Planning history of the first half of the twentieth century has long been focused on large-scale projects. Due to research on a great variety of projects such as the Tennessee Valley Authority or utopian «white elephants» such as the Atlantropa project of the German engineer Hermann Sörgel, the «Generalplan Ost» or the efforts of inner colonisation in Europe, our understanding of the alliances between engineering, scientific experts and political power has grown considerably.¹

James C. Scott has described those planning processes as based on a high modernist ideology, which was widely spread among «planners, engineers, architects, scientists, and technicians», and characterised as the will (and the confidence of being capable) to organise and regulate not only technological aspects of the modern world, but also natural, social and (most generally) human aspects of the world in general.² This ideology resembles in many respects the ideology of technocracy, which formed a small but famous movement in the United States as well as in Germany.³ But while the technocracy movement as such was limited to a relatively small number of members, And for «inner colonisation», see L. van de Grift, «On New Land a New Society: Internal Colonisation in the Netherlands, 1918–1945», in: Contemporary European History 22 (2011), 609–626; M. Weiper, «Mehrung der Volkskraft. Die Debatte über Bevölkerung, Modernisierung und Nation 1890–1933», Paderborn et al. 2006, 81–88.

its fundamental ideas became more and more influential. In order to emphasise the wide-spread influence of these ideas, Dirk van Laak has described them as a «background ideology» among scientists and engineers, administrative elites and also some politicians.4

The focus on large-scale projects as well as the ideology of high modernism implies that the first half of the twentieth century was first and foremost the high tide of top-down planning and authoritarian interventions – a conclusion that is undoubtedly correct, in particular with regard to authoritarian political systems such as National Socialist Germany. It is, additionally, often associated with the perception that these planning processes were directed towards a specific spatial concept: the strict separation of different spaces, which were to be internally centralised and homogenised. This form of spatial interventionism is often discussed in relation to the «territoriality» that has been described by Charles Maier as a characteristic of the era between 1860 and 1970. In his classical essay from 2000, Maier identified a global coherence of the era in which the territory itself became an instrument of power. In this period, two aspects of the territory became particularly crucial: the borders and the space within. The political practices of drawing up and strengthening frontiers are unquestioned in their importance for the history of the nineteenth and twentieth century, the era of nation states. Maier, however, puts an emphasis also on the relevance of processes that concern the exploitation of the land within. By means of describing the era of territoriality not only as a period of strict border regimes, but also as one of centralisation processes, he is capable of shedding light on how old, more decentralised forms of power perished and new techniques of maintaining power within the territory appeared and evolved; transport facilities and new forms of governance and administration became more important and were a stabilising factor for the centralised (nation) state.5 Maier’s considerations on the age of territoriality as well as the coinciding reflections about a «spatial turn» in history have inspired many scholars to explore the territorial character of modern states and the relations of power and to analyse border regimes, the construction of (national) spaces by cartographic practices as well as the spatial expansions in imperial and colonial contexts.6 A noteworthy field of interest in the last years has been that of «exceptional spaces». These «exceptional spaces» are territories that were perceived as

6 See J. Döring / T. Thielmann (eds.), Spatial turn.
«empty» or «exploitable», and in which brutal acts of violence took place, such as colonial spaces and peripheries of empires as described by Timothy Snyder. Yet concurrent practices of constructing and exploiting space other than the aforementioned are often disregarded.

This exclusive focus on radical and extraordinary projects ignores, however, the many every-day and moderate planning processes in the first half of the twentieth century, which were not only based on a more complex idea of structured and hierarchical spaces, but also on a specific combination of top-down planning and (small) spaces of self-organisation. Governments as well as regional and local authorities enforced a new internal structure of space during the era of territoriality. These planning processes influenced most aspects of the every-day life of many people and had strong long-term effects. In this contribution, I will focus on these «normal» planning processes, particularly with a view to analyse transport planning. In so doing, I will concentrate on two interrelated problems.

Firstly, I will analyse what types of top-down or bottom-up planning and organisation were put into action in order to realise a rational and smooth transport – and social – order. Secondly, I will scrutinise the spatial concepts on which these planning processes were based. I will thereby ask for the less well-known forms of ordering space behind radical and large-scale projects. Another type of high modernist planning practice also becomes visible: small-scale and more flexible, but by no means a democratic or even congenial form of ordering the social.

The objects of my analysis will be the German and British transport experts. These two national cases seem suitable for the aim of analysing the rather everyday practices of transport expertise, especially concerning the interwar years. When the different transport systems, which had emerged during the nineteenth century, began to converge after the First World War, transport experts in both countries had to cope with the same problem: the growing competition between railways and road transport. Even though the institutionalisation of transport expertise and the political and social contexts differed fundamentally in both countries, no radical different spatial practices took place. Therefore, my argument will not lead to a direct national comparison. Instead, I intend to outline a transnationally existing form of planning, which can help to broaden the perspective on planning history in high modernity.


1. Transport Studies – Development and Stabilisation

The tendency to critically examine transport processes began in both countries during the nineteenth century, coinciding with the expansion of the railway network. Authors such as Friedrich List stressed the politically unifying forces of the railways, which had to be completed by a political union in Germany. Yet the principal problem was the legal and economical alternative of public or private ownership of railways and canals. During the nineteenth century, the idea of publicly owned infrastructure was increasingly supported, in particular in Germany. Conversely, privately owned railway companies were only legally regulated in Great Britain – mostly with respect to security, accountability and accessibility.

Yet the principal problem was the legal and economical alternative of public or private ownership of railways and canals. During the nineteenth century, the idea of publicly owned infrastructure was increasingly supported, in particular in Germany. Conversely, privately owned railway companies were only legally regulated in Great Britain – mostly with respect to security, accountability and accessibility.

While these questions were initially mainly discussed by economists, jurists and politicians, and especially with regard to the railways, the institutionalisation of transport studies as a distinct field of knowledge took place only after the First World War. One factor for this development might have been the experience of a stricter administration of the transport sector during the war. In the immediate aftermath of the war, it seemed thus equally necessary to develop civil forms of a general transport administration, especially because of the growing number of lorries formerly owned by the armed forces. The setting up of governmental transport departments such as the Ministry of Transport in Great Britain and the Reichsverkehrsministerium in Germany were related to an even wider awareness of the importance of transport problems, which later also led to the foundation of specialised transport newspapers as well as institutions in which the emerging group of transport experts organised themselves.

Nonetheless, the specific forms of expertise were quite different. German transport experts were mainly located in newly founded departments for transport studies. In contrast, British experts met at the Institute of Transport, a learned society. These transport experts were primarily practitioners and often worked for transport companies in the administration and management sector. Despite the obvious differences between these institutional forms of expertise, both communities of experts shared some distinct features. Both experts’ cultures can be characterised by a strict habitus of rationality as well as social responsibility: In both countries, the transport specialists believed in serving the common interest with their specialised knowledge.

After the First World War and the first period of institutionalisation, a longer period of difficulties for the new field of expertise began. In Great Britain, the short era of reconstruction ended at the beginning of the 1920s, and the re-organisation of the

The regulation of competition and spatial relations became less important for the governmental and the public interest. The scientific experts in Germany at the University of Cologne, for example, were faced with major financial difficulties. During the 1920s, the experts in both countries sought to stabilise their institutions and to build an audience for their expertise – in transport companies, in public administration and in the political sphere. According to the different political cultures, administrative traditions and styles of expertise, these addressees differed considerably, and consequently so did the planning styles and degrees of intervention. After the great reforms of railway companies in the early 1920s, the scale of transport planning was reduced to a regional or local level until the late 1920s. Subsequently, the growing competition between railways and lorries coincided with the Great Depression, and in this situation, state interventionism and large-scale planning in the transport sector became acceptable again.

These regulative ideas were based on a specific diagnosis of crisis in the transport sector. Many experts perceived an exacerbating social and spatial disorder, for example a growing disequilibrium between rural and urban regions caused by accelerated modernisation processes. Even in rather organisational contexts, this perception of crisis and disorder caused by modernity was the basis of a specific form of interventionism. The organisational task of creating new authorities of transport administration for larger agglomerations like the Ruhr area or Greater London were related to the wider contexts of creating a new order of settlement, spatial decentralisation or prevention of augmenting migration. These attempts to build up a new transport order showed that the experts believed that the problems of industrialisation, urbanisation – in brief, modernity – could be solved.


2. Cornish Milk Logistics – An Unremarkable Example of Transport Planning?

Literary historians have used anecdotes – short, not necessarily canonical texts or fragments – to make relationships, which are otherwise hard to uncover, visible. This approach can be helpful here, too. By analysing and contextualising an unremarkable transport plan as an anecdote, I will show how even this inconspicuous intervention reveals many characteristics of interwar transport discourses, and these are the characteristics that will shed new light on the everyday planning practices and implementations in interwar Europe in a rather different form from radical and large-scale variants.

In 1933, the *Railway Gazette*, a British weekly newspaper for railway professionals, published a rather extensive and richly illustrated article. Entitled «Co-ordinated Transport of Cornish Milk», the article informed the readers of a new milk collecting system, which had recently been established by the Great Western Railway and Nestlé in Cornwall. The piece explained how the collection of more than 7000 gallons of fresh milk from over 600 farms throughout Cornwall was organised on a daily basis in order to transport milk to the central collecting point at Lostwithiel station. Light lorries collected the milk at each farm and brought it to Lostwithiel where a train departed to Nestlé for final processing, bottling and distribution to the consumer.

This new scheme was presented as rational and smooth. For the perfect flow of milk and its transport, Cornwall was subdivided into 24 sectors. Ten sub-centres were established to which the lorries delivered the collected milk before it was finally transported to Lostwithiel. This hierarchical system of grouped sectors and centres on different levels formed a new spatial order of Cornwall. It did not follow any existing patterns, such as the system of administrative regions; instead, it was directly shaped by the requirements set by the milk collecting traffic (Figure 1). Additionally, it covered the whole territory without any overlapping.

The planning process was a great challenge for the railway company and its expert Fulwar C. A. Coventry, the superintendent of Road Transport. It included meticulously collecting necessary information (such as address lists of milk-producing farms), personally inspecting the whole region as well as calculating timetables for lorries. The most important part of the planning process remained, however, the task of locating the lorry centres and traversing the 24 different milk-collecting routes, which had to be allocated to the sub-centres. The combination of new, dispersed and extensive traffic was the major challenge for the planning process, yet it was a great success according to the *Railway Gazette*: «Subject to minor difficulties inseparable from a completely

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new transport system of this magnitude, the scheme soon began to function smoothly and efficiently.»

At first glance, the article seems to deal solely with rational planning in an industrial society, where both the production and the distribution of groceries followed the rationale of logistics and industry. Yet the most interesting part of the article in the *Railway Gazette* is still to be told. According to the newspaper, the artificial spatial regime proved to be able to establish a new form of organisation, namely the self-organisation and co-operation of transport facilities bottom-up. Immediately after the implementation of this new scheme, the first modifications emerged – self-organised, without planning or even permission by the Great Western Railway. The drivers began to use the trains of the Great Western and established a hierarchy of light and heavy lorries. The light vehicles no longer went the whole way to their sub-centre, but only to new, informal collecting and meeting points where the milk was transferred to heavier lorries. While the light ones were able to make a second round to collect more and fresher milk from the farms, the heavier vehicles delivered the milk to a local station where it was transferred to a train, sometimes even a passenger train, heading to Lostwithiel. The spatial system established by the transport expert continued to be used, but the transport flow was now able to bring itself to perfection, self-regulated and self-ordered. The *Railway Gazette* was very impressed by this development.

The article, published in a specialists’ newspaper, might be seen as a negligible episode in the history of logistics. However, its publication in an experts’ journal suggests that the article was intended to present a successful example of how the challenge to form a thorough and extensive organisational pattern for a specific sector was coped with.
with perfectly. These discursive elements have become visible also in other texts by transport experts as well as in political attempts to regulate the transport sector during the interwar years. The anecdote, to follow Stephen Greenblatt, becomes (by thorough analysis) representative for its time and specific context – not by strict parallelising, but by underlining the resonance of the anecdote in other texts. Thus, this strongly condensed singularity about milk logistics in Cornwall reveals the strong conjunction of spatial order and planning, the relation between top-down and bottom-up organisation, as well as of hierarchy and co-operation in transport.

3. The Unity of Transport

The article in the *Railway Gazette* features some major characteristics of the professional transport discourse between the wars. One can identify in this piece, for example, the prominent position of the expert and of the underlying values of empirical knowledge and efficiency for all planning tasks. In this section, I will concentrate on three further characteristics that are displayed in the article: the importance of the unity of transport, the hierarchical spatial structure and the margins for self-organisation.

One important aspect of the anecdote is the practised co-operation of different transport facilities. There is no apparent emphasis on this fact; it rather seemed to be natural that the co-operation of lorries and railways was necessary and desirable to exploit a certain territory. All the available transport facilities were to solve the complex task of milk collecting traffic in Cornwall together: trains (both freight and passenger trains) as well as lorries (light and heavy ones). This is a typical feature of the transport discourse in the interwar years. The creation of a smooth transport system, which overwhelmed all existing forms of traffic and communications, was the greatest challenge for the new field of knowledge.

Transport studies, as outlined by transport experts, covered all forms of transport facilities – railways, air transport, road transport, etc. – as well as transport relations (local and long-distance traffic) and economic forms (the public sector and private enterprises). This required a new definition of transport that would embrace all physical and non-physical, local and mobile, economic, political, and social aspects of traffic and mobility in one concept. As a consequence, transport became described as a social function, constitutive of all sectors of society: social, political, economic and cultural. The German transport expert Carl Pirath suggested an abstract definition of transport in which transport was to assist the three basic functions of social life («Volk», «nation» and «national economy»), whereas the initiator of the British Institute of Transport found a rather catchy picture to outline the invisible and organic nature of transport:

19 Greenblatt, «Erich Auerbach», 79, 87, 98.
Whenever the word Traffic is used, the picture that commonly presents itself to the mind is one of railways and roadways, docks and harbours, canals and inland waterways. I venture to suggest that that is not an altogether adequate mental concept of the term. Traffic as I understand it, is no more locomotives and trains, tramways and omnibuses horsed and power driven vehicles than say cricket is a bat, a ball and a pair of stumps. True, they are the implements of the game; but the game itself, that is the teamwork of a number of men, striving under definite rules and regulations for a common end, utilising the instruments on definite well ascertained principles, designed to achieve the maximum result with a minimum effort.  

Thus, in both expert cultures, the concept of interdependence of all forms of transport was a crucial feature. German scientific experts sought to develop abstract definitions and ensured the coherence of the transport sector with a view to its fundamental social tasks, while in many British statements the coherence of an industrial sector seems to have been of greater importance. But nonetheless, the social charging of transport can equally be found in British contexts.

Both groups of experts favoured interventions in order to ensure that the collaboration between the still competing branches of the industry could be realised. The main field of discussion for transport experts and also the main challenge for the transport policy in the interwar period, even until the early 1960s, was the competition in the transport sector, which was perceived as problematic (at best) or even dangerous (at worst). While this had been quite a subordinated topic around the fin de siècle, when infrastructure provision in the worldwide context was of major importance, it quickly became a major topic in the transport expertise after the First World War – brought about and accompanied by the massive establishment of motorised street transport and the growing importance of efficiency in a situation that was characterised by constant economic problems. The relation between railways and inland water navigation was also discussed quite extensively in the first half of the 1920s (at least in

22 H. H. Gordon, «Manuscript of the address at the first meeting for the foundation of the Institute of Transport», 08/1919. Papers of the late H. H. Gordon relating to the foundation of the Institute of Transport; Archives of the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport, Corby/GB.


25 See van Laak, Imperiale Infrastruktur, 45–99.

Germany) until the «road-rail problem» became the dominant topic in transport debates during the interwar years.  

The main characteristic of the problem was not only the confrontation between old and new transportation technology, but also the difference concerning their economic mode. Railways were subdued to specific political regulations, in particular the system of tariffs and legal obligations such as the «Beförderungs- und Betriebspflicht» of the Deutsche Reichsbahn. In Germany as in Great Britain, the railways were seen neither as a «normal» economic sector nor as an ordinary field of state policy. During the interwar years, both systems – the Staatsbahn-system in Germany and the privately owned railway companies in Great Britain – were altered considerably. This resulted in hybrid forms of private and state ownership (in Germany) and of unbound and politically controlled decision-making and regulation (in Great Britain). In both contexts, the railways were perceived as facilities, which had to serve not only economic purposes, but also the common interest.

On the other hand, the road transport industry in both countries was a highly heterogeneous field of many small and a few bigger enterprises, which often operated on a small revenue base. Notably in the crisis-driven economy of the 1920s, «uncontrolled growth» («Wildwuchs») in the freight companies’ sector was discussed frequently. Smaller companies seemed to cause problems in the transport sector by price-cutting competition to the detriment of the quality of transport, but also to the long-term effects of transport. For example, the economic health of the enterprise in the medium run, the maintenance of infrastructure such as roads, and even a (perceived) healthy regional and social order seemed to be challenged by the short-term freight competition furthered by small companies. Therefore, the conflict between railway and road traffic was quickly interpreted as a conflict between the common good («Gemeinwohl») and self-interest («Eigenwohl»). While railways were seen as safeguarding the public interest, road transport enterprises seemed to epitomise egoism, greed and the dark

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29 After the First World War, the former Ländereisenbahnen (federal railways) were united under the central control of the Reichsverkehrsministerium (national transport ministry). In 1924, the Deutsche Reichsbahn became partly independent when it was transformed into a state-owned enterprise («Deutsche Reichsbahn-Gesellschaft»). See M. Pohl / S. Kill, «Von den Staatsbahnen zur Reichsbahn 1918–1924», in: L. Gall / M. Pohl (eds.), Die Eisenbahn in Deutschland. Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart, München 1999, 71–107.
side of capitalism. In Germany, this conflict was immediately interpreted as an existential one, whereas the crisis diagnosis in Great Britain was slightly weaker. Nonetheless, in Great Britain, structural changes in the transport sector were equally conceived as a problem; the idea was to pacify the perceived conflict by means of putting the whole transport sector into a new order. In 1929, the Royal Commission on Transport was appointed to develop constructive suggestions on how «the problems arising out of the growth of road traffic» could be solved.\textsuperscript{33}

In most historiographical contexts, these approaches to establishing a new order in the transport sector are analysed and interpreted only as economic regulations. As a result, the main points of interest are the tariff schemes, the systems of licensing and the interventions in the organisational structure of transport companies, which were politically implemented in the 1930s and 1940s in Great Britain and Germany.\textsuperscript{34} Considering the Cornish Milk anecdote, however, the problem of competition in the transport sector can also be interpreted with respect to the underlying spatial concepts. In the success story in Cornwall, no competition could be observed between the different facilities. On the contrary, the system was based on the division of labour between railways and lorries. This division of labour was the Holy Grail that both groups of transport experts were looking for: to organise all available means of transport in such a way that there would be no competition and oversupply, no parallel services and no regions without any connection. The Cornwall anecdote can be defined as a small-scale example for an existing ideal transport organisation: a «Verkehrseinheit» or a «co-ordinated transport system»\textsuperscript{35}.

4. The Structure of Space

The co-ordinated transport system, as it was presented in the Cornwall example and as it was sought to be realised in many other contexts, was based on a hierarchical spatial order. At the first glance, the most important characteristic of the spatial regime of milk collection traffic seems to be the fact that no transport route was overlapping another one. It was an efficient system without any oversupply on the one side or any undersupply on the other. The new transport network covered the whole territory.

citing Vogt, one of the Reichsbahn presidents, who believed that common interest and the interest of the Reichsbahn were naturally the same.

\textsuperscript{33} «The Royal Order», reprinted in: Royal Commission on Transport, \textit{Final Report}, VII, VIII; citation VII.

\textsuperscript{34} Aldcroft, \textit{British Transport}, esp. 30–95; A. Zatsch, \textit{Staatsmacht und Motorisierung am Morgen des Industriezeitalters}, Konstanz 1993.

This important characteristic notwithstanding, the more interesting aspect of this transport regime is the hierarchy on which the system was based. It cannot be reduced to a simple centralisation pattern. In fact, the spatial regime was more complex because it was based on a multi-level hierarchy. Each individual farm was part of one (and only one) sector that was served by one lorry; each two or three of these sectors were related to one sub-centre. The result was a complex system of hierarchies and interconnections, which was not only able to exploit the whole territory; it was also able to realise an economic order of transport without any competition.

The relationship between spatial aspects and co-operation problems lies in the fact that the main lines of competition did not run solely between collective and individual transport facilities, between regulated enterprises and free market economy, between «public» and «private» interests. Furthermore, the opposition between road and rail was also perceived as one of the spatial effects: the independent and private road transport served the short-distance exploitation of space, while politically regulated rail transport was considered for long distances and the effective linkage of centres. Thus, the attempts to establish a co-ordinated transport economy were strongly linked to the idiosyncratic concept of spatial order on which the transport discourse was based. An important component of this underlying discursive structure was the fact that both forms of transport were seen as indispensable. Therefore, the aim was to establish a new balance between the different transport functions as well as transport facilities – and particularly not to bring the old railway monopoly back into being. The equilibrium could, according to the transport experts, only be achieved in a strictly hierarchical system, in which the most important lines and the cheapest infrastructure were combined.

All transport facilities were – according to the basic paradigm of transport studies – seen as a vital part of the overwhelming transport system; every part thus had to serve different tasks. Transport was not interpreted as a kind of space compression, as it is sometimes discussed in recent spatial theory. Instead, there were three different spatial functions of transport: connection, exploitation and structuring of space. All of


37 The whole discourse on transport competition was based on a fundamental diagnosis of a crisis, which made waiting for a natural balance impossible. In the contemporary crisis, waiting for a natural equilibrium would cause a severe waste of resources, which were constantly short. This diagnosis also found its way into the definition of unwanted competition: It was a «wasteful» one. R. J. Eaton, The Elements of Transport, London 1936, 53.

them had to be combined in the right way to achieve a rational social order. While there were means of transport whose abilities lay primarily in the linkage of centres (such as mainline railways or air transport), other means seemed to be able to open up distinctive regions – light railways as well as lorries were discussed in this respect. To properly combine these abilities and effects, it was crucial to structure the space correctly – at a global as well as at regional level. Thus, transport experts had to organise transport facilities in such a way that the spatial effects of the different transport media were combined to realise an ideal spatial order.

This difficult task was based on the idea that a specific equilibrium between linking and exploiting transport facilities should be achieved. It was perceived as a great mistake of the nineteenth century that the railways, thus the facilities with the greatest capability of linking two centres, were developed without taking into account the decentralising of transport media such as light railways or road transport facilities. The furious process of urbanisation was the result, which now seemed irreversible. Yet the other extreme was not an alternative either – the concentration on those transport facilities, which served to stretch land, would have led to the complete dissolution of all structures. A modern form of economy could not be envisaged without centres of commerce and production, and, moreover, to concentrate on de-centralising transport facilities would have been very costly given the lower effectiveness and higher costs of the area-serving facilities such as lorries or light railways. Even the construction of the Reichsautobahn was critically discussed in respect of its spatial effects. The showcase project of the national-socialist transport policy was suspected of causing new centralising processes.

Thus, every transport system in a distinct space had to solve two different problems: it had to exploit the whole space and to avoid all uneconomic oversupplies simultaneously. This seemed to be possible only by a hierarchical order of the different transport facilities, in which the most flexible and lightest vehicles provided the lowest level of exploitation and the most non-elastic means of transport formed the «backbone» of the transport system. Flexibility and elasticity were not only discussed as spatial capa-

bilities – such as the difference between rail-bound and non-rail-bound means of transport – but also as economic ones. And, furthermore, all these differences followed the same lines. On the one hand, there were the privately owned road transport facilities, which were able to react flexibly to new transport requirements or volatile demands. On the other hand, there were the non-elastic main railways.

To sum up, the hierarchy between the transport means, which structured all attempts to solve the problem of transport co-ordination in the interwar years, was a spatial, a technical and an economic one. And I would add: the hierarchical order was also a political one. Publicly controlled railways were seen as the backbone of the whole transport system. They were first and foremost transport facilities that the public administration was able to regulate, and indeed, they were largely governed in a top-down manner. As a consequence of their technical, organisational and legal specifics, they predetermined the spatial pattern of the transport policy. Transport experts were profoundly convinced that this could be considered the natural way of governing spaces by transport systems. Yet apart from the top-down regulation, most transport experts claimed that transport could not be planned entirely. They described their field of expertise as a highly dynamic sector, which could only be managed by a mixture of planning and evolution.

5. Margins of Self-organisation

The core feature of the Cornish success story was the evolution of an even more perfect and smooth transport co-ordination, which started immediately after having finished the planning and implementing process. The system that had been introduced by experts of the railway company proved to be sufficiently flexible to provide margins of self-organisation and development.

The reader of transport experts’ texts from the interwar years will encounter those margins of development quite often – at least more often than most readers would expect when working on a planning discipline at the high tide of authoritarian planning practices. Beyond the fixed lines of inflexible transport infrastructure, many transport experts expected potentials of development. In some cases, this expectation was limited to «new» transport branches, that is, air transport or the «young» road transport.44 Their regulation should leave leeway for development, which would eventually serve the common interest. This argument was predominantly used by representatives of road transport companies and the automobile industry, since they were in the first place interested in avoiding all regulation attempts for the road transport sector.45
Nonetheless, proponents of the railway system – like most of the German transport experts – also used this argument in order to show that some margins were left free of regulation. These margins were normally located at the lowest level of the spatial order, that is, in the sphere of local transport. Local transport relations were hardly schedulable because of their high volatility, and they seemed less pivotal for the national economy than long-distance traffic relations.

Here again, the strong hierarchical relationship between the different transport facilities can be observed, which underlay the transport experts’ discourse. Central traffic needs regarding long distances had to be satisfied, and this required a rational and central planning process. Otherwise, this backbone of traffic system would have overlapped in the more crowded areas and the less inhabited (or industrialised) regions would have been neglected. For a balanced network, central planning accordingly seemed indispensable. In addition to the main lines of transport, a need for feeder services to explore the regions around was expressed. Here, the special abilities of private road transport came into play.

This hierarchical division of labour also had political implications. In both countries, the freight transport industry was brought under a strict regulation system in order to ensure the co-ordination of road and rail in the early 1930s. Under this regulation system, railways were supposed to manage the long-distance traffic, and the road transport industry should carry out the short-distance traffic and feeder services. To ensure this division of labour, only the local range remained free from regulation (and thereby became a sphere of competition), while the regional and national transport was subjected to a strict system of concessions. Long-distance freight routes by lorries were permitted only to the extent that they did not compete with rail routes. The road transport industry might have been perceived as a necessary element in transport, but still subordinate to railways.

6. Conclusion

My main interest in this contribution was to analyse the everyday and small-scale planning processes with the objective of providing insight into how they may contribute to our understanding of interwar planning processes. My analysis results in a bundle of propositions that could partly adjust our picture of planning in the first half of the twentieth century. I intended to show that planning in this period was by no means characterised solely by large-scale, utopian or radical planning attempts. If one analyses the «normal state» instead of the «state of exception», as Timo Luks recently suggested, the scope of intervention practices in this era is widened substantially.
First of all, the expert cultures in Great Britain and Germany show very similar representations and perceptions of space and spatial order. While many recent analyses stress the practices of spatial homogenisation and separation, the analysis of transport expertise has shown that we can find strong efforts to bring space into a new structure by implementing a space hierarchy.

This approach had two prerequisites. Firstly, the differentiation of spaces was only possible due to a holistic representation of transport. Transport was seen as an instrument for re-stabilising the (perceived) chaotic and destabilised transport and social order at the same time, and it made an integrated planning process necessary that had to take into account all existing means of transport. Finally, this idea ensured the coherence in spite of divisions of labour and space.

The second prerequisite was the interlocking of a central, top-down planning process with bottom-up processes of self-organisation and evolution on a lower level. Planning and self-organisation, which had long been considered as antagonists, particularly concerning the supposed anti-liberal era between the wars, were not seen as inseparable approaches for transport experts (and perhaps other protagonists) between the wars. Nonetheless, these two approaches were placed in a clear hierarchical order: self-organisation was only tolerated or desirable a) in consigned spaces, on a local or regional level, and b) only on condition that all undertakings were serving the higher goal of transport.

Beyond these similarities, the two national examples show different forms of acceptance for the (supposed) essential spheres of self-organisation. The German case shows an attitude of mere tolerance because complete planning was considered impossible, while British experts (and transport politicians) even expressed their willingness to integrate self-organised negotiations between different transport undertakings into the planning process. These rather participatory forms of planning were inconceivable in Germany – despite many corporative political structures in Weimar Germany.

These characteristics of transport planning in both countries differ in many respects from the forms of authoritarian and top-down planning that we know from the analysis of large-scale projects. Does that mean that transport planning was a kind of asynchrony in history, maybe even pointing towards mere postmodern forms of planning and regulation?
In fact, I would suggest the opposite. The attempts to regulate and stabilise a social and transport order, which can be reconstructed through an analysis of transport expertise between the wars, were by no means postmodern. The strict hierarchy of top-down and bottom-up regulations points to a high modernist ideology as well as the exalted position of the expert. Only small ranges of self-organisation were left between the fixed spheres of rational and efficient transport regulation. Therefore, I would propose to analyse these forms of planning attempts also as powerful and high modernist approaches that are related to a distinct social order, which social experts were asked to establish. Even if these forms of everyday and low-scale planning were by no means analogous to those interventions that tried to realise a new and utopian social order by using extreme, authoritarian forms of power, they still influenced social life considerably. These «normal state» planning processes attempted to re-establish a threatened order in the normal spaces of society, which became another challenge for planners, and that implied other forms of power and force. Moreover, these planning processes were often accompanied by strict regulations, disciplining norms and strong hierarchies.

Planning Order and Self-Organisation. The Regulation of Competition and Spatial Relations in Interwar Transport Expertise

Planning practices in high modernity are often analysed as authoritarian and top-down interventions. This interpretation is derived from the concentration on large-scale planning projects. By investigating small-scale and everyday transport planning examples, this article tries to enhance our understanding of high modern planning practices. Transport planning during the interwar years was meant to establish a transport regime in which all means of transport were put into a rational relation to each other. This was only possible by building up a spatial order in which different spatial functions – connecting places, opening up regions and structuring spaces – were placed in a hierarchical order. Hence, the planned spaces often displayed a hierarchy of top-down and bottom-up organisational patterns. This should by no means be regarded as a form of pre-postmodern fascination for self-organisation of order out of chaos. On the contrary, these planning projects, too, reveal strictly defined power relations, even if their objectives and methods cannot be put on a par with famous large-scale projects.

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ABSTRACT