



CALL FOR PAPERS

Urbanization and Nordic cities: governance, mobility, and transport in 1860-2020: how the modern Nordic city can be understood in a comparative European perspective.

2nd International Conference on Nordic Town History and 1st National Conference on Finnish Urban History

Time: 10–12 April 2024

Place: Vantaa City Hall, Finland

Dear Nordic and Finnish urban and planning historians,

It is great honor to welcome you to attend the 2nd International Conference on Nordic Town History (NTH–2024), which will be held in Vantaa, Finland from April 10–12, 2024, to mark the 50th anniversary of Vantaa as a city. The conference is free-of-charge, and we expect to be able to provide accommodation and meals for accepted speakers. In addition, it may be possible to contribute to travel costs for accepted speakers, though we hope most participants will be able to obtain travel support from their home institutions.

The International Conference on Nordic Town History (NHT–2024) is intended to provide a professional platform for scholars and historians from different Nordic countries, who are doing research and exploring various aspects of urban and planning history, taking place in Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Iceland

and/or comparatively in the northern Europe and Scandinavia. NTH–2024 will invite experts from Nordic universities and city museums and other urban research institutions to share their research ideas. We prefer presentations which have a clear link to themes and questions mentioned in the proposal below.

If you are interested in attending this conference, please submit your speech title and abstract to pirjo.ovaskainen@helsinki.fi by the end of October

Looking forward to meeting you in Vantaa, Finland!

Background

In 2024, the City of Vantaa will celebrate its 50th anniversary as a city. Founded as a municipality already in 1865, this old settlement of Helsing Socken became Helsing (*landskommun*), the rural municipality in the Helsinki area. The railway hub of Malmi became the administrative centre of this municipality. Later, in 1972, the municipality was renamed Vantaa / Vanda and promoted to the status of a market town (*köping*) with name Vantaan kauppa / Vanda köping. In 1974, the town became a full city with the name of Vantaan kaupunki / Vanda stad or "City of Vantaa". The name refers to the river Vantaa running through the city, along which settlements in the area were originally centred. The 650th anniversary of Vantaa was celebrated in 2001. Based on population figures, Vantaa is today the fourth biggest city in Finland.

Vantaa offers an excellent setting for Nordic urban historians to discuss the different aspects of urbanization in Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland, Iceland. Since the mid-19th century and municipal reforms, both the interest in towns as well as their functions changed considerably. In recent years, the concept of urbanity has re-emerged, crediting especially the capital cities or metropolitan areas with a leading role in their societies' modernisation. The role of second, third, fourth and fifth cities need more investigation in this process. Therefore, we wish to discuss the wider frames for urban developments in the next level of modernizing the growing cities and smaller towns after the municipal reforms in the 19th century and until today.

Conference Programme

In this conference we will explore the history of modern city in the Nordic context from the gradual introduction of the modern municipal governance – as the local administration started to grow and political decision-making to develop – until the early 21st century, when towns, cities and municipalities are the core bodies of modern welfare services. We privilege three wide themes, helping to focus on the differences and similarities between the Nordic cities. These themes are:

- Migration and social mobility in cities
- Transport system and urban modernization (railroads, ports, and airports as agents of social, economic, and cultural shifts)
- Means of urban self-governance and state politics

Migration and social mobility: Mobility and migration are constituting elements of all urban societies. We are taking as a starting point the fact, that many cities in Northern Europe (before and after the era of industrialization) attracted internal migrants in search of social mobility, from all rural areas. In addition, cities from early times have attracted external, ethnic movers who have played a key role in urban networking and innovation across the region. Migrants, both local and more distant, face problems of insertion into a unequal urban society. We are interested in following questions:

- What trends in urban migration, whether internal or international, that were shared by Nordic countries?
- What are the problems that migrants face in urban insertion? What are the main pathways and mechanism of integration?
- What is the role of governments and municipal authorities as key actors in trying to manage migration?
- How has migration influenced urban planning and city formation?

Transport: The nineteenth century witnessed profound transformations in urban planning and form as the (mainly) wooden town of the nineteenth century gave way to the expansive, industrialized city of the twentieth century. At the core of this transition was the railroad and the port, and later, the airport, binding cities together in new ways. A modern type of urbanism developed: railroad, port, and airport urbanism, with new kinds of public buildings and spaces (the terminal station, modern port pavilions and airports) which influenced greatly the urban fabric in all Northern countries, as elsewhere in the world. Some of these developments have in turn been challenged since the 1960s by the rise of the private motorcar and problems of parking etc. We hope to get papers and answers to following questions:

- How did the changes in transport system influence the planning of cities and towns?
- How has port and railway decline promoted new planning initiatives?
- What was(is) the role of ports, railway stations, and airports in shaping and structuring the urban system and contributing to regional development?
- How has urban transport shaped our image of the city?
- What are the environmental impacts – air, water, and noise pollution – of urban transport?
- What are the economic spinoffs of urban transport? The impact on industry, services?

Self-governance and the state: During the 19th century, in all Northern European countries the idea of municipal self-governance expanded, resulting with the introduction of many new urban and social services. The following period (1850–1920) experienced a renaissance for the idea of the city as a politically autonomous community. Urban administration incorporated various types of public services that had previously been organized by the private sector. Municipalities had a crucial role in creating a stronger public sector in all Northern European countries, whereas the state took later on this role as a legal guarantee of the Nordic Welfare society. In the late 20th century, this trajectory was redirected in favor of deregulation and privatization of public services. We hope to get papers discussing following aspects:

- How were the municipal infrastructure services developed in the urban core and in the fringe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries?
- How, when, and why did the state start to intervene urban developments?
- The role of the private sector in urban governance from the 19th century to the present?

Significance of Conference

Our themes are best answered in a comparative perspective as well as by creating a dialogue between urban historians and scholars from other fields and disciplines. Although our focus is the Nordic region we are also interested in contributions from other researchers from Northern Europe. We can call this the common urban history of the North. This conference offers a much-needed platform to discuss the role of the North and its urban development in comparison with the rest of Europe. Traditionally, the northern Europe found itself in the periphery and, which despite its importance in economic terms perceived itself as lacking, not the least with regards to its urbanity. The North comprises of different historical regions, which always stayed in close geographical contact. It was marked by economic, political, and cultural empires like the German and Danish colonization, the Hansa, the Swedish and Russian Empires. At long last, it was divided during the Cold War. After 1989, the North was reshaped, filled with new meanings, referring to its role in the past as a kind of role model for the future. The cities have played an important role in this development and created different kind of networks and twinning city relations throughout the history.

The first Nordic urban historians meeting was arranged in Stockholm 2019, by invitation of the Swedish Institute of Urban History. This institute was established in 1919 by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR). The next conference in Vantaa in 2023 wants to explore the role of Nordic towns in a historical and comparative perspective and be more specific with the themes. There might not be a typical “Nordic town”, but there are certainly similarities, due to exchange relations, common for many towns in the North. The conference is also meant to strengthen the dialogue and a long-term cooperation between town historians from different nations, belonging to the North. Their different historical interests and backgrounds in city and town cultures will help to intensify the dialogue and the common interest in town history. A good start in Stockholm was paused by the global pandemic in 2020–2022.

The conference invites papers on town history of the North, from all historical periods, preferably with a comparative approach. The conference will take place in April 2024 in Vantaa (dates to be confirmed). The conference language is English. The organizers will aim to subsidize the participation of scholars, particularly younger scholars. Attendance at sessions will be open to members of the public, including members of learned societies.

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Organizers: Vantaa City Museum, URBARIA: Helsinki Institute of Urban and Regional Studies and Institute of History, University of Helsinki

Organizing committee:

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