that all public transport vehicles, platforms and terminals shall be fully ac-

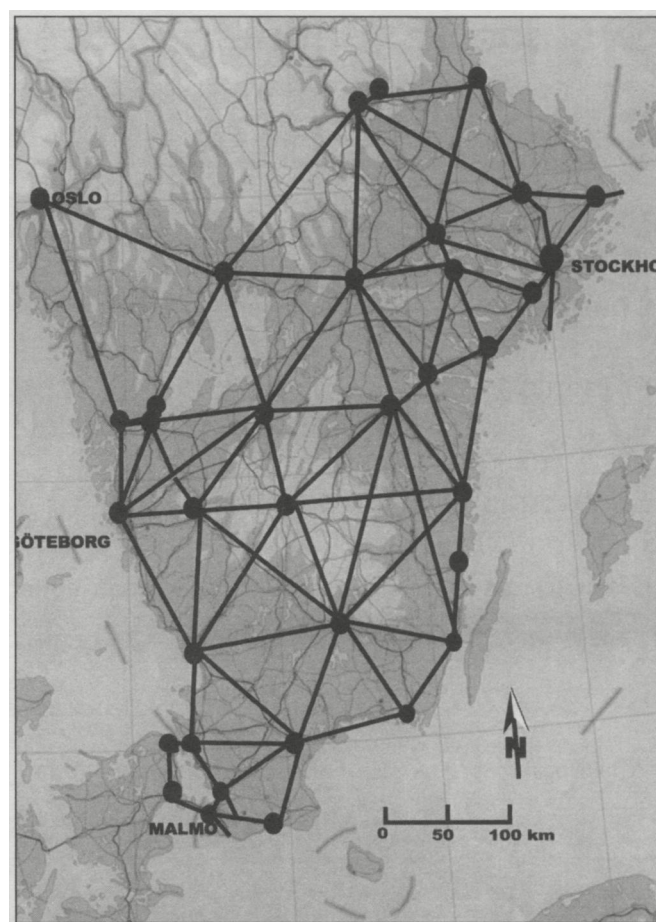


Fig. 5: Interregional Structure of Passenger Transport in south Sweden and adjacent areas, major links as conceived by the author in 2002.

cessible to everybody regardless of any form of disability before 2010. This is of course a great challenge for the entire passenger transport market.

Future – a Pan-European, competitive public transport system

A combination of ekistically based understanding of the structure of settlements and the digital revolution that opens the way for smart ticketing, booking and information is needed to enhance the efficiency of the public transport sector.

More travelling is made over regional and national borders which calls for international solutions. In the Nordic countries a so-called Universal Travel Card Standard is under way. Hopefully you will soon be able to travel by all kinds of transport modes between most destinations by means of a little travel chip that gives you an open access and easy payment. Taking into consideration that this digitally powered service is relatively cheap, it will be possible to expand the public transit market and subsequently bring about a deeper understanding of the benefits of heavy investments in new transport infrastructure.

A coherent public transport system cannot develop within national frameworks but must expand over all borders so that the individual feels free to travel from any origin to any destination. This is the way to challenge extensive automobilism, that is, simply to provide a better, faster, safer, cheaper, more comfortable and accessible system than the traditional private car-ownership.