

Networking Europe: Transnational Infrastructures and the Shaping of Europe, 1850–2000. *Edited by Erik van der Vleuten and Arne Kaijser*. Sagamore Beach, Mass.: Science History Publications, 2006. vii + 335 pp. Index, notes, illustrations, maps, figures. Cloth, \$47.50. ISBN: 0-881-35394-9.

Reviewed by Christian Stadler

As the European Union has expanded over the past fifty years, interest in transnational networks and their effect on the political, economic, and social makeup of Europe has grown. Yet because scholars have done little research on the phenomenon of European networks, the subject has not received the attention it deserves.

The Channel Tunnel between France and England, which was officially inaugurated in 1994, exemplifies the ambiguities and tensions that can surround transnational projects. A tunnel between the two countries was first proposed in 1750, but the plan was abandoned when the Napoleonic wars broke out around 1800. Other attempts to connect the two land masses were made, most notably in the 1880s, when drilling began on both sides of the channel. Strategic concerns raised by the British military and technical problems brought this initiative to a halt. A more recent attempt was derailed by the British trade unions in the 1970s. When the link between the United Kingdom and the continent was finally established a decade later, it did not end the controversies. In fact, the project only became possible because it was presented as a purely economic endeavor, thereby avoiding the sensitive issue of European integration. Nevertheless, it is clear that the tunnel's effects extend beyond the economic sphere, and the debate over whether it is a bilateral or a "European" project continues to reverberate on both sides of the water.

Erik van der Vleuten and Arne Kaijser, the editors of this collection, recognize the role of material networks in shaping society, and they have tried to do justice to this important topic by bringing together a mix of both young and experienced scholars from different parts of Europe. The contributors apply a range of perspectives to their considerations of the political and economic impact of transnational linking, nonlinking,

delinking, and relinking between countries during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The collection consists of four parts. Three sections comprise case studies, while the fourth consists of an article by Erik van der Vleuten on the commingling of technology and societal change.

The authors in part one are concerned with the geopolitical implications of the railway and the telegraph. Aristotle Tympas and Irene Anastasiadou survey the development of the Greek railroad and its effect on both military and economic fortunes. Ana Paula Silva and Maria Paula Diogo explore networks and political power in their essay on Portugal's telecommunications policies. Originally, Portugal permitted only Britain to use its islands and colonies for relay stations, but, with the outbreak of World War I, the Portuguese began to allow other countries to participate in the network, a decision that brought its own complications. Finally, Judith Schueler writes about the importance of Switzerland's Gotthard rail tunnel to the country's identity.

The essays in part two are about electricity projects. Alexander Gall discusses the Atlantropa, which was conceived in 1930 as a dam that would stretch across the Strait of Gibraltar and unite two continents, generating electric power that would equal the combined production of all European hydropower plants. Helmut Maier describes how the Nazis introduced the concept of large-territory technology (*Grossraumtechnik*) as part of their plan to construct a new Europe.

The influence of political realities is again evident in the essays in part three, which consider network building during the cold war and after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Pär Blomkvist writes about the International Road Federation, a U.S. industry initiative that lobbied for road planning in postwar Europe, both on an international (United Nations Economic Committee for Europe) and a national level (e.g. government of Sweden). The limits to the influence that can be wielded by supranational organizations are revealed in Léonard Laborie's analysis of the Conference of European Postal and Telecommunications Administrations, which brought together national postal and telecommunications managers in order to encourage them to surrender some of their authority to enable a more efficient connection of national networks. This goal was thwarted by the clash of protectionist national interests. Geert Verbong's article reveals a similar outcome in attempts to establish transnational electricity flows between Holland,

Belgium, and Germany. A particularly interesting overview by Per Högselius of transnational networks in the Baltic region completes this section. The author describes how the region was cut off from the West under Soviet rule. Then, in the 1980s, leaders of the Baltic independence movements began to reconnect with the West and to promote ideas about clean energy that they said they would rely on the West to carry out. This campaign, however, turned out to be primarily a political tool to move closer to the West. Once independence was achieved, interest in clean energy quickly subsided. The large power plants and power exports to Russia were now considered to be of economic importance overruling any environmental concerns.

In part four, Van der Vleuten rounds out the empirical case studies with his essay examining the concept of large technical systems. He describes the work that has been done in the field, pointing out that a good deal of research remains to be done, but he does not move beyond the concepts himself.

The study of transnational networks and the impact they have had in Europe was an ambitious undertaking. In the interests of space, however, the editors had to narrow their focus in two ways. First, they excluded networks that did not cross national boundaries; and, second, they avoided detailed discussions of the long-term interactions among different networks, allocating little space to socioeconomic trends. While both guidelines make sense, I would still like to have learned more about how the networks interacted, as this is how they can be best understood in all their richness and complexity. An alternative approach might have been to cover a narrower region, limiting their geographic definition of Europe and allowing more space for detailed discussion of network interactions.

In conclusion, I found this to be a well edited, successful collaboration by a diverse group of scholars. Scholars interested in networks will find it an informative and well written account.

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*appeared in “The Four Principles of Enduring Success,” published in the July/August 2007 issue of Harvard Business Review*