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A profession in change

Wallengren, Hans; Ottosson, Mikael

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Truckers

A profession in change



Mikael Ottosson &
Hans Wallengren (eds)

Skrifter från Centrum för Arbetarhistoria 10

Truckers

A profession in change

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The picture shows the truckers Djordje Sadiković and to the right Ebbe Bengtsson, representing the Malmö-based hauling firm GP-Last at a truck meet that occurred sometimes in the early to mid-1980s.

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Truckers

A profession in change: some introductory remarks

Mikael Ottosson & Hans Wallengren

Like everything else, this anthology has its history. For several years, research has been conducted on truck drivers' changed working conditions at the Center for Labor History at Lund University. During this time, several seminars, workshops and more or less unorganized conversations between different researchers have been carried out. Early in 2017, a number of researchers from different disciplines and countries, professional drivers and trade union representatives, gathered in Landskrona to discuss topics like working conditions and work environment in the trucking industry, field technologies and fleet management, gender and trucking, truck driver culture, truckers in popular culture, etc. at a two-day symposium. Some of the texts presented at this symposium have been collected in the following edited volume. The authors have different backgrounds (truck drivers and researchers), which means that the texts have somewhat different characters and designs.

The overall objective of this edited volume is to discuss how the truck driver profession has changed over time, and how underlying processes are related to changes in the industry of commercial transportation as well as to societal changes in general. The period covered by the articles ranges from the 1960s up to now. One basic idea that connects the included chapters is that changes in contemporary working life consist of a number of interwoven conditions and processes and that these, for example neoliberalism, transnationalism and gender order, can be made visible by focusing on a specific profession from different perspectives. As a consequence, the chapters are not linked together by overarching research questions, or a shared disciplinary perspective, but rather by the object under study – the truck driver.

The structural changes that working life in general is undergoing are tangible, or even dramatic, in a wide range of labor market segments. But in our view, the trucking industry is probably one of the industries where “the new working life” can be particularly noted.¹ Our starting point is that the mobile character of the work performed by truck drivers makes visible these changing

1 An assumption based on e.g. Michael Allvin et al., *Work without boundaries: psychological perspectives on the new working life*. Oxford 2011; Dale L. Belman et al., *Trucking in the Age of Information*, Dale Belman & Chelsea White III (eds.), New York 2018; Michael H. Belzer, *Sweatshops on Wheels: Winners and Losers in Trucking Deregulation*. New York 2000; Beatrice Lindqvist & Mats Lindqvist, *När kunden är kung: Effekter av en transnationell ekonomi*, Umeå 2010; Mikael Ottosson & Calle Rosengren, “The Construction and Demonization of the Lazybones”, *Fast-capitalism* 2015:11 (1); Carl Ulrik Schierup et al., *Migration, citizenship, and the European Welfare State: a European Dilemma*, Oxford 2006.

structural conditions. Trucks have increasingly become digitalized and connected to the Internet, and transportation companies and forwarders have been integrated into international transport systems. This changes the social relations of work in a fundamental way. A further reason for our interest in truck drivers is the tension between these structural changes and the specific culture of the profession. Truckers are blue-collar laborers, historically often with a rural background. Poorly educated rural men in the countryside have for many years found opportunities to make a living by purchasing a truck or starting work as a driver for a local trucking firm owned by a relative, a neighbor or a friend. Historically, trucking has been part of a self-contained cultural context, premised on dreams of independence and autonomy.² The recruitment has traditionally been socially narrow, the work is done in solitude and the drivers mostly meet other drivers on ferries and truck stops.³ Factors that work towards both a construction of a professional identity and a construction of social and cultural self-exclusion. In this context, drivers have defined themselves in relation to society in general, for example to police officers and government representatives.⁴

An additional reason to be interested in truck drivers is the workplace itself. The trucks are rolling around and the drivers' work is performed on highways and country roads. In one way or the other, trucking is characterized by its mobility and spatial movement. Road carriers, forwarders, customers and authorities have therefore had difficulties monitoring and controlling the drivers. This situation has on the one hand resulted in a high degree of decision-making autonomy. On the other hand, it has also resulted in the emergence and preservation of a somewhat wayward and masculine culture. As Karen Levi puts it, the truckers perform their work "in a hypermasculine workplace."⁵ To be able to carry out this performance of work, normative knowledge and ability are required – both linked to class and gender. Truckers are without doubt blue-collar working class – but they are this in their own specific way.

Even if it's a story of interwoven processes, and we are thus at risk of oversimplifying actual conditions, the discussions in this volume can be grouped into the following three themes: (1) *deregulation, transnationalism and flexibility*, (2) *digitalization and field technologies* and (3) *trucking – a male working-class arena*. These three themes will be presented below in the form of brief overviews.

Deregulation, transnationalism and flexibility

As a result of the development of the transnational economy, long-haul freight transport has become increasingly important at the same time as the commercial transportation market in the Western economies has been deregulated. For the transportation industry, this has meant an increased importance of flexibility. As discussed by, for example, Shane Hamilton and Mikael Ottosson, in their respective chapters, the "just-in-time" idea with trucks used as "rolling stocks" has led to an increased use of digitalized management of both trucks and drivers. In critically orientated transportation research, this development has been seen as a potential threat to, for example, road sa-

2 Eddy Nehls, *Vägval. Lastbilsförare I fjärrtrafik – perspektiv på yrkeskultur och genus*, Göteborg 2003, pp. 58-62.

3 Shane Hamilton, *Trucking Country. The Road to America's Wal-Mart Economy*, New Jersey 2008, p. 201.

4 Lotta Pettersson, *Frihet under kontroll: Om kontroll i åkerinäringen*, Stockholm 2009, pp.130-133.

5 Karen E. C. Levy, "Digital surveillance in the hypermasculine workplace", *Feminist Media Studies*, 2016:16 (2), pp. 361-365.

fety and to the environment. In the chapter written by Ragnhild Steen Jensen, Mona Bråten and Kåre H. Skollerud, it is shown that this production concept causes increased flexibility, which in turn affects working conditions, salaries, and, in the end, the power relations in the industry. These changes have been analyzed in studies emphasizing the economic, technical and social consequences of the deregulation of the transport market. Among other things, these studies show that the deregulation resulted in declining wage levels and deteriorating working conditions for both employed drivers and owner-operators.⁶

Digitalization and field technologies

The technological and organizational changes linked to digitization, which started in the 1970s, have led to a radical reversal of human relationships to time and space. Hence through digital technology, our activities are no longer limited to a physical space. From a driver's perspective, however, it is reasonable to believe that digital technology may result in increased stress levels and less control over the working conditions. One of several factors highlighted in research is that increased digitalization and new forms of organization have generally changed the relationship of power to the benefit of the employer.⁷

The truck facilitates a mobile space in which working life and private life merge together, but, at the same time, are kept apart. This relationship is not new; it has always been part of the work environment, culture, and organization of the industry.⁸ As a result of the transition from analogue to digital technology, this environment and culture have, however, changed. Not only the separation of work life and private life, but even the tradition of autonomy is challenged by the fact that digital technologies have the ability to be spatially transcending. In his article, Mikael Ottosson discusses the impact of different communication solutions on the professional culture of truck drivers. As shown in the chapters written by Ljuba Fredenman and Eddy Nehls, the increased digitalization has affected the relationship between drivers and their family and friends, which signals that the technology affects the traditional gender coding of the profession.

Trucking – a male working-class arena

Among truck drivers all over the Western world, the so-called trucking culture had a rather notable presence between the 1960s and the 1980s. This culture can be viewed as a distinct expression of a certain kind of masculinity in which myths about mobility, solitude, and freedom, comparable to those about cowboys, are central. As highlighted in several of the included book chapters, the

6 E.g. Timo Aho, "Driving Through Neoliberalism: Finnish Truck Drivers Constructing Respectable Male Worker Subjectivities", *Masculinity, Labour, and Neoliberalism, Global Masculinities*, Charlie Walker & Steven Roberts (eds.), Cham 2018, pp. 291-293; Hamilton 2008, pp. 207-224; Sebastian Kummer et al., "Flagging out in road freight transport: a strategy to reduce corporate costs in a competitive environment: Results from a longitudinal study in Austria", *Journal of Transport Geography* 2014:36 (1), p. 145.

7 Colette Cuijpers, "ICT and Employer-Employee Power Dynamics: A Comparative Perspective of United States' and Netherlands' Workplace Privacy in Light of Information and Computer Technology Monitoring and Positioning of Employees", *J. Marshall J. Computer & Info. L.*, 2007:25 (1), p. 74; Karen E. C. Levy "The Contexts of Control: Information, Power, and Truck-Driving Work", *The Information Society*, 2015:31, p. 161.

8 Pettersson 2009 pp. 81-126.

trucker culture centered around typical masculine attributes and traditional gender roles, such as individualism, freedom, reliability, responsibility and experience. The professional culture of truckers is projected as a culture characterized by a traditional masculinity, in which the relationship between the man, the truck, and the road are central. As Hans Wallengren shows in his contribution, these properties have also played a prominent role in the popular culture, such as the “trucking music”.

The truck driver culture originates from one of the lower layers in the proletariat, the 19th and early 20th century hauler boys. A rough blue-collar culture characterized by poverty, hard work over long working days and heavy drinking. However, as shown by, for example, Shane Hamilton and Mikael Ottosson, these properties stand in sharp contrast to the technological and organizational changes that the industry is undergoing. The digital control and monitoring of vehicles, time-management of drivers, and new technological management systems such as Fleet Management, will likely not only reduce the perception of freedom and affect certain power relations among different kinds of drivers, but also affect expressions and notions of masculinity. Viewed in both a historical and a contemporary perspective, research portrays a tension between being a trustworthy skilled worker and wayward cowboy. From different perspectives, this changed expression of masculinity is discussed by, for example, Hans Wallengren and Eddy Nehls, in their respective chapters.

From a historical perspective, however, the nature of the commercial transportation profession, for example flexible forms of employment, organization of work etc., has changed over time. It is reasonable to assume that the professional culture has been affected by these changes – that cultural expressions have changed and sometimes been loaded with new meaning.

The book chapters

In the first contribution, “Law and Order or Social Dumping in the Road Haulage Industry?”, the historian Annette Thörnquist discusses a program with the same name launched by the Swedish Transport Workers’ Union in order to combat social dumping in the road freight transport industry, and thus also help to bridge the economic and social cleft in the EU between East and West. In February 2019, the trade union also signed a posting agreement with a Romanian hauler carrying out cabotage and combined transport in Sweden, including also an application agreement (hängavtal) for a company he runs in Sweden. This unprecedented arrangement entitled the Romanian drivers in these companies the same wages and working conditions as Swedish drivers when working in Sweden. Thörnquist asks how these agreements with a single hauler can help to counteract the problems with low-cost competition and social dumping. She discusses this question in wider Swedish and European context of the problem, with a focus on the deregulation of the road freight transport market, the lack of social harmonization within the enlarged EU, and the possibility to use loopholes in EU regulations, such as those on cabotage, combined transport and posting.

The second chapter, “Cross-Border Cargo Transport to and From Norway: Who Undertakes It, and at What Cost?”, is written by the human geographer Ragnhild Steen Jensen (with Mona Bråten and Kåre H. Skollerud as co-writers). Their chapter takes its starting point in the problems that the EU internal market faces when it comes to foreign drivers’ conditions of employment. The chapter is based on a survey conducted at Norwegian truck stops in 2014. The study shows that there is a significant difference in salary levels between Norwegian and Eastern European drivers. According to their interpretation, it appears that Norwegian haulers, to some extent,

employ cheaper drivers from Eastern Europe. The payroll levels of foreign drivers do not allow much social life outside the truck and rest areas. This leads to the development, from both an economic and a social point of view, of an ethnicity-based exclusion.

The historian Shane Hamilton's contribution to this volume, "Flexibility Is Just Another Word for Nothing Left to Lose", addresses the impact the liberalization of the American transport market in the 1970s and 1980s had on the American truck drivers, but also on the beliefs that surrounded the profession. The neoliberal policy, which aimed to increase competition in the industry, consequently resulted in a deterioration in employment relationships and severe pay cuts. According to Hamilton, the changed reality of the trucking business led to shifting meanings of concepts such as freedom and independence. If using the concept of flexibility, you might say that truckers lost the ownership of the profession's flexibility – "[...] expectations of worker autonomy and responsibility have been replaced by managerialist demands for workers to be 'always working.'"

The fourth contribution, "Field Technologies and Truck Driver Identity", written by historian Mikael Ottosson, deals with the role that increased use of digital technology has played on the drivers' professional identity. Ottosson argues that the very purpose of using field technologies is to enable management to exceed spatial distinctions. The freedom traditionally associated with work carried out on the roads is therefore challenged by the technology. Seen in this sense, the field technologies affect the balance between labor and capital. The study shows that digitization significantly affects the self-image and identity of the drivers. The drivers felt that road carriers, freight forwarders and customers were "present" in a completely different way than before and that the freedom of the profession has thus decreased.

The fifth contribution, "Hauling From the Seventies Up to Now: Truckers' Perceptions on Cultural, Social and Environmental Changes Over Four Decades", is written by former truck driver Ljuba Fredenman. In his text, Fredenman raises the question: "[...] was it better in the old days?" As the author is well aware, this is a difficult question to answer, but from results obtained from two group interviews, Fredenman highlights a number of areas for discussion. The majority of the interviewed drivers believe that the professional comradery has decreased, partly due to new management systems. In the wake of digital technology, the drivers' work has also undergone rationalization, which in turn has led to experiences of stress. Furthermore, competition from low-paid drivers from Eastern Europe appears to be significantly present. Another result to highlight is that the drivers feel more supervised and controlled than before. The overall picture given in the chapter is that the experience of freedom, which was once crucial to their career choice, has decreased.

In the sixth chapter, "The Paradoxical World of Trucking", written by ethnologist Eddy Nehls, a number of paradoxes are highlighted. The core in Nehls's discussion is that norms linked to the masculine image are central in the truck driver professional culture. Depending on the mobile character of the workplace, and the work performed out of sight, Nehls argues that the drivers in general have been trusted. Therefore, it is possible to find two partially conflicting properties – waywardness and trustworthiness – within the same cultural context: "[...] To be a cowboy [the one you must trust] is to be someone that you cannot trust – here today, gone tomorrow." Nehls depicts an image of the driver as a person who is living a non-glamorous life torn between (absence in) family life and long and boring waiting at European border stations, etc. – but at the same time feelings of freedom behind the wheel.

The historian Hans Wallengren, author of the seventh contribution, "Volvo Trucks and Cowboy Hats: American Trucking Music in Swedish Packaging", discusses the introduction of American

trucking music, in Sweden during the 1970s and 1980s. In his chapter, Wallengren claims that the music genre underwent a process of cultural transformation into a Swedish cultural context. The very tangible element of a hard-boiled masculinity that was strongly present in the US original weakened significantly when performed in Sweden. Similarly, the image of the truck driver as a rough and violent outlaw was reduced. According to Wallengren's interpretation, the difference between "the US original" and "the Swedish copy" was a result of a "cultural negotiation".

The eight chapter, "Reading Truck Drivers – A Success Story", written by truck driver and novelist David Ericsson, consists of an autobiographical account of the implementation of an audiobook project carried out in the early 2000s. In many ways, the audiobook project discussed in the chapter has connections to the tensions raised by the other authors. The truck driver is on one extreme a masculine, violent trucker – but on another extreme a potential reader (or writer). In the end it turns out that truck drivers might have the potential to be one of the most well-read and literary groups in our society.

The symposium that was conducted in 2017 and the printing of this edited volume has been made possible by generous financial support from the Swedish Society for Humanities and Social Sciences, Åke Wibergs Stiftelse and Elisabeth Rausings Minnesfond. Finally, we would like to conclude this introduction by expressing our sincere appreciation to all authors for their contributions of interesting book chapters.

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Law and Order or Social Dumping in the Road Haulage Industry?

Annette Thörnquist

- Hi friends, Tommy here from Transport, Law and Order in the Haulage Industry.
- Hello, hello, Jimmy's here too.
- Yes Jimmy, today something has happened.
- Yeah, indeed something good has happened.
- This is a historical day for the Swedish Transport Workers' Union. Today, Jimmy and I have signed a posting agreement with a Romanian hauler. This is as far as we know the first time ever. The hauler runs a company in Sweden and has a subsidiary in Romania. He operates around the combi-terminals here and makes some trips to Denmark and Norway.
- Yes, he does 90% combi-transport and 10% cabotage.¹

Introduction

The conversation above is taken from a short video published on Facebook in early February 2019. Tommy and Jimmy are the leaders of the program “Law and Order in the Haulage Industry” (*Ordning och reda i åkeribranschen*) at the International Department of the Swedish Transport Workers' Union (Transport). The aim of the program is to prevent and combat low-wage competition and erosion of collective agreements and established labor standards. The arrangement the trade union officers so proudly present concerns a posting agreement applying to the hauler's company in Romania and a related application agreement² for his company in Sweden. This company – a medium-large company with 12-15 road tractors – is registered in Sweden, but the hauler uses drivers from the Romanian company.

Why then, is this arrangement so important? How can these agreements with a single hauler help to counteract the problems with low-wage competition and social dumping in the Swedish

1 “Law and Order in the Haulage Industry”, Swedish Transport Workers' Union. Online video Facebook, 5 February 2019. The author's translation.

2 In Swedish “*bängavtal*”.

road freight transport market? To answer these questions, it is necessary to consider the wider national and European context of the problem.³

The freedom of movement of goods, services, capital and people are the fundamental four freedoms of the European Union (EU). However, these freedoms have not always been in line with the social interests of individual Member States. The prime aim of the EU and its predecessor, the European Economic Community (EEC), has been economic integration, while social harmonization has lagged behind.⁴ This became evident with the southward enlargement of the EU in the 1980s, and even more with the eastward enlargement in the 2000s.

The economic and social cleft between the old and new Member States is a breeding ground for social dumping, as it allows employers to exploit this cleft by “shopping” between applicable regulatory regimes in order to reduce labor costs and gain a competitive advantage (“regulatory arbitrage”).⁵ Social dumping refers to “the practice undertaken by self-interested market participants, of undermining or evading existing social regulations with the aim of gaining a short-term advantage over their competitors”.⁶

The freedom of establishment and the freedom to provide services, currently manifested in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) (signed in Lisbon 2007), and in the Service Directive (2006/123/EC), shall guarantee the mobility of businesses and services. However, the possibility for EU citizens to start and run enterprises in a fellow Member State has also been used to flag-out companies to low-wage countries, or to establish “letterbox companies” with the purpose of evading fiscal and social obligations in the home countries. Another problem is that EU regulations aimed at protecting the environment and the rights and safety of workers, often have been circumvented or misused.⁷ As Magdalena Bernaciak has put it:

Tensions between the existing constraints and the possible short-term benefits of evading them are inherent in the capitalist system of production and accumulation; as a result, social dumping is practiced by different groups of actors in a variety of market settings.⁸

3 The paper draws on oral information from the Swedish Transport Workers' Union and the nation-wide industry organization, the Swedish Association of Road Transport Companies, as well as a variety of written material (such as statistics, reports and media material) from these organizations, from the Swedish authorities and from the European Commission. Relevant academic literature has also been used.

4 Fritz W. Scharpf, *The Asymmetry of European Integration or why the EU cannot be a 'Social Market Economy'*, KFG Working Paper Series, No. 6, Kolleg-Forschergruppe (KFG), Berlin 2009; Jan Buelens & Lies Michielsen. *Social Dumping: A Symptom of the European Construction. An Exploratory Study of Social Dumping in Road Transport*, in *From Social Competition to Social Dumping*, Jan Buelens & Marc Rigaux (eds.), Antwerp/Cambridge 2016, pp. 33-62.

5 Fleischer, V. (2010). "Regulatory Arbitrage". *Texas Law Review*, 89(2), pp. 227-289; Lies Berntsen & Nathan Lillie, "Breaking the law? Varieties of social dumping in a pan-European labour market". *Market Expansion and Social Dumping in Europe*, Magdalena Bernaciak (ed.), London 2015, pp. 43-60.

6 Magdalena Bernaciak, *Social dumping and the EU integration process*. Working Paper European Trade Union Institute (ETUI), 2014.06, Brussels, 2014, p. 5.

7 E.g. Nadia Hilal. "Unintended effects of deregulation in the European Union: The case of road freight transport", *Sociologie du travail* 50, 2008, pp. 19-29; Jan Cremers, "Letter-box companies and abuse of the posting rules: how the primacy of economic freedoms and weak enforcement give rise to social dumping" ETUI Policy Brief, No 5/2014, Brussels 2014; Berntsen & Lillie 2015.

8 Magdalena Bernaciak, *Social dumping and the EU integration process*. Working Paper 2014.06, Brussels, 2014, p. 23.

The development of the European road freight transport market in recent decades is a striking example of these tensions. With this insight, based on experiences gained in real life, the Swedish Transport Workers Union decided to launch the project “Law and Order in the Road Haulage Industry” in 2015. Two years later, the project was made a permanent part of the trade union’s International Department.

The Swedish road freight transport industry for hire or reward consists of several sub-sectors, including specialized transport for different industries and operations, as well as non-specialized break-bulk cargo and container transport. Long-haul trucking accounts for around one-fourth of the industry.⁹ As in most other countries, the Swedish road freight transport industry consists mainly of small companies, while forwarding agencies (which traditionally have a strong position in Sweden) are large actors, including several multinationals, such as DHL, DB Schenker and DSV. Haulage companies without employees make up over 40% of the registered companies.¹⁰ The barriers to entry are low, which implies a significant risk of oversupply. This concerns non-specialized transport in particular, using truck tractors pulling trailers and containers.¹¹ It is mainly in this part of the industry, where drivers are more interchangeable than in other sectors, we find low-wage competition and social dumping. This sector includes long-haul trucking, as well as port-trucking around the big sea ports, and so-called combined transport around the inland centers for multimodal carriage. Along with the increase of foreign trucks carrying out cabotage – and even more combined transport – the problem has begun to spread into the sector for scheduled goods transport as well.¹²

International transport carried out by Swedish haulers has strongly declined in the wake of increasing international competition in the liberalized and enlarged European road freight transport market. In 2016, international transport accounted for 8% in terms of ton-kilometers (or 2% terms of ton).¹³

Deregulation and market liberalization

The Swedish road freight transport industry has a comparatively long tradition of deregulation and market liberalization. The process of liberalization started with the introduction of a new Transport Act in 1963. This was over 20 years earlier than the vast majority of the other European countries. Most quantitative restrictions to market entry were lifted in the 1960s. After some years of delay due to an economic downturn in 1967–1968, and public concern over the social and environmental effects of increasing road freight transport, the liberalization process continued by

9 Oral information from the Industry Director of the Swedish Association of Road Transport Companies, September 2018.

10 Statistics Sweden, 2018, *Företagsregistret* (The Company Register).

11 In Swedish, “dragbilsbranschen”.

12 Oral information from the Industry Director at the Swedish Association of Road Transport Companies, April 2018; Oral information from the leaders of “Law and Order in the road haulage industry”, Swedish Transport Workers’ Union, November 2018; Annette Thörnquist, *False (Bogus) Self-Employment in East-West Labour Migration: Recent trends in the Swedish construction and road haulage industries*. *TheMES, Themes on Migration and Ethnic Studies*, No. 41, Linköping University Electronic Press.

13 Trafikanalys (TRAFA), *Lastbilstrafik 2016*, Swedish national and international road goods transport. Statistik 2017:4, Stockholm 2017, p. 5; Sveriges Åkeriföretag (SÅ), “Fakta om åkerinäringen, Sveriges”, Stockholm 2016.

the mid-1970s. At the same time, quality control increased in order to improve road safety, work safety and environmental protection.¹⁴

Like most countries in the Western World, Sweden had regulated the growing road transport market in the early 1930s in order to prevent unfettered competition, which was an immediate risk during the international depression. The aim was also to protect the rail transport sector. Strict regulations based on bilateral agreements and quotas governed the transnational European road freight transport as well, and cabotage (domestic transport operations carried out by non-resident haulers) was prohibited.¹⁵ In Europe, this structure remained largely in place until the mid-1980s, despite the fact that the Treaty of Rome (the Treaty behind the creation of the EEC) prescribed a free common road goods transport market to be implemented by the end of the 1960s at the latest.¹⁶ Moreover, road freight transport increased rapidly after World War II along with the strong economic growth and increasing international trade. However, most Member States preferred to keep the existing system, which included a certain amount of flexibility. The exception was the United Kingdom (UK), which underwent an even more radical liberalization process in the 1960s than Sweden.¹⁷

It was not until the mid-1980s (with the establishment of the EU Single Market close at hand) that the process of deregulation and market liberalization started in earnest in Western Europe. The economic crisis in the 1970s was a contributing factor, but the immediate reason was that the European Parliament had taken the Council of Ministers to the European Court of Justice (ECJ) in 1983 for not implementing the common transport policy required in the Treaty of Rome. Along with the formal establishment of the EU in 1993, the intra-Union road freight transport market was deregulated as well (Regulation EEC No 881/92). Cabotage was now allowed, but a quota system was to regulate the distribution of cabotage licenses between the Member States until 1998 (Regulation EEC No 3118/93).¹⁸

With the eastward expansion of the EU in 2004 and 2007, and the introduction of transitional restrictions on the free movement of labor from the new Member States, the European Parliament and the Council decided to clarify and harmonize the rules on cabotage. This resulted in the current Regulation on cabotage issued in 2009 (EC No. 1072/2009).

Cabotage, combi-transport and social dumping

As mentioned above, the Roman hauler carried out mainly combined transport operations in Sweden, and to some extent also cabotage. The trade union officers emphasized in their presentation of the posting agreement that the hauler, who had run the haulage company in Sweden for a couple of years, had gradually adapted the Romanian drivers' wage level to the minimum wages in the Swedish collective agreement. Nevertheless, signing a posting agreement that regulated wa-

14 Lars Kritz, *Transportpolitiken och lastbilarna: En studie av regleringar och deras effekter*, Stockholm, 1976.

15 Brian Bayliss Regulations in the European road freight transport sector. *Journal of Transport Economics and Policies* 32(1) 1998: 113-131; Michael H. Belzer, *Sweatshops on Wheels: Winners and Losers in Trucking Deregulation*. Oxford, UK and New York, NY 2000.

16 Treaty establishing the European Economic Community, signed on the 25th of March 1957, Articles 74-84.

17 Kritz 1976; Bayliss 1998.

18 Bayliss 1998; OECD, *Liberalization and structural reform in the freight transport sector in Europe: The Freight Transport Sector in Europe*, Paris 1997, pp. 11-12; European Commission, "Commission Interpretative Communication on the temporary nature of road cabotage in the movement of freight" (2005/C 21/02).

ges and working conditions for non-resident drivers performing domestic transport temporarily in Sweden was a big step forward for the Transport Workers' Union.

Both cabotage and combined transport have often been fraught with labor abuse and social dumping. According to the Regulation on cabotage, carriers who hold an EU Community license, which allows them to perform international transport operations in the EU, may carry out three domestic transport journeys in a host Member State within a seven-day period after the international transport. The primary aim of the Regulation is to reduce empty journeys and thus protect the environment and save transport costs. However, the Regulation has also been used for quite other purposes than to protect the environment. In practice, loopholes in the Regulation have made it possible for haulers to operate for longer periods in a host country without formally violating the cabotage rules, as long as they cross the national border once a week. This strategy, which has been discussed in terms of “big cabotage” or “systematic cabotage”, illustrates how non-resident carriers may act as domestic haulers in Western and Northern Europe by rotating their trucks continually between two or more countries, making three cabotage trips in each of these countries, and actively contributing to the downward pressure of transport prices.¹⁹ The fieldwork carried out by the leaders of “Law and Order in the Road Haulage Industry” confirms the prevalence of this practice.²⁰

Combined transport refers to the intermodal transport of goods between Member States under certain circumstances. The Council Directive on Combined Transport (92/106/EEC) states, among other things, that the goods must be moved by rail, inland waterway or maritime transport at a distance of more than 100 kilometers as the crow flies, and truck transport concerns the initial and/or final legs of the journey within a given distance.²¹ All haulers in the EU who have formal access to the occupation and to the market for goods transport between the Member States have the right to carry out the road haulage legs, which can also include crossing of a border. As with the policy on cabotage, the European Commission promotes combined transport for economic and environmental reasons; the idea is to reduce road freight carriage in favor of water and rail transport.

Like the Regulation on cabotage, however, the Directive on combined transport has been widely used as a “legal” way to undercut prices and wages, as well as to circumvent the rules on cabotage. It has become more and more common that haulers from low-cost EU Member States – or haulers in high-cost countries with subsidiaries in low-cost countries – hire parking stands and set up networks of bases in Western and Northern Europe, from which they operate more or less permanently. The drivers used in this system come from the newer EU Member States in the former Eastern Bloc, or from low-wage countries outside the EU, and they are paid on the basis of the wage level in their home countries. They work in periods, and the haulers – or labor market intermediaries – regularly transport them to and from the host countries. Many of these drivers

19 Hans-Jürgen Schramm, *Deregulation of European Road Transport and its Impacts on International Transport Operations*. Vienna 2012; Henrik Sternberg, Michal Filipiak, Erik Hofmann & Daniel Hellström, *Cabotagestudien: A study on trucking deregulation in Scandinavia and beyond*. Report. Packaging Logistics, Lund 2015.

20 “Law and Order in the Haulage Industry”, 2019.

21 This distance is defined as: “between the point where the goods are loaded and the nearest suitable rail-loading station for the initial leg, and between the nearest suitable rail unloading station and the point where the goods are unloaded for the final leg, or; within a radius not exceeding 150 km as the crow flies from the inland waterway port or seaport to loading or unloading”.

work under extremely precarious conditions, living in the trucks for months.²²

According to the leaders of the program “Law and Order in the Haulage Industry”, these practices have increased dramatically in Sweden in recent years. One of their main tasks is to map out the prevalence of haulers carrying out combined transport or cabotage on a permanent basis in Sweden. Since the companies do not have a permanent establishment in the country, the haulers can evade tax duties as well.²³ In other words, the union officers explore how haulers generate dumping of transport prices and wages by formally conforming with liberal EU regulations, but at the same time manipulating these regulations. The Swedish Transport Workers’ Union, as well as the European Transport Workers’ Federation (ETF), therefore strongly emphasize that haulage companies carrying out combined transport and cabotage on these terms must be immediately registered in the host country and comply with the tax duties required there.²⁴ Moreover, drivers working temporarily in a host Member State, under an employer without a permanent establishment in this country, must be registered as posted workers, and are thus entitled the same rights to payment and working conditions as other posted workers.²⁵

Posting of drivers – a controversial issue

The Posting of Workers Directive (96/71/EC) also applies to the road transport sector. In practice, however, it has been considered difficult to implement the Directive on drivers working internationally. Moreover, the Member States have interpreted the Directive in various ways.²⁶ The introduction of Directive 2014/67/EC on the enforcement of the Posted Workers Directive (96/71/EC) was an attempt to clarify regulations and facilitate enforcement. As regards the road freight transport sector, however, the implementation of the Directive also illustrated the problems of enforcement and controls. According to the Directive (Chapter IV, Article 9), as well as the Swedish Posting of Workers Act revised in 2013 (SFS 2013:351), employers posting workers for more than five days must register at the applicable administrative authority in the host country and designate a contact person. However, few foreign haulers operating temporarily in Sweden have followed the requirement to register. In contrast to the Netherlands, Belgium and France, for example, drivers carrying out cabotage have not been defined as posted workers in Sweden unless there is an agreement between the employer and the recipient of the transport services, and all other criteria of cabotage are fulfilled.²⁷

22 Bettina Haidinger, *Fraudulent Contracting of Work: Road Haulage Sector*. Dublin: Eurofound. (Working Paper), 2017. European Transport Workers Federation (ETF), *Modern Slavery in Modern Europe? An ETF account on the working and living conditions of professional drivers in Europe*, Brussels, 2013; “Exploitation across Europe in road transport supply chain automotive industry”. FNV Vakbond, online video, 2018.

23 “Permanent establishment” refers to “fast driftsställe” in Swedish.

24 “Law and Order in the Haulage Industry”, online video Facebook, 2018.

25 Oral information from “Law and Order in the Haulage Industry” 12 September 2018, 13 February 2019.

26 European Parliament, *Road transport: Driving times, breaks, rest periods, tachographs and posting of drivers*. Briefing Initial Appraisal of a European Commission Impact Assessment. Brussels, 2017.

27 According to the Swedish Work Environment Authority, “transportation and storage” accounted for 0.30% of the workers posted to Sweden in 2017. Arbetsmiljöverket, *Register för företag som utstationerar arbetstagare i Sverige*, Rapport 2018:3, Stockholm 2018; see also Arbetsmarknadsdepartementet, *Utstationering av vägtransporter*, Ds 2017:22, Stockholm 2017.

The Posting of Workers Directive has been further reviewed and revised in recent years. Through an amendment of the Directive adopted in the European Parliament in May 2018, posted workers were entitled to be paid on the basis of the applicable collective agreement in the host country, in accordance with the principle “equal pay for equal work in the same place”. However, the Parliament decided to exempt the road transport sector from this rule, until the European Commission’s proposals on posting of drivers included in the so-called Mobility Package (a major revision of the social regulations in the road transport sector) was approved.²⁸

This decision, as well as the concrete proposals on posting, cabotage and drivers’ rest periods presented in the “Mobility Package”, caused massive protests from ETF and the national member unions.²⁹ The Commission suggested that drivers of international transport (except for transit transport), who worked at least three days a month in a host country should be entitled the same rights as regards payment as other posted workers. Concerning cabotage, the Commission proposed free cabotage over a period of five days following the international transport operation.³⁰

As regards drivers’ weekly rest periods, the rules in force allowed that the normal weekly rest of 45 continuous hours could be reduced to 24 continuous hours every second week. However, the Commission proposed two 24-hour weekly rests over a four-week period: in contrast to the regular weekly rest of 45 hours, EU law allows drivers to take the reduced weekly rest in the cabin as long as it has suitable sleeping facilities.³¹ Opponents regarded the proposal as a concession to profit interests. According to the ETF, as well as the Swedish Transport Workers’ Union, the proposed change would only mean more crowded parking areas with drivers from Central and Eastern Europe and from the Balkans living in the trucks for weeks, as well as more problems with fatigue and increasing accident risks.³²

In the summer of 2018, the EU Parliament rejected all these proposals (including several amendments).³³ By the end of the year, the EU Ministers of Transport agreed on a set of new proposals, which gained more acceptance among the trade unions. Among other things, the Ministers suggested that cabotage, as well as the road legs of combined transport, should be subject to the posting rules. The proposed rules on drivers’ rest periods were about the same as before.³⁴ In January 2019, however, the Transport Committee of the European Parliament only came to a compromise on cabotage. This meant that the previous rules on cabotage should remain, but a truck should not be allowed to start a new cabotage trip in one and the same country until after

28 European Parliament, “Posting of workers: final vote on equal pay and working conditions”. Press Release, 29 May 2018.

29 European Transport Workers Federation (ETF), “The Council of Ministers decides over the temporary exclusion of road transport from the principle of ‘equal pay for equal work or equal value,’” Press Release, 24 October 2017.

30 European Commission, “Road transport: Driving times, breaks, rest periods, tachographs and posting of drivers. Briefing Initial Appraisal of a European Commission Impact Assessment”, Brussels 2017.

31 The prohibition against weekly rest of 45 hours in the vehicle is not quite clear, and it is often systematically violated.

32 European Transport Workers’ Federation (ETF) Press release. 24 October 2017; *Transportarbetaren*, “Vi ska försöka stoppa nya kör- och vilotidsreglerna”, 6 June 2017.

33 Nordic Logistic Association, “A split European Parliament voted on the social aspects in first mobility package”, 5 June 2018. European Parliament, Committee on Transport and Tourism, Report PE 615.504v02-00 A8-0206/2018; Trans.info, “Deadlock over Mobility Package. The European Parliament voted against three reports”, 4 July 2018.

34 Europaportalen, “Svenska Transport: EU-kompromiss bättre än väntad”, 4 December 2018.

a five-day waiting period. The proposals on drivers' weekly rest periods and posted drivers' payment were rejected. As the trade unions were not satisfied with the proposal on rest periods, the President of the ETF's Road Transport Section, Roberto Parrillo, welcomed the outcome of this decision and concluded that the Members of the European Parliament had, in fact, "voted against all attempts to make drivers sleep in their cabins for weeks and work for longer without rest".³⁵

Hence, when the Swedish Transport Workers' Union concluded the posting agreement and the related application agreement with the Romanian hauler in early February 2019, the highly controversial issue of the payment and working conditions of drivers on international transport operations had been postponed indefinitely.³⁶

The importance of the agreements with the Romanian hauler

Why then, is the posting agreement and the related application agreement between the Swedish Transport Workers' Union and the Romanian hauler, so important? How can this arrangement help to make a difference with regard to the problems of low-wage competition and social dumping in the Swedish road freight transport industry? The agreements are of great principle importance in at least three respects.

First, the agreements acknowledged the Romanian drivers on cabotage and combined transport operations as posted workers. As shown above, the question of whether or not drivers should be regarded as posted workers was still an apple of discord in the EU as well as in Sweden in February 2019.

Second, the parties also showed that it was possible to conclude a posting agreement with an Eastern European company that entitles drivers performing these forms of transport "the same wages for the same work in the same place". Thus, both parties were prepared to set an example that aimed to counteract the exploitation of the economic and social cleft between East and West in the enlarged EU.

Third, as the collective agreement entitled the drivers a monthly salary including the social protection implied in the agreement, it also eliminated the possibility to use bonuses, such as distance-based pay and allowances, in order to evade social security contributions (for the employers) and income tax (for the workers).

Normally, drivers from the newer Member States in the former Eastern Bloc are paid in accordance with the very low statutory minimum wages in these countries, and on top of that distance-based pay and allowances that are not subject to tax and social security contributions in their home countries.³⁷ There are considerable differences in the east-west divide as regards forms of payment of international drivers. While the share of the gross salary consisting of travel allowances and other components not subject to social contributions was 10–23% in older Member Sta-

35 European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF), "Another day of chaos for EU Mobility Package", 10 January 2019.

36 In April 2019, the Members of the European Parliament voted that foreign drivers within the country in which they are working should be paid the same as domestic drivers doing the same work, and that the posting rules should apply to cabotage and to cross-border transport operations (with some exceptions).

37 Alessio Sitran & Enrico Pastori, Social and working conditions of road transport haulage. Policy Department B: Structural and Cohesion Policies, Brussels: European Parliament, 2013; Haidinger, 2017; European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF), Modern Slavery in Modern Europe? An ETF account on the working and living conditions of professional drivers in Europe, Brussels, 2013.

tes, such as Luxembourg, Germany, Belgium and France, the share in Poland, Lithuania, Romania and Bulgaria was 61-76% (in 2016).³⁸ It is difficult not to regard this as a way of systematically evading taxes and social security contributions. Accordingly, it also means that drivers paid on these terms are poorly protected by social insurances such as sick pay and pensions. Moreover, allowances are paid only during working hours, making the workers even more vulnerable.

As regards payment based on the distance travelled or the weight carried, Regulation (EC) No 561/2006 “on the harmonization of certain social legislation relating to road transport” states that this form of payment is not allowed “if that payment is of such a kind as to endanger road safety and/or encourages infringement of this Regulation” (Article 10:1). This Regulation has been interpreted in various ways, and it has been frequently circumvented in order to gain a competitive advantage.³⁹

Thus, the agreements with the Roman hauler also highlight the need for a structural change in the way drivers from the newer EU Member States, or from other low-wage countries, generally are paid when working in the West. It is not known from the negotiations whether, and if so, to what extent the hauler had used allowances and distance-based pay previously. What is clear, however, is that after negotiations with the trade union officers, the hauler considered that having a collective agreement served the interests of both the company and the drivers.⁴⁰

The leaders of “Law and Order in the Haulage Industry” concluded their presentation of the agreements in the Facebook video by saying:

Now Jimmy and I will approach another hauler, who does business in Sweden in exactly the same way as the Roman hauler, using drivers via his company in the home country. There is no reason why this guy shouldn't sign a collective agreement as well.⁴¹

38 Comité National Routier, *Comparative study of employment and pay conditions of international lorry drivers in Europe*. CNR European Studies, Paris 2018.

39 Sitran Alessio & Enrico Pastori, 2013; European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF), *Modern Slavery in Modern Europe?* “Law and Order in the Road Haulage Industry”, Swedish Transport Workers' Union. Online video Facebook, 2018.

40 Oral information from the leaders of “Law and Order in the Road Haulage Industry”, 15 February 2019.

41 “Law and Order in the road Haulage Industry”, Swedish Transport Workers' Union. Online video Facebook, 5 February 2019. Quotation, author's translation.

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Cross-Border Cargo Transport to and From Norway: Who Undertakes It, and At What Cost?

Ragnhild Steen Jensen, Kåre H. Skollerud & Mona Bråten

Introduction

The road haulage sector has undergone a significant structural change in recent decades, due to EU market integration and the increased competition that this has occasioned. There has been an increase in international transport operations and five of the top ten EU Member States in terms of international flows are from the EU12: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Cyprus, Latvia Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia.¹ In Norway, there has also been an increase in international transport from East European countries. According to Norwegian trade unions and employer organizations, the growth in international transport from low-cost countries has a negative effect on Norwegian truck drivers' working conditions.² What characterizes the wage levels and labor conditions of drivers arriving in Norway as part of an international transport assignment is the question addressed in this paper. To obtain information on the foreign drivers' working conditions, a 'rest-area survey' was undertaken in 2014. A total of 70 interviews were conducted with drivers of foreign trucks. At the same time and at the same rest areas, 20 interviews with Norwegian truck drivers were conducted. The survey was carried out as part of a project about wage and working conditions in the road haulage sector in Norway.³

The highly internationalized road freight transport industry complicates any regulation of the wage and labor conditions in the industry. Given the large variations in wage and labor conditions within the EU, free competition for assignments may threaten the transport industries in European high-cost countries such as Norway, or cause a strongly negative trend in wage levels. A 2013 report for the European Parliament states that:⁴

- 1 Andrea Broughton, Maurizio Curtarelli, Christine Bertram, Anna Fohrbeck, Robin Hinks & Arianna Tassinari, *Employment Conditions in the International Road Haulage Sector*. Directorate-General for International Policies. Policy department Economic and Scientific Policy A, European Parliament 2015, p. 17.
- 2 Ragnhild Steen Jensen, Mona Bråten, Bård Jordfald, Merethe D. leiren, Tor-Olav Nævestad, Kåre H. Skollerud, Henrik Sternberg & Tommy Tranvik, *Arbeidsforhold i gods og turbil*. Fafo-rapport 2014:58, p. 18.
- 3 Jensen et al. 2014, pp. 76-81.
- 4 Alessio Sitran & Enrico Pastori, *Social and Working Conditions of Road Transport Hauliers*. European Parliament 2013, p.13.

“The process of liberalisation of the sector has not ... been accompanied by a parallel process of social harmonisation in the employment and working conditions, on the contrary, these are experiencing a general and sharp downward trend for both resident and non-resident professional drivers”

Although the free flow of goods and services is one of the EU’s main goals, the union has realized that the transport industry needs a certain amount of regulation. With a view to safety, regulations on driving time and rest periods have been introduced, specifying the permitted driving time between rest periods as well as in total per day. Rules have also been introduced to protect each country’s national transport sectors from competition by foreign transport agencies in their domestic markets, so-called cabotage. As a result, foreign operators are not permitted to undertake more than three domestic assignments once the cross-border assignment has been completed. After these three trips, or no later than one week after the completion of the international transport assignment, the vehicle must leave the country before it can accept any further domestic cargo. The regulations also specify that the cross-border assignment must include goods being brought into the country, and the transport must be of a temporary nature, i.e. not undertaken on a systematic basis, for example as part of a scheduled service.

The motivation for permitting such cabotage (i.e. domestic transport with the aid of foreign vehicles and drivers) is that it may help boost the efficiency of the industry. The rules permit vehicles to bring cargo with them back out of the country to a greater extent than what would have been the case if they were forced to leave the country immediately or remain idle while waiting for an international assignment. In addition, environmental arguments have played a role, especially with regard to minimizing CO₂ emissions. On the other hand, part of the motivation to introduce regulation of cabotage was related to protection of the transport industry in European high-cost countries. Concerns were voiced with reference to the risk of social dumping involved in having drivers from European low-cost countries undertake scheduled transport assignments inside other countries while being paid wages adapted to the tariffs of their home countries.⁵

International transport in Norway

International transport volumes to and from Norway have increased over the last 12 years. In Figure 1, we can see the development in imported and exported tonnage from 2003 to 2013, measured in the number of metric tons of cross-border cargo.

From the figure, we can see that there has been an increase in both import and export volumes from 2002 until today. There is one exception, however; after the financial crisis in 2008, there was a drop in both import and export volumes.

As a result of the EU’s internal market, cross-border transport by truck has become an arena for competition between vehicles registered in Norway and vehicles registered in low-cost countries. In Figure 2, imported tonnage has been distributed among vehicles registered in Norway, Sweden and other countries.

5 Sitran & Pastori 2013, p. 65.

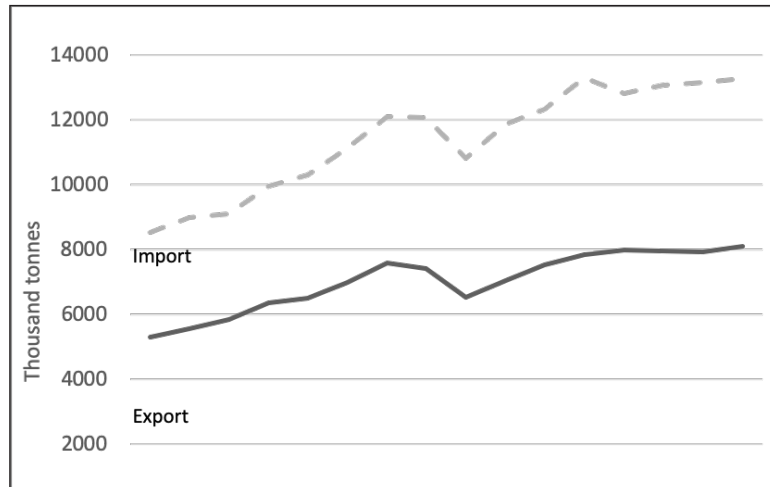


Figure 1. Development of Norwegian imports and exports in the period 2003–2013. Volumes in 1000 metric tons. Petroleum is not included. Source: Foreign trade statistics (Statistics Norway)

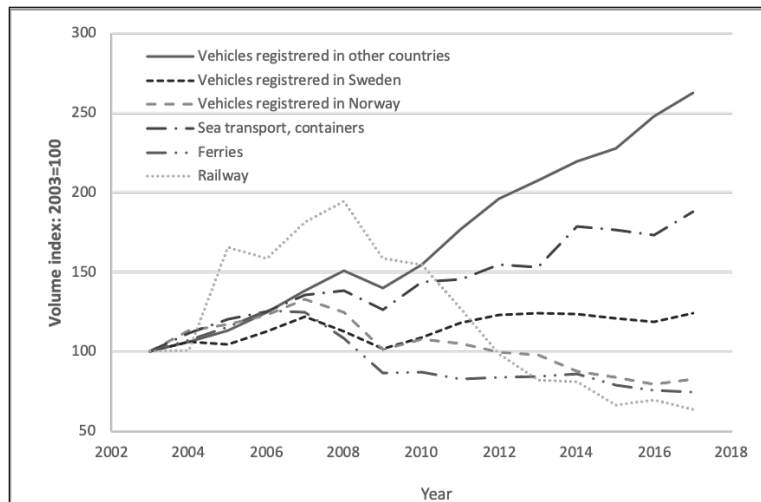


Figure 2. Development of import volumes (metric tons) entering Norway by truck, ship-borne container and ferry in the period from 2003 (reference year) to 2012.

Figure 2 shows that trucks registered in countries other than Norway and Sweden have had the largest growth by far in terms of relative volume. Since 2013, these have nearly doubled their amount of cargo transported into Norway. The largest growth has come from Poland and the Baltic countries.⁶ This is an indication of growing competition in the market. Vehicles registered in the Eastern EU countries conquer market shares from both Norwegian and Swedish vehicles, which have seen their volumes drop from the peak levels seen in the years before the financial crisis in 2009. Despite the increasing volume of cargo coming into the country today compared to 2003, vehicles registered in Norway are transporting exactly the same volume today as they did in 2003.

6 Stein Erik Grønland, Inger Beate Hovi, Paal Wangsness & Elise Caspersen, *Næringslivets logistikksystemer. Hvordan ser de ut og hvordan har de utviklet seg?* TØI rapport 1371/20 2014, pp. 2-17.

When combined with the imbalance in terms of volumes referred to above, by which more goods are brought into the country by truck than are transported out by truck, a ‘surplus’ of foreign-registered vehicles may remain in Norway while looking for cabotage opportunities rather than leave the country empty. However, a study conducted by Sternberg in the autumn of 2013 did not detect any major proportion of cabotage transport in Norway, of neither a legal nor of an illegal nature. The situation was different in both Sweden and Denmark, where cabotage occurred on a significant scale.⁷

Rest-area interviews: The drivers’ working conditions

To obtain information on the foreign drivers’ working conditions, possibly also on the less organized parts of the Norwegian long-distance haulage sector, a ‘rest-area survey’ was conducted. Over a period of nine days in late October 2014, four interviewers visited various rest areas to the south and north of Oslo where they conducted a total of 90 interviews with drivers of articulated trucks. The interviews were conducted as an online survey with the aid of a tablet computer. The questionnaire was available in nine different languages.⁸ Drivers from a total of 16 nationalities were interviewed. As can be seen in the figure, Norwegian and Polish drivers constitute the largest national groups, each accounting for one-fifth (21 percent).

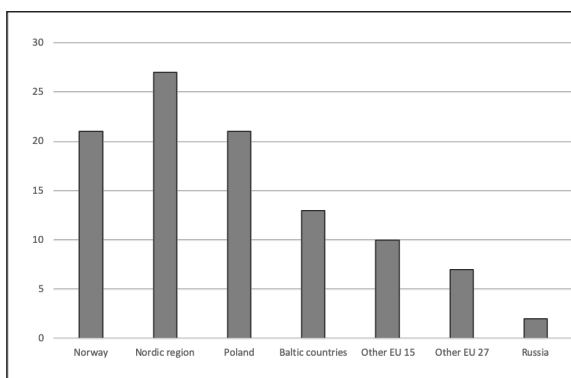


Figure 3. Driver nationalities, numbers.

Drivers from the other Nordic countries account for more than one-fourth (27 percent) of all interviewees in the material. Swedes and Danes dominate in this group, with 14 and 11 percent of the interviewed drivers, respectively. In the figure we can also see that 10 percent of the drivers are from the EU15 countries, with Germany as the dominant nation, while Spanish and French drivers are absent from the material. However, these figures do not reflect the real proportion of nationalities in the transport sector. Some nationalities appeared to be more reluctant than others to be interviewed, and we missed two interviews with Bulgarian drivers because the questionnaire had not yet been translated to the relevant language.

⁷ see Jensen et al. 2014, pp. 47-52.

⁸ The questionnaire was available in Bulgarian, English, Estonian, French, German, Latvian, Lithuanian, Norwegian, Polish, Rumanian, Russian and Spanish.

Where are the drivers' wages paid out?

In the survey, the drivers were asked to state the country where their wages were paid out. As can be seen in Figure 4, nearly four in five (77 percent) receive their wages in the country they had reported to be their nationality, and nearly one in five (18 percent) of the foreign drivers reported that their wages were paid out in Norway.

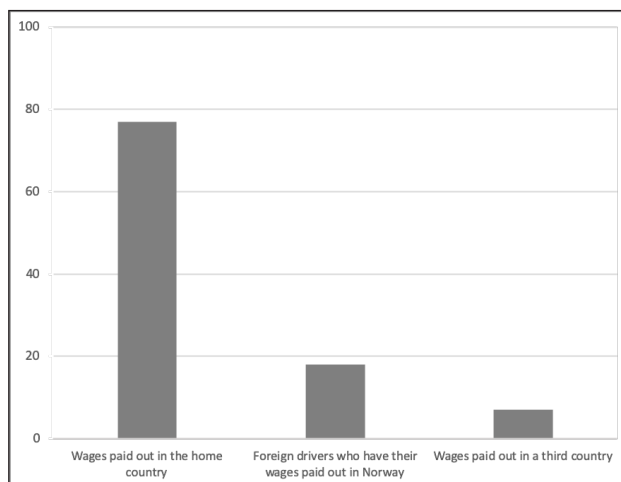


Figure 4. Where are the drivers' wages paid out?

Only one in every 20 drivers (five percent) have their wages paid out in a third country. Specifically, this involved drivers from the EU15 whose wages were paid out in another EU15 country. Among those whose wages were paid out in Norway, the Polish drivers were in a majority, although Swedish drivers also made up a considerable proportion. The observation that 25 percent of the Polish drivers report receiving their wages in Norway may indicate that Norwegian haulers employ Polish drivers, but the data material is of a very limited nature and must be interpreted with great caution.

Employment conditions

Altogether, 91 percent of the respondents in our survey report being permanently employed, and nine percent report being self-employed. When asked whether they were permanently employed, temporarily hired or leased through a manpower supply firm, altogether 90 percent report being permanently employed. All the Norwegian drivers report being permanently employed; the equivalent proportion among the Nordic drivers amounts to 95 percent. Among drivers from other Western European countries we also find only permanent employees. The noted differences are based on a very small number of observations, however, and may well be due to random variations. Drivers from countries other than the EU15, i.e. Poland, the Baltic countries, Bulgaria, Romania and Russia, on the other hand, more frequently tend to report employment conditions other than permanent employment. Among these, 80 percent report being permanently employed, a markedly lower proportion than among the Western European drivers. In the group whose wages are paid out in Norway, the proportion of permanent employees amounts to 94 percent, i.e. at the same level as for Nordic drivers in general. Looking at Eastern European drivers employed

in Norway, the proportion of permanent employees amounts to 90 percent, while among those who are employed in their home countries, the equivalent proportion is 71 percent. However, the number of observations is so small that in spite of a considerable observed difference in terms of percentage points, this does not indicate any statistically significant differences, and the figures must be interpreted only as an indication of a possible difference.

Wages and wage levels

In the section on forms of employment, the transport industry appeared relatively orderly, with a prevalence of permanent employment relationships. The kinds of wage systems used may also be regarded as an expression of the degree of predictability and orderly employment conditions.

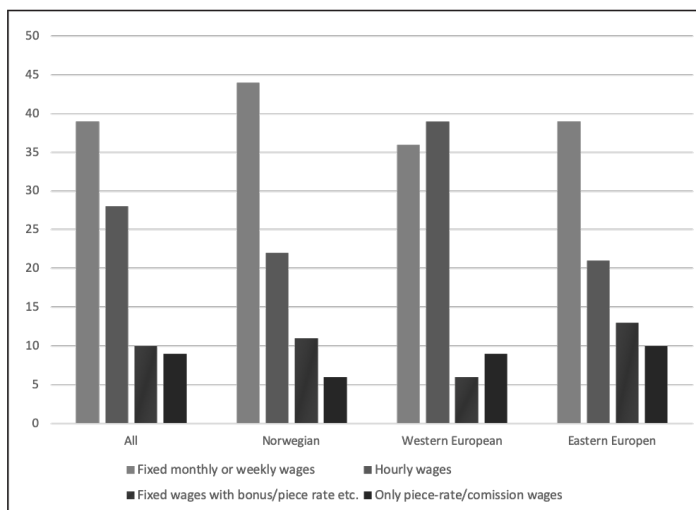


Figure 5. The drivers' wage systems by nationality groups. Percentages.

In Figure 5 we can see that fixed monthly or weekly wages represent the most prevalent wage system for all drivers in general, and that fewer than one in ten drivers (nine percent) have a wage system based exclusively on piece-rate or commission wages. We can also observe major differences between the groups of countries. First, we can see that the proportion drawing fixed monthly or weekly wages is clearly highest among the Norwegian drivers, at 44 percent. The high proportion of Western European drivers who are paid hourly wages is another conspicuous feature. We can also see that piece-rate or commission wages, occasionally in combination with fixed wages, are more common among the Eastern European drivers than among the others. However, these differences are small and not statistically significant, meaning that apart from the use of hourly wages among Western European drivers, the main impression is that fixed wages is the predominant wage system, although other forms of remuneration are also widespread in this industry and this is the situation for drivers from most European countries.

Looking at the drivers' wages in relation to their country of employment (operationalized as the country in which their wages are paid out), we can see from Figure 6 that wage levels vary considerably with place of employment.

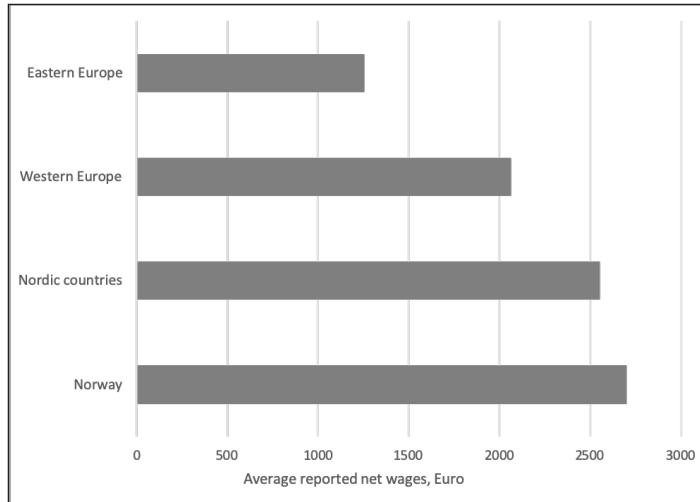


Figure 6. Averages of the drivers' reported monthly wages after tax in Norway, other Nordic countries, other Western European countries and Eastern Europe. Euro.

While the average monthly wages of drivers who are paid in Norway amount to EUR 2,700 after taxes, they are EUR 2,550 for those whose wages are paid out in the other Nordic countries, mainly Sweden and Denmark. Other drivers who are paid in Western European countries receive EUR 2,060. This wage level drops considerably when we look at drivers paid in Eastern European countries. On average, they take home no more than EUR 1,250, i.e. well below half of the average net wages of a driver employed in Norway.

Using Norwegians and Poles to illustrate these wage differences, we can see in Table 1 that while Norwegian drivers whose wages are paid out in Norway earn on average approximately NOK 3,040, the equivalent average wages of Polish drivers amount to approximately NOK 2,330. The average wages of Polish drivers whose wages are paid out in Poland amount to no more than approximately NOK 1,030. Poles are the only non-Nordic nationals in the survey that provide a sufficient number of individual respondents to enable us to present an impression of the wage differences, but they are still too few to draw any general conclusions with regard to wage levels.

Table 1. Wage levels by country of disbursement and nationality. Euro.

Nationality	Drivers receiving wages in Norway		Drivers receiving wages in Poland
	Norwegian drivers	Polish drivers	Polish drivers
Wages (EUR)	3,040	2,330	1,030

Working hours

With regard to the amount of time they spend driving each day, we can see from Figure 7 that the average driving time is shortest for those drivers whose wages are paid out in Norway.

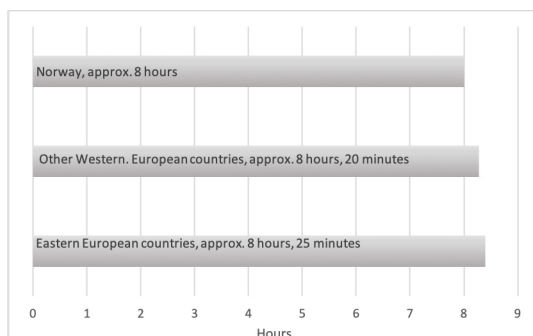


Figure 7. Time spent driving on an average working day. Hours.

On average, they report spending eight hours driving on a regular working day. Drivers from Western Europe report approximately eight hours and 20 minutes, while drivers who are paid in Eastern Europe report spending eight hours and 25 minutes driving on a typical day.

It can be argued that waiting for assignments can also be defined as part of the working hours. In this area as well, there are differences between the drivers depending on their country of origin. Drivers whose wages are paid out in Norway report that on a typical working day, they wait approximately 20 minutes to be given a new assignment, while those from other Western European countries wait for approximately half an hour. Drivers from Eastern Europe, on the other hand, report waiting approximately 50 minutes, or two and a half times as long as their Norwegian colleagues, to receive a new assignment.

Admittedly, we need to be cautious in regarding these totaled working hours as an exact measure of real working hours. The figure we have used here is the total of the estimated time spent on various activities on a 'typical day.' This notwithstanding, the estimated time use provides a good impression of how the categories of drivers spend their time differently. Given that they report working from one to two hours of overtime every day, it is worth noting that nine out of ten of them state that they are either paid for overtime or compensated by time off in lieu. Apparently, the orderly conditions also apply to holidays; more than nine out of ten drivers who are paid in Norway report receiving the holiday allowance, and two out of three of those who are paid in Eastern Europe report the same.

Psychosocial working environment

Long working days with constantly changing traffic conditions and uncertain availability of parking spaces in combination with schedules for picking up and/or delivering cargo may easily be perceived as potential stressors for the drivers.

Table 2. Perceived degree of stress caused by the working situation. Percentages.

Degree of perceived stress	Drivers paid in Norway	Drivers paid in W. Europe, other	Drivers paid in E. Europe
To a great extent	10	7	0
To some extent	20	10	21
To a small extent/not at all	70	83	79

As shown in Table 2, one in ten drivers who receive wages in Norway or another Western European country perceive a great deal of stress caused by their working situation. No Eastern European drivers report experiencing this.

Among the possible causes of stress on the list presented to the respondents,⁹ most of the drivers singled out time constraints and traffic conditions. More than 40 percent mentioned these factors, while technical problems with the vehicle were noted by 13 percent of the drivers. The small proportion who feel stressed by technical problems with their vehicle may indicate that the vehicles tend to be modern. This assumption is corroborated by the fact that more than four in every five vehicles (81 percent) are in Euroclasses 5 or 6. The data material indicates that the Eastern European vehicles may be of a somewhat poorer quality, but even among these, two in every three vehicles are in Euroclasses 5 or 6. Most of the remaining are in Euroclass 4. However, the number of observations is so small that we cannot make a general assertion that drivers employed/paid in Eastern Europe operate an older vehicle fleet.

Conclusion

By conducting interviews in rest areas, we had the opportunity to interview foreign drivers about their wage levels and labor conditions. As regards wage levels, the pattern is unambiguous; foreign drivers earn less than Norwegian drivers. This applies even to those who receive their wages in Norway. Drivers from the Eastern European countries earn least of all, and the wage differentials are considerable. Drivers from Eastern Europe report drawing wages that on average constitute less than half of the net wages of a driver whose wages are paid out in Norway. Even though this wage level is on par with that in their home countries, it strongly restricts the drivers' freedom of action in Norway. At the rest areas, it was our impression that the drivers spend virtually all their (leisure) time in or near their vehicles.

⁹ The stress factors the drivers were asked to assess included: technical problems with their vehicle, time constraints, traffic conditions and issues associated with delivery of cargo.

The wage differentials will naturally also have a major effect on the competition between Norwegian and foreign drivers in the international transport industry. It may also seem, however, that the availability of foreign drivers exerts pressure on the wage level in the domestic transport sector.¹⁰

In terms of working hours, there are only minor differences between the foreign and the Norwegian drivers. Norwegian drivers report spending eight hours behind the wheel each day, while their Eastern European counterparts report spending 25 minutes more. Although the industry is under great pressure with regard to time use and delivery of cargo, the regulations on driving time and rest periods serve to limit the drivers' working day. These provisions have a regulating effect on Norwegian and foreign drivers alike, and to the extent that they are being complied with, they will restrict the opportunity to impose long working hours.

As regards employment conditions, all Norwegian drivers report being permanently employed. Altogether 80 percent of the Eastern European drivers report the same, despite being the group with the lowest proportion of permanent employees.

One result of the international nature of the road haulage industry is that haulers in high-cost countries such as Norway recruit drivers to perform work here for wages that are below subsistence level. Consequently, these drivers live in their vehicles, typically spend their leisure time in rest areas and eat food they have brought with them from home. Because even if their wages may be relatively high in their home countries, they provide no leeway for purchasing anything beyond the bare necessities for as long as the drivers are in Norway. As we have seen, international road haulage volumes have tended to increase, at least as far as transport into Norway is concerned. Nor is there any likelihood that the growth in transport volumes will slow. Forecasts made in the context of the National Transport Plan indicate growth rates that entail more than a doubling of transport volumes associated with imports to Norway.¹¹ Moreover, the foreign sellers will choose the preferred hauler. It might be possible to enact regulations to restrict cabotage and thus ease the pressure on the Norwegian transport industry. A completely different question, however, concerns the working conditions that can be accepted for drivers from the low-cost EU countries when they are on assignments in the wealthier parts of the Union.

10 See Jensen et al. 2014, p. 44.

11 Inger Beate Hovi, Elise Caspersen, Bjørn Gjerde Johansen, Anne Madslie, & Wiljar Hansen, (2015), *Grunnprognoser for godstransport til NTP 2018-2027*. TØI rapport 1393/2015 2015, pp. 3-4.

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Flexibility Is Just Another Word for Nothing Left to Lose

Shane Hamilton

When Kris Kristofferson wrote “Me and Bobby McGee” in 1969, he understood it as a meditation on the “two-edged sword that freedom is.” The memorable line, “freedom’s just another word for nothing left to lose,” according to a 2015 interview with Kristofferson, was inspired by a character in the Fellini film *La Strada* whose urge to ramble offers freedom from social ties, yet ultimately undermines his sense of purpose in life.¹

Nine years later, Kristofferson starred in the Hollywood film *Convoy*, playing a rebellious owner-operator trucker. Known as the “Rubber Duck” on citizens’ band radio, Kristofferson’s character declares early in the film, “I’m independent.... There ain’t many of us left.” The hundreds of truck drivers who join him in the film’s eponymous convoy of nameless protest admire Rubber Duck’s commitment to freedom, his willingness to simultaneously challenge the sexual norms of respectable society, the class-based collectivism of the Teamsters Union, and the regulatory structures of the trucking industry. Yet in the explosive climax of the film, the ragtag band of rebellious truckers are dispersed by powerful forces beyond their control, and Rubber Duck’s truck is destroyed. Escaping the explosion, Rubber Duck sneaks off, and with no livelihood left to lose, stages his own funeral.²

Kristofferson’s critical engagement with the uncertain meanings of *freedom* and *independence* built upon the sensibilities of the American counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s. Kristofferson’s early successes as a country music singer and songwriter in Nashville, Tennessee, did not come through following the norms of the industry; he dressed more like a hippie than a Hollywood cowboy, he dated countercultural icons including Janis Joplin (whose recording of “Me and Bobby McGee” immortalized the song), and many of his lyrics evoked Beat poetry by dwelling on mystical themes, the bittersweet loneliness of the open road, and a wholesale rejection of the conformist attitudes of mainstream society. The casting of Kristofferson as the star in the most significant Hollywood film about trucking could thus be seen as jarring, given the social conservatism of most real-life truckers of the time, many of whom openly despised the campus protests spearheaded by politically engaged members of the counterculture. Yet Kristofferson’s country-counterculture

1 Lydia Hutchinson, “Kris Kristofferson’s ‘Me and Bobby McGee,’” *Performing Songwriter*, Sep. 25, 2015, <http://performingsongwriter.com/kris-kristofferson-bobby-mcgee/>.

2 *Convoy*, dir. Sam Peckinpah, 110 min., EMI Films, 1978, videocassette.

meditations on freedom and independence nonetheless clearly resonated with the tens of thousands of American truck drivers who protested—on several occasions, violently—in the 1970s against the regulatory structures and business practices of an industry that seemed much less free than moviegoers and country music listeners liked to imagine.³

Among the outcomes of the real-life trucker protests of the late 1970s was a profound shift in the regulatory landscape of American trucking. The Motor Carrier Act of 1980 implemented a number of significant changes intended to spur competition for freight and thus drive down shipping costs. Supported by a coalition of consumer activists, neoliberal policymakers, and independent truckers, the deregulation of the industry in 1980 set in motion a series of wide-ranging changes to the nature of work on the American highways. The once-dominant Teamsters Union lost 43 percent of its long-haul trucking members between 1976 and 1985. Non-unionized firms such as J. B. Hunt increasingly took market share from the unionized firms that had anchored the industry since the onset of economic regulation in 1935 during the New Deal. Many small firms, including individual owner-operator truckers, who had been unable to establish positions in some markets in the regulated era, were able to expand their scale of operations significantly after deregulation. But the average truck driver, who had been among the best-paid of blue-collar workers in America in the 1960s and 1970s, continually faced severe pay cuts in the late 1980s and 1990s. Deregulation, in other words, was a “two-edged sword” of freedom, enabling new modes of competition and entrepreneurship for some drivers and firms, but undermining the industry’s stability that had previously provided many drivers with both pride and steady paychecks.⁴

Although the economic consequences of deregulation in American trucking have been well-studied, much less attention has been paid to how the cultural and social meaning of the work of driving a truck in America has changed since the deregulatory legislation of 1980. The work of truckers clearly captured a cultural mood in the 1960s and 1970s, the heyday of country trucking songs and popular movies and TV shows featuring truck drivers bantering on CB radios. The broader cultural appeal of trucking seems to have lessened since 1980, however, suggesting that shifting meanings of *freedom* and *independence* for truckers have made the presumed appeal of the open road less resonant both for professional drivers and for the broader public.

To begin exploring the nature of these changes, it is worth considering what “independence” meant in American trucking culture in the period before deregulation. One place to start is *Overdrive* magazine, “The Voice of the American Trucker,” a periodical launched in 1961 by Mike Parkhurst explicitly aimed at a readership of independent truckers. In an early editorial explaining the magazine’s mission, Parkhurst defined the independent trucker as “a combination small businessman and adventurer.” Soon afterward, however, Parkhurst noted that the “adventurer” aspect invited derogatory epithets such as “gypsy,” a racial slur widely used in the industry since the 1920s—especially among Teamsters union leaders and managers of large common carrier firms—to describe drivers who hauled loads on irregular contracts over irregular routes. According to Parkhurst (who bore a lifelong grudge against the Teamsters Union), such derogatory language

3 Mary G. Hurd, Kris Kristofferson: Country Highwayman, Lanham 2015; Shane Hamilton, *Trucking Country: The Road to America's Wal-Mart Economy*, Princeton 2008, pp. 214-231.

4 Michael H. Belzer, *Sweatshops on Wheels: Winners and Losers in Trucking Deregulation*, New York 2000; Hamilton 2008, pp. 224-231; Michael L. Pettus, “The Resource-based View as a Developmental Growth Process: Evidence from the Deregulated Trucking Industry,” *Academy of Management Journal* 2001: 44:4, pp. 878-896.

belittled the important business function of truckers who neither belonged to a union nor worked for wages on fixed contracts for firms owned and managed by non-drivers.⁵

Thus for Parkhurst, to be an independent trucker entailed romance and adventure, though it was not the open road that made it so, but instead the appeal of proprietary capitalism. In this understanding, to be an independent trucker was to own and operate a small business, and thus to challenge on a daily basis the corporate consolidation of American capitalism. For Parkhurst this was what linked “independence” to a broader notion of “freedom,” which he made explicit in 1962 when he founded a trade group, the Independent Truckers Association (ITA). “If you believe in private enterprise,” *Overdrive* announced, then “join the ITA.” Parkhurst advanced this vision consistently during the 1970s and 1980s, including a statement before Congress in 1976 demanding a “rebirth of free enterprise” to allow independent truckers to “legally compete with the large monopolies” and thus prove that “we truly live in the free society we advertise around the world.” This conceptualization of independence as a matter of small business ownership in a system of “free enterprise” resonated widely for the tens of thousands of truckers who participated in violent shutdowns in 1973-1974 and again in 1979. As one protesting trucker explained in a 1973 letter to *Overdrive*, freedom was “the reason for this country in the very beginning,” but it had become increasingly costly for individual drivers to compete with larger firms, which for him suggested that “a three or four day shutdown is a good, very good, place to start to get what is ours.”⁶

Yet implicit in the protests of the truckers of the 1970s was a recognition that even drivers who owned and operated their own rigs remained deeply dependent on economic and political structures largely beyond their control. Most drivers who hauled freight on contract rather than for wages depended on either freight brokers or larger common carrier firms to gain access to loads. The work of delivering freight over the highways was not only firmly enmeshed in the machinery of corporate capitalism, but it was also bound by multiple layers of regulation, covering everything from allowable driving hours to licensing to taxation to weight restrictions. The cost of fuel and the lost time of delays at shipping and receiving docks remained almost entirely out of the control of individual truckers. One trucker wrote to *Overdrive* in 1973 to share his frustration at a common experience of owner-operators. Having contracted with a carrier to haul an empty trailer across Pennsylvania and then deliver a load to Port Elizabeth, New Jersey, the driver expected to be paid \$100, but was given only \$50, despite having spent four unpaid hours loading the trailer bound for New Jersey. Independence, the trucker realized, was often fraught with powerlessness, as he had no organizational backing for recourse.⁷

In wider American society and culture in the 1970s, however, truckers were routinely thought of as modern-day cowboys, traversing the “open road” without a care. Within the industry, to call a trucker a cowboy was to denigrate the driver’s skills, but for non-truckers there seemed an obvious parallel between the cattle-herding horsemen of the Old West and the “diesel-doggin’, truck drivin’ asphalt cowboy,” as Clark Bentley and Lawton Williams’s 1970 country song put it. From

5 “Who We Are, Why We Are, Where We Are,” *Overdrive* (Feb. 1962), p. 25; *Overdrive*, “Let’s Quit Calling Independent Truckers ‘Gypsies,’” *Overdrive* (May 1962), p. 18.

6 “If You Believe in Private Enterprise Then Why Not Join the ITA?” *Overdrive* (Nov. 1963), p. 16; House Committee on Small Business, *Regulatory Problems of the Independent Owner-Operator in the Nation’s Trucking Industry, Part 1, Hearings*, 94th Cong., 2d sess., May 19, 20, 26, Jun. 5, 1976, p. 195; Mike Funkhouser to the Editor, “A Shutdown Is a Place to Start,” *Overdrive* (Nov. 1973), pp. 16-17.

7 J. Gonzalez, to the Editor, “Flexibility,” *Overdrive* (Jan. 1973), pp. 17-18.

this outsider perspective, the freedom and independence of trucking was a matter not of engaging in proprietary capitalism, but of a daily work experience unconstrained by factory or office walls, unhampered by the constant supervision of managers. This perception was exaggerated in country music songs such as Jerry Chesnut and Mike Hoyer's 1968 "Looking at the World through a Windshield," in which singer Del Reeves bragged of making other drivers choke on his smoke as he roamed effortlessly across the nation. Yet letters in *Overdrive*, as well as oral histories, memoirs, and journalists' interviews with truckers who drove in the period make clear that being alone in a tractor cab, viewing sunrises and sunsets over mountains and plains while traveling at high speed, really could be a profoundly liberating experience. Drivers were, of course, routinely subject to inspections and government and managerial oversight of their work, such as through tachographs and logbooks intended to prevent driving too fast or too long, but truckers often prided themselves on their skill in finding ways to meet regulatory and managerial demands on their own terms.⁸

Importantly, notions of freedom and independence in American trucking were coded as almost exclusively male and white in the 1960s and 1970s. Throughout both decades, more than 90 percent of owner-operator drivers were white. In the overall trucking industry as of 1970 only two percent of drivers were women, and in 1980 only three percent. More than just a demographic fact, the assumption of white manhood in trucking pervaded the culture of the industry both from internal and external perspectives. Workers in the industry routinely laughed at the mere notion of women drivers, while country music songs celebrated the masculine exploits of drivers who spent their days far removed from the domestic sphere.⁹

There have been significant changes in American trucking culture since 1980, however. First, economic deregulation has led to a significant shift in business practice, making the dream of independent small business ownership ever more chimerical. Long-haul drivers are routinely recruited into the industry through promises of being able to purchase their own tractor-trailers and become independent entrepreneurs. The reality for most long-haul drivers, however, particularly for new recruits, is an industry that depends heavily on contract labor. Drivers who consider themselves "owner-operators" often own very little, furthermore, as they operate vehicles financed by lease-to-own contracts that routinely put them under heavy long-term debt burdens. Particularly since the 1990s, such drivers have increasingly witnessed changing understandings of contractor autonomy. Prior to deregulation, it was possible for contractors to seek out only the best loads, refusing to haul freight that did not pay well or that prevented them from exercising control over the geography or timing of their routes. Increasingly in the deregulated era, however, drivers sign contracts committing them to haul for only a single company. Such "independent" contractors find the ability to control the timing, geography, and pay of their work severely reduced, as sociologist Steve Viscelli has clearly demonstrated. One of sociologist Anne Balay's informants forthrightly declared that trucking was "the most unfree thing I've ever done."¹⁰

8 Mrs. Wilfred Abernathy to the Editor, *Overdrive* (Jan. 1965), p. 6; Robert Krueger, *A Gypsy on 18 Wheels: A Trucker's Tale*, London 1975; John F. Runcie, "Social Group Formation in an Occupation: A Case Study of the Truck Driver," (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1971); Otto Riemer, *Hammer Down*, Winona 1985; Axel Madsen, *Open Road: Truckin' on the Biting Edge*, San Diego 1982.

9 Hamilton 2008, pp. 205, 196, 194-207.

10 Steve Viscelli, *The Big Rig: Trucking and the Decline of the American Dream*, Berkeley 2016, pp. 105-113; Anne Balay, *Semi Queer: Inside the World of Gay, Trans, and Black Truck Drivers*, Chapel Hill 2018, p. 5.

A case recently argued before the U.S. Supreme Court highlights the wider social significance of the ongoing shift to contracting in the long-haul trucking industry. The case, *New Prime Inc. v. Oliveira*, originated from a dispute over whether a driver named Dominic Oliveira, who had signed a long-term contract to haul freight for New Prime, was in fact, if not in name, an “employee” rather than an “independent contractor.” New Prime, an interstate truckload carrier, has in recent years pursued a strategy similar to many of its competitors in relying heavily on independent contractors. In large part the strategy is driven by the nature of the deregulated environment in which New Prime is located. The truckload (TL) segment of the industry has become hypercompetitive since the deregulation of American trucking, with tens of thousands of firms operating in highly volatile shipping markets—such as furniture and agrifood haulage—ridden with endemic uncertainty regarding timing, geography, and volume of demand for services. Demand for TL services thus fluctuates widely, as do freight rates. Firms such as New Prime confront this uncertainty in part by shifting risk onto independent contractors, who must cover the fixed costs of their equipment even when carriers cut their freight rates to regain volume. Independent contractors are thus expected to be exceptionally flexible workers, willing and able to accept any load at any time (and often at any price) while also accepting the very real possibility that there may be no loads to haul. The social consequences of this risk-shifting mode is illustrated poignantly by Anne Balay’s analysis of a truckstop in southern California where drivers pay to park, sometimes for days or even weeks, bored and dispirited, while they wait on the firms to whom they have contracted their labor for notice of an available load. Firms that rely on independent contractors to bear the risks of fluctuating demand are clearly doing so as part of an intentional strategy for gaining or maintaining competitive advantage; as the American Trucking Associations noted in its brief in support of New Prime before the Supreme Court: “Contracting with independent businesses to supply capacity is, in short, critical to the ability of motor carriers to remain nimble and competitive in the face of inevitable fluctuation in demand for hauling freight.” Considered in a longer historical context, it is clear that contemporary trucking firms’ demands for flexibility from independent contractors are remarkably similar to conditions in the unregulated era of the 1920s and early 1930s.¹¹

Realizing the problematic nature of contracting with New Prime, Dominic Oliveira filed a class action lawsuit demanding payment of wages that would have been owed to him had he been classified as an employee rather than an independent contractor. New Prime responded by asking the courts to invoke the Federal Arbitration Act of 1925, because Oliveira’s contract included a clause requiring all disputes with independent contractors to be handled through arbitration rather than litigation. This case ultimately made its way to the U.S. Supreme Court, because Oliveira argued that the 1925 legislation specifically exempted from compulsory arbitration any “contracts of employment of [certain transportation] workers engaged in foreign or interstate commerce.” New Prime and its allies in the American Trucking Associations clearly recognized that if independent contractors could pursue legal action to resolve disputes over pay and working

11 Brief of Steve Viscelli, Domingo Avalos, Gabriel Procel, Brion Gray, James Zuber, Hector Zelaya, Desiree Ann Wood, the Wage Justice Center and Real Women in Trucking, Inc. in Support of Respondent as Amici Curiae, *New Prime, Inc. v. Dominic Oliveira*, 586 U.S. ____ (2019), 3-6; Balay 2018, pp. 129-130; Brief of American Trucking Associations, Inc., in Support of Petitioner as Amicus Curiae, *New Prime, Inc. v. Dominic Oliveira*, 586 U.S. ____ (2019), 6; Peter Scott & Chris Reid, “The White Slavery of the Motor World’: Opportunism in the Interwar Road Haulage Industry,” *Social History* 2000: 25:3, pp. 300-315; William R. Childs, *Trucking and the Public Interest: The Emergence of Federal Regulation, 1914-1940*, Knoxville 1985.

conditions, rather than be forced into arbitration, the strategy of shifting the risks of volatile markets onto “independents” would quickly become prohibitively expensive. Thus New Prime argued that the phrase “contracts of employment” referred solely to waged employees, not independent contractors. The lower courts agreed with Oliveira, however, as did the U.S. Supreme Court in January 2019, declaring that the 1925 exemption from compulsory arbitration applied to Oliveira whether he was considered an employee or an independent contractor.¹²

The narrowness of the legal dispute and of the Supreme Court’s ruling belies the wider significance of a case such as *New Prime*, for at the heart of the dispute is a contest over the meaning of independence and freedom in the trucking industry. A central assumption in New Prime’s argument was the notion that as an independent contractor, Dominic Oliveira was free “all along” to “become an employee of New Prime instead,” and thus had consciously and freely chosen to bear the risks of contracting his labor in a market defined by uncertainty and incessant demands for flexibility. Yet for Oliveira the supposed choice between wage work and contracting was not itself the issue; in fact, Oliveira later decided to end his contract and work as an employee instead. More to the point was the matter of how much control contracted drivers might exercise over the nature of the work process. Justice of the Supreme Court, Neal Gorsuch, noted in the court’s unanimous decision supporting Oliveira that employers have rights to “control the details of work performance,” but that independent contractors, in distinction to employees, are “entrusted to undertake a specific project but [are] left free to do the assigned work and to choose the method for accomplishing it.” The reality of the contemporary American trucking industry is that both employees and independent contractors are carefully micromanaged, particularly through the use of satellite tracking and monitoring devices—generally referred to as “Qualcomms” in reference to the most popular brand in use. Firms rely on such devices to limit truck speeds, monitor driver compliance with hours-of-service regulations, and determine where and when drivers should be in order to maximize efficiency of deliveries and pickups. Firms can also use the devices to ensure that independent contractors do not break the terms of their lease by hauling for other carriers. And beyond the technological means for micromanaging the driving behavior of independent contractors, contracting firms tend to exercise extraordinary control over which loads drivers will “choose” to accept, for most independent contractors do not have nationwide operating authority of their own and thus must haul under the authority of the firm to whom they are contracted. In short, an independent contractor exercises remarkably little autonomy over the nature of work; rather than be “entrusted” to “choose the method” for accomplishing their work, what independent contractors are expected to do, in the words of the American Trucking Associations’ brief to the Supreme Court, is “provide the flexibility necessary to meet fluctuations in demand for trucking services.”¹³

A Hollywood scriptwriter hoping to draft a screenplay lionizing the freedom and independence of the American trucker would thus find in the contemporary industry very little material worth portraying on the silver screen. Certainly the mythology of independent small business ownership remains a constant in the industry; indeed, as sociologist Steve Viscelli has made clear, trucking firms routinely promote entrepreneurial possibilities as a means for recruiting new dri-

12 Reply Brief of New Prime, Inc., *New Prime, Inc. v. Dominic Oliveira*, 586 U.S. ____ (2019); Brief of American Trucking Associations, op cit.; *New Prime, Inc. v. Oliveira*, 586 U.S. ____ (2019).

13 Reply Brief of New Prime, Inc., op cit., 3; *New Prime v. Oliveira*, op cit., 10; Brief of Steve Viscelli, op cit., 10, 14; Brief of American Trucking Associations, op cit., 5.

vers into the contracting system. Yet that mythology, as powerful as it is in shaping expectations and behaviors among new drivers entering the industry, clearly contrasts with the daily working experience of truckers whose labor must be “flexible” yet also closely micromanaged.¹⁴

Intriguingly, however, an ongoing cultural and social change in American trucking opens up the possibility that “freedom” and “independence” may be taking on new meanings as trucking becomes less and less a preserve of white masculinity. Statistics indicate that although American trucking remains dominated by men (with 94 percent of drivers in 2014 identifying as male), only 74 percent identified as white while 9 percent and 17 percent identified as Hispanic and black, respectively, a significant departure from the demographics of the 1970s. Culturally, the dominance of masculinity remains prevalent; as one recent analysis of contemporary country music songs about truckers has demonstrated, songwriters continue to “essentialize the occupation as made for males,” such that even songs about women drivers “symbolically preserve trucking as essentially male-centered” by marking female drivers as exceptions or aberrations. Yet as sociologist Anne Balay has discovered, there is an emerging culture of gay and trans truckers who, despite clearly recognizing the limits to economic opportunity and workplace autonomy that prevail in the contemporary industry, nonetheless find meaningful personal value in long-haul trucking. For working-class individuals accustomed to persecution and social scrutiny for being transgender or intersex, the daily work of trucking provides a moving refuge, a means of limiting the possibility of persecution for their identity. Balay’s informants indicate that they feel empowered by driving a truck, considering the machinery a “prosthesis” that—through its movement—enables a sense of personal freedom of expression and courageous selfhood that would be notably absent in an office or factory setting.¹⁵

The world of American work, as historian Louis Hyman has aptly argued, has been transformed since the 1970s “from one of security to insecurity,” with firms routinely demanding ever more “flexibility” from workers. In some respects, long-haul trucking is no different from many other occupations that have been subjected to the rise of contracting, temporary employment, and outsourcing that companies large and small have implemented to reduce labor costs and maintain competitiveness. Yet there is something particularly striking about the transformation of American trucking culture, and how the impacts of deregulation have so thoroughly challenged the meaning of independence in the context of work. After all, unlike the steady corporate jobs undermined by temp agencies and consulting firms in Hyman’s study, long-haul trucking has relied on independent contractors from its inception; drivers have always been expected to provide “flexible” labor. But during the decades in which American trucking was subject to economic regulations, that “flexibility” was also closely tied to expectations of autonomy, choice, and individual responsibility on the part of independent truckers. Thus in the 1960s and 1970s, the masculine-coded working-class appeal of independence in trucking conveyed significant social and cultural meaning even when both insiders and outsiders recognized limits to freedom on the “open road.” Since the 1980s, however, and especially since the rise of new forms of lease-contracting and technologically regulated driving in the 1990s to today, long-haul trucking seems increasingly similar to any other form of work—including professional white-collar work—where expectations

14 Viscelli 2015, pp. 108-128.

15 Viscelli 2015, p. 219; Jason T. Eastman, William F. Danaher, & Douglas Schrock, “Gendering Truck Driving Songs: The Cultural Masculinization of an Occupation,” *Sociological Spectrum* 2013: 33:5, p. 421; Balay 2018, pp. 110-111.

of worker autonomy and responsibility have been replaced by managerialist demands for workers to be “always working.”¹⁶

Indicatively, it is no longer the “cowboy” but instead the “robot” that receives the majority of attention in media discussions of American trucking. Artificial intelligence is increasingly imagined as a “disruptive innovation” that will transform the trucking industry—particularly the hypercompetitive and exploitative TL segment that is so dependent on independent contractors—enabling “autonomous” or “self-driving” trucks to deliver goods efficiently and flexibly. As one young tech entrepreneur tells the Silicon Valley news hub *TechCrunch* in a 2017 video on YouTube, robot trucks have “an incredibly strong business case.” After all, if a truckload firm needs a flexible workforce, it is hard to beat a non-sentient, non-living entity that has neither individual rights nor expectations for any sort of “autonomy” beyond what is prescribed by its managerially dictated protocols. Yet it is also intriguing, when reading the breathless reporting on the nascent self-driving truck industry, how rampant is the sense of youthful enthusiasm among those involved in the work. Engineering the autonomous truck is a thrillingly difficult technological challenge, providing young techies a chance to explore unknown horizons, talk in strange jargon impenetrable to outsiders, work hard over long hours, and potentially reap the rewards of taking risks in a system of free enterprise. Their media world is one of Instagram and WhatsApp and Twitter, of course, not country music and CB radios. But in a world where trucks are expected to be autonomous and drivers are merely contractors, it would seem we now turn to Silicon Valley and not Red Sovine’s Feather River Canyon to find renegades worthy of wider admiration in a society where the “flexibility” of the modern workplace increasingly loses its appeal.¹⁷

16 Louis Hyman, *Temp: How American Work, American Business, and the American Dream Became Temporary*, New York 2018, p. 2; Scott & Reid 2000, p. 301.

17 Conor Dougherty, “Self-Driving Trucks May Be Closer Than They Appear,” *New York Times*, Nov. 13, 2017; Dilip Bhattacharjee, Eric Komenda, & John Murnane, “The US Truckload Industry Seeks a Road to the Future,” *McKinsey & Company Travel, Transport, & Logistics* (Oct. 2017), <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/travel-transport-and-logistics/our-insights/the-us-truckload-industry-seeks-a-road-to-the-future>; Kyree Leary, “Tesla’s Autonomous Semi Truck Has Its First Official Mission,” *Futurism*, Mar. 1, 2018, <https://futurism.com/teslas-autonomous-semi-truck-spotted-california-highway>; TechCrunch, *EMBARC Self-Driving Truck*, Sept. 20, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mCr7CmrNY-Q>.

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Field Technologies and Truck Driver Identity

Mikael Ottosson

I may be married to the truck but at least I don't have a boss looking over my shoulder.¹

Introduction

The sense of living in a state of change is a central part of modern society. In a historical perspective, man's view of his own time during the modern era has been characterized by a mix of wonder, optimism and dystopia. The process of change that we might experience as most manifest in this day is the radical digitalization that society is undergoing. The present article covers the digitalization of working life and more specifically what consequences this has had for the working conditions and work culture of long-haul truck drivers. Two questions are in focus: (1) how present is digital communication technology in the haulage industry operating in Sweden? and (2) how has the digitalization influenced truck drivers' view of their own work? The article is thus to be positioned in the intersection between Labor History, Technological History and Work Science. The empirical basis of the article is an interview study carried out at two South-Swedish truck stops in autumn 2018. The scope of the study is limited and aims to illustrate a central perspective on the digitalization of the haulage sector, namely surveillance and control.

First, it can be observed that the influence of the technological development on society and working life has manifested itself in different ways during the course of history. In a historical perspective, the performance and organization of work has been defined by the technology that has been in use. During the 18th and 19th centuries, the steam engine contributed to the industrialization of large parts of Europe and North America; during the first half of the 20th century, the combustion engine and electrical motor technology contributed to the development of centralized and large-scale mass production; during the second half of the 20th century, the same technology made decentralization and piece production possible. These core technologies, the steam engine and the electric motor, were closely connected to a changed infrastructure, urbanization, globalization and not least the rise of a capitalist market economy. We must view the use of digital

¹ Voice of a truck driver. Quoted from Michael E Conyngham, "Future Truck Drivers: Where Will They Come From, Why Would They Take the Job?", *Trucking in the Age of Information*, Dale Belman & Chelsea White III (eds.), New York 2018, p. 272.

technology in working life in this perspective. According to Brynjolfsson and McAfee, the development, and the increasing use and falling prices of digital technology, can be seen as an indicator of the appearance of a new techno-economic paradigm.²

In academic as well as in popular contexts, technological development is often described in dramatic terms, for example “technological leap” or “industrial revolutions”. To claim that new technology overturns earlier production logics is to claim a truism, but it is a truism that risks concealing the continuity of technology. Even if the digital technology has meant that new products have seen the light of day, its effect is perhaps most significant in the fact that the equipment that once was developed in an analogue context has been endowed with digital control and regulation.³ In fact, the truck and the truck cab have not undergone any radical changes in recent decades. A truck driver from the 1970s would probably not have any major problems finding their way around the cab or even driving the truck. Although digital information technology are used, the traditional construction of a truck remains as the conceptual premise.⁴

Along the lines of classical work process research, digitalization can be seen in the light of generating two effects: replaceability and control. Brown, Ashton and Lauders use the concept of *digital Taylorism* to describe the ongoing digitalization of working life. In their definition of the concept, work is strictly controlled; communication takes place automatically from machine to machine, and the tasks are both decided and given by computers. This means that supervisory functions that previously demanded human judgement have been automatized. Apart from the process being dehumanizing, one consequence of the development is a diminishing value of traditional knowledge and the transfer of individual skill to the organization.⁵ The development of automated working knowledge in this perspective carries a shift in power over the work towards the one who is controlling the technological systems, usually the employer.

Truckers, work and professional culture

The industrialization meant that the worker had to be disciplined and to conform to a predetermined flow of time and actions. The concrete manifestation of this process often occurred within the factory building where the work was carried out in the framework of a set time-spatial relationship.⁶ The tasks that for different reasons were not integrated in the industrial organization thus maintained elements of a pre-industrial freedom. Individual persons and collectives secured

2 Erik Brynjolfsson & Andrew McAfee, *Den andra maskinåldern. Arbete, utveckling och välbästand i en tid av lysande teknologi*, Göteborg 2015, pp. 81-85.

3 Jan Johansson et al., “Work and Organization in a Digital Industrial Context”, *Management Revue* 28(3), 2017, p. 282.

4 Dale L. Belman et al. “Truckdrivers in the Age of Information: Transformation Without Gain”, in *Trucking in the Age of Information*, Dale Belman & Chelsea White III (eds.), New York 2018, p. 183.

5 Philip Brown, Hugh Ashton & David Lauders, *The global auction: The broken promises of education, jobs, and incomes*, Oxford, 2010. In particular pp. 65-83.

6 Zygmund Bauman, “Time and Space Reunited”, *Time & Society* 9 (2/3), 2000, pp. 174-178.

power over their work by moving spatially in a way that made it hard for the employer to plan, surveil and control their work.⁷ The possibility to move spatially can thereby be seen as social capital – and as such linked to a masculine identity.⁸

The culture-oriented studies of the truck driver profession point fairly unanimously to the fact that the work revolves around a masculine professional culture, where traditional notions of connections between the man, the truck and the road are at the core.⁹ The research also shows that the mobility of the profession for a long period of time has been mythologized. The sole truck driver has been pictured as “an asphalt cowboy” or “the knight of the country road”. In this mystique, the mobile character of the work has been linked to independence, to freedom from the surveilling eye of the employer, and to freedom from family obligations and from social conventions.¹⁰ At the center of the professional culture is therefore the connection of freedom to traits conceived as masculine, such as “individualism” and “physical strength”.¹¹

Other cultural elements that previous research has highlighted as central in the professional culture, such as “freedom”, “reliability”, “responsibility” and “experience” stand in sharp contrast to the technological and organizational changes.¹² The digital control and surveillance of vehicles and of the truck driver’s exercise of profession, the introduction of new technological control systems such as fleet management, probably mean that the sense of freedom of the drivers diminishes. With regard to the importance of freedom in the professional culture, it is likely that other cultural elements, such as notions of masculinity, are also affected by the increasing use of digital technology. In this male blue-collar culture, trucking is – as Karen Levy puts it “[...] more than a work process; it is also an enactment of masculinity, a form of economic provision, and an extension of sexuality.”¹³

7 See e.g. Lawrence J. Ouellet, *Pedal to the Metal. The Work Lives of Truckers*, Philadelphia 1994, pp. 23-27.

8 Timo Aho, “Driving Through Neoliberalism: Finnish Truck Drivers Constructing Respectable Male Worker Subjectivities”, in *Masculinity, Labour, and Neoliberalism, Global Masculinities*, Charlie Walker & Steven Roberts (eds.), Cham 2018, p. 293; Ylva Ulfsdotter Eriksson, *Yrke, Status & Genus. En sociologisk studie om yrken på en segregerad arbetsmarknad*, Göteborg 2006, pp. 48-52.

9 E.g. Ouellet 1994, pp. 101-110. For general research on the connection between the man and the machine, see e.g. Ulf Mellström, “Patriarchal Machines and Masculine Embodiment”, *Science, Technology & Human Values* 27 (4), 2002.

10 Belman et al. 2018, p. 184; Sisse Malene Frydendal Grøn, *Sikkerbedskultur og arbeidspraksis hos lastvognschauffører – en fortelling om frihed og tanketorsk*, Roskilde 2008, pp.158-166.

11 Levy 2015 pp. 162-163; Eddy Nehls, *Vägval. Lastbilsförare i fjärrtrafik – perspektiv på yrkeskultur och genus*, Göteborg 2003, pp. 64-76.

12 Mona Bråten & Tommy Tranvik, *Kontroll med ansatte utenfor fast arbeidsted. Ansattes erfaringer med feltteknologi*, Oslo 2012, p. 12; Nehls 2003, p. 63.

13 Karen E. C. Levy, “Digital surveillance in the hypermasculine workplace”, *Feminist Media Studies*, 2016: 16 (2), p. 364.

Field technologies and mobile work

The factory building was a solution to a perceived need to control the performance of work.¹⁴ The extensive division of labor that early industrial organization was based on enhanced the opportunities for more continuous surveillance. The division of labor entailed the separation of a complex working process into smaller, more well-defined and manageable objects.¹⁵ However, alongside the factory organization, work has always been done in which employers have had limited opportunities to control the work. Usually because workers have been out of sight. As a consequence of their mobility, workers such as truck drivers, foresters and home care staff have independently planned as well as carried out their work.¹⁶ Since digital technology enables both centralized and individualized control, surveillance and management, and is thereby spatially transcending, it gets harder for workers to be out of sight. In a work-process perspective, use of digital communication technology means a potential change in power relations between truckload carriers and drivers, to the benefit of the former.¹⁷

The technology that is used for the purpose of gathering, analyzing and presenting data about mobile work, and on that basis generates instructions and working orders, can be subsumed under the term field technologies. There are two conditions that characterize the use of field technologies from a control and surveillance perspective. (1) Due to the spatial separation, management has an opportunity to obtain information that traditionally has been hidden and limited. The digital technology enables, in a quantitatively as well as qualitatively new way, the organization to access, gather, process, save and present information. (2) The technology allows this information to be managed in an individualized way. The way the employee is carrying out his work can be observed at a distance and the individual can be rated in a totally different manner than before.¹⁸ When employers use digital communication technology with the aim of gathering information about activities of mobile field workers, their social relation gets room independent. In addition to being spatially transcending, the technology can accordingly also be understood as a technologically determined individualization of the organization of work. The individual's performance becomes visible in a new way.¹⁹

14 Kirstie Ball, "Workplace Surveillance: an Overview", *Labor History* 51 (1), 2010, pp. 87-88.

15 Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital. The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*, New York 1998, pp. 49-58.

16 Levy 2015 p. 162; Mikael Ottosson & Calle Rosengren, "Who can you trust? The Swedish Confederation for Professional Employees (TCO) and trust-based working time 1950-1970", *Management Revue* 26 (1), 2015, pp. 59, 61-62; Ouellet 1994, pp. 23-27.

17 Colette Cuijpers, "ICT and Employer-Employee Power Dynamics: A Comparative Perspective of United States' and Netherlands' Workplace Privacy in Light of Information and Computer Technology Monitoring and Positioning of Employees", *J. Marshall J. Computer & Info. L.*, 25 (1), 2007, p. 74; Karen E. C. Levy "The Contexts of Control: Information, Power, and Truck-Driving Work", *The Information Society*, 2015:31, p. 161.

18 Tommy Tranvik & Mona Bråten, "The Visible Employee - Technological Governance and Control of the Mobile Workforce", *Management Revue* 28 (3), 2017, pp. 320-321.

19 Levy 2015 pp. 160-161.

Even if there is a considerable amount of suspicion involved in the relation between labor and capital, the surveillance in its own is not the primary goal for the employer to use field technologies. From the perspective of capitalist logic, use of digital technology is rather to be viewed as a means in an ambition to limit non-value-adding activities. It is reasonable to link acquisition and use of field technologies to an increasingly competitive situation.²⁰ In a situation with falling prices of transport, where margins of haulage contractors and forwarders are being reduced, the focus is directed to the logics of paid work. As pointed out by Kirstie Ball, surveillance must be viewed in its role in a capitalist market economy.²¹ Working time is a commodity traded on the market, but at the same time it is a commodity that is characterized by its value-creating potential rather than its direct value. With reference to a capitalist production logic, it is plausible that surveillance and control aim to give owners of capital better value for their money when acquiring labor.²²

But how can field technologies be understood from a surveillance perspective? Michel Foucault argues that what is interesting to study is the effects rather than the causes of surveillance. According to Foucault, surveillance contributes to creating a sense of an ever-present visibility. By using digital information technology, a great amount of data is generated that is automatically sent to the central computer unit of the employer. The machine-to-machine communication that thereby emerges can be compared to a Panopticon, where power is made invisibly, but the individual person is made visible. When we sense that we are being observed, our behavior changes and we are being disciplined.²³ As a result of the digital technology, power is given a new capacity to be and come from everywhere, to become an all-seeing omnipresent eye.²⁴ In this context, digital technology means that power can move inside the truck cab in a different way than before. “It also places their boss over their shoulder, potentially watching their every action.”²⁵ Those who are subjects of the surveillance, in this case truck drivers, would then change their behavior in accordance with what they regard as expected behavior – and in accordance with what they think that the one who is surveilling them would find acceptable or normal.²⁶ If you have a sense of being observed, behaviors expressing willfulness, freedom and masculinity are probably constrained. These behaviors represent cultural elements that traditionally have been central in the professional culture of drivers and have contributed to their position of power in relation to truckload carriers, haulers, forwarders and customers.²⁷

20 Anuradha Nagarajan et al., “Technology in Trucking”, in *Trucking in the Age of Information*, Dale Belman & Chelsea White III (eds.), New York 2018, p. 151.

21 Ball 2010, p. 89.

22 Braverman 1998, p. 37.

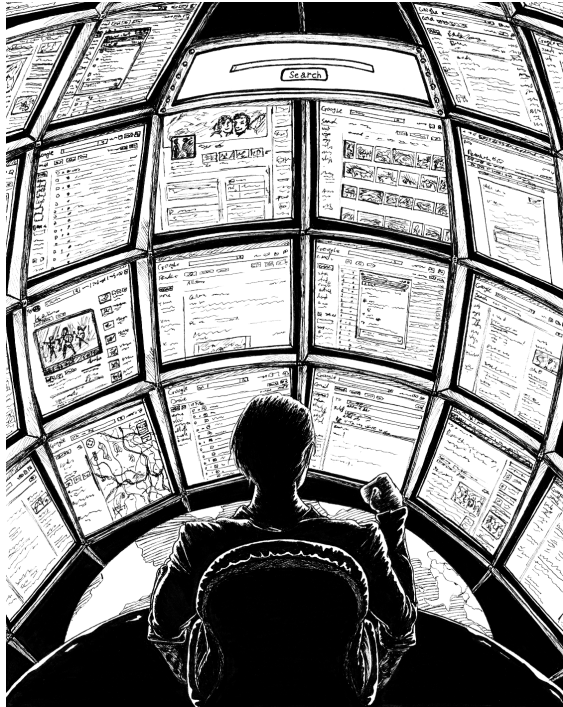
23 Michel Foucault and Allan Sheridan, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, New York, 1995, pp. 189, 201-202.

24 Calle Rosengren & Mikael Ottosson, “Employee Monitoring in a Digital Context”, in *Digital Sociologies*, Jessie Daniels et al. (eds.), Bristol 2017, pp. 181-194; Robert D. Sprague, “From Taylorism to the Omnipricon: Expanding Employee Surveillance Beyond the Workplace”, *J. Marshall J. Computer & Info. L.*, 25 (1), 2007, pp. 1-2.

25 Conyngnam 2018, p. 273.

26 Scott C. D’Urso, “Who’s Watching Us at Work? Toward a Structural-Perceptual Model of Electronic Monitoring and Surveillance in Organizations”, *Communication Theory* 16, 2006, pp. 288-297.

27 Levy 2015, pp. 161, 165-168; Oulet 1994, pp. 23-27.



Digital Panopticon. The digitalization of working life makes information of work performance independent of the room. A consequence of the digital technology is that mobile workers, such as truck drivers, who previously have been out of sight, are monitored and controlled to a greater extent. Illustration © Alison Schofield.

Field technologies

In a technological sense, field technologies consist of a system of hardware and different applications (software) that are constructed in order to gather, connect and present desired information. One way to understand the structure of the system is to split it up on the basis of its foundational functions. In essence, the system consists of three parts: (1) core technology, (2) software and applications and (3) a system for data transmission.²⁸

The basic core technology (1) is a GPS receiver. Originally, a GPS device was a specific and relatively expensive device that was installed in vehicles. The progression has been rapid and in a few years the GPS technology has left its original format and has been integrated with other technology. Regardless of format, a GPS device has the capacity to momentarily create data about the position, speed and direction of the device. The created data can remain with the driver, but it can also momentarily be transmitted to the owner of the system. After being processed, information can thereafter be forwarded to different stakeholders, in this case truckload carriers and forwarding agents, but sometimes also to third parties such as customers and authorities. One important circumstance is that the system creates information that is not solely momentary, but also historic.

²⁸ The following reasoning about field technology structure and functionality is essentially based on reviews written by Bråten & Tranvik 2012, pp. 28-40; Conyngham 2018, p. 273; Levy 2015 in particular pp. 163-165; Nagarajan et al. 2018, pp. 148-155.

Depending on the selected technical solution, this information can be subsequently linked to the vehicle or to individual drivers.

The data that are generated about the movement of the device can subsequently be combined with other systems (2) and thereby create applications with specific purposes. Closely related to the GPS technology, and in fact the original use, is the combination of positional data with map data. If the system also has traffic information, the driver can get information that takes roadwork and gridlocks into account. Today, this is cheap standard technology that we all can access in our cellphones. It is highly useful, but means a substantial change of qualification from the perspective of the driver. Local knowledge or judgement is no longer necessary for choosing the best route. Further integration can be achieved by receipt and payment systems that are connected to smartphones. This means that a system is built up around the GPS technology that has a potential to link the position and direction of the device with different management decisions and functions. What once was an elusive ability has now been mechanized – and a central professional skill has been imperceptibly transferred to the organization.

In addition to the GPS technology, sensors that register other types of data, such as temperature in the cargo space, driving style, fuel consumption, alcohol intake of the driver and technical data from different parts of the vehicle, may be installed in the truck. This data can be of interest not just for haulers and forwarders, but also for customers and vehicle manufacturers. Other stakeholders are government agencies that collect data from digital tachographs. The data that is generated on the vehicle, and the processed information created by the owner of the system, need (3) to be transferred in both directions. Here the technology revolves around an increasingly available and fast internet. Where information previously was sent manually with radio or calls from phone booths, flow of data and information to an increasing extent occur automatically, machine to machine, without active measures being taken by either driver or owner of the system. This means that both the collecting of data and communication have become natural parts of the previous analogue equipment. As far as active measures are required, the interface of technology in many cases overlaps with our private use of similar technology and is thus easy to use and easy to accept.

But at the same time as new technology is developed and installed, there is an existing fleet of vehicles with functioning and tested technology. It is therefore fair to ask how field technologies are used in practice. How are the trucks trafficking Swedish roads equipped? How do the drivers experience the technology? As a consequence of the rapid development of the area, the surveys that have been done are rapidly getting out of date. In order to get an up-to-date idea of the situation, a limited survey was conducted in autumn 2018.

A snapshot from southern Sweden

The trucking industry is a diversified line of business, where different types of activities are being conducted. It involves logging trucks going to sawmills, gravel trucks going from gravel pits to roadworks, short-distance transport and intercompany distribution, et cetera.²⁹ According to the Swedish Transport Workers' Union, about 20% of the road freight is to be characterized as long-

29 B. Starr McMullen, "The evolution of the US Motor Carrier industry", in *Trucking in the Age of Information*, Dale Belman & Chelsea White III (eds.), New York 2018, pp. 2-4.

haul trucking while the remaining 80% is local transports.³⁰ Long-haul trucking, in turn, can be divided into private carriers hauling their own goods and for-hire carriers hauling goods belonging to others.³¹ The organizations also differ in size. There are owner-operator truckers (drivers with a rig of their own) and there are haulers with hired drivers – all with different relationships to customers and forwarders. It is reasonable to assume that a digitalization process differs depending on the type of transport organization, what goods are being transported and who the customers are.

With respect to Northern European conditions, a major research study was conducted in Norway in 2012.³² Given the rapid technological development, there is reason to believe that the conditions are different today. The Norwegian research study also showed that the use of field technologies increased rapidly. With the purpose to get an idea of how field technologies currently are being used in Sweden, a limited survey on the use of field technologies was conducted by the author in autumn 2018. The survey was limited to larger long-haul trucks.³³ The vehicle's country of registration or what kind of goods it transported was not taken into account. The study was conducted at two truck stops in the South of Sweden on October 8 and October 12, 2018. One of the truck stops is located along European Highway number 6 (E6), just outside Helsingborg, and the other truck stop is located along European Highway number 22 (E22) just outside Karlshamn, both in the South of Sweden. At one truck stop (E6), twelve drivers were interviewed and at the other (E22), eight drivers were interviewed, which adds up to 20 interviews. The interviews were relatively short and lasted approximately 20 minutes each. The drivers were interviewed in the order that they appeared at the truck stop, hence the selection was random. Two of the drivers were interviewed simultaneously. At one truck stop (E6), six drivers chose to refrain from participating and at the other (E22), three drivers refrained from participating. The main reason as to why they chose not to participate was lack of time, stress and need for rest. The interviews were carried out in Swedish or English. The interviews were made voluntary and the drivers were informed about the aim of the study, and that the data would be strictly handled with regard to their integrity. For privacy reasons, the interviews were not recorded; only field notes were taken. In addition to the interviews with the drivers, a telephone interview with a representative from the Swedish Transport Workers' Union was conducted November 22, 2018.

In relation to the total number of long-haul trucks, this study is of limited scope.³⁴ Its representativeness is limited to the situation over a couple of hours at two highway truck stops in Southern Sweden. Both places are also characterized by their closeness to the harbors in Helsing-

30 Interview with official at The Swedish Transport Workers' Union November 22, 2018. These figures are confirmed by The Swedish Association for Road Transport Companies. According to the Swedish trade organization, about 25% of the transports performed by their member companies are long-distance transports.

31 Oulett 1994, p. 21.

32 Bråten & Tranvik 2012. The study is referred to in Tommy Tranvik, *Det gjennomslitige arbeidslivet. Erfaringer med feltteknologi i utvalgte yrker*, Oslo 2013 and Tranvik & Bråten 2017. An FAFO report from 2016 presents data relating to the use of field technologies in different industries. However, truck drivers are not reported specifically in the study (Mona Bråten, *Digital kontroll og overvåking av arbeid: Omfang og praksis*, Oslo 2016).

33 The Swedish 25.25 m combinations, the 16.5 m trailer-tractor combinations or the European 18.75 m combinations.

34 At a measuring point on the E6 highway, Hofterup, close to one of the spots where this study was carried out, daily traffic includes about 5,000 larger trucks (Swedish Transport Administration) as referenced in the newspaper *Sydsvenska Dagbladet*, January 16, 2018.

borg on the one hand and the harbors in Karlshamn and Karlskrona on the other. What the study can show is how truck drivers can experience the connection between digital technology and their working conditions. From a methodological point of view, it is a qualitative study aiming to understand how drivers relate to the technology in question.³⁵ It must be noted, however, that the patterns concerning the use of field technologies that appeared in this study correspond relatively well with previous research.

In the interviews, questions were asked based on two themes:

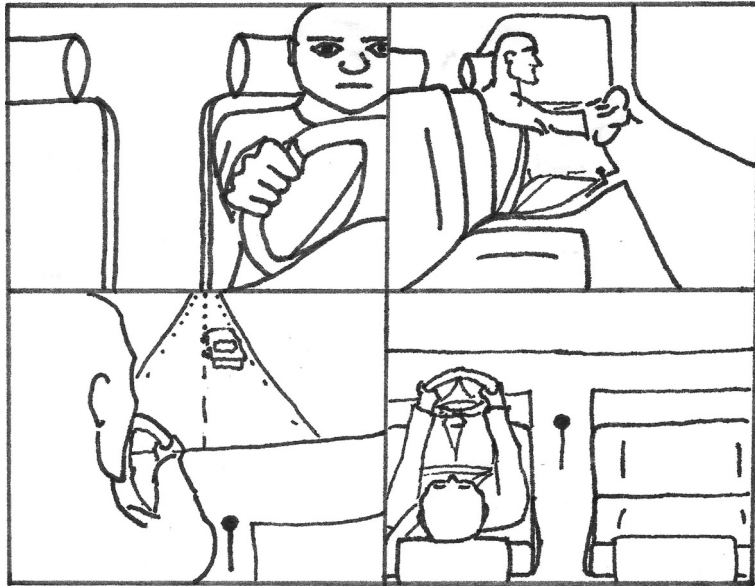
1. What field technology is installed in the truck? Which part of the technology do you use and which part exclusively sends information to the road carriers, forwarders or customers? To which administrative systems is this technology connected? How do road carriers, forwarders or customers communicate? What is communicated?
2. How do you experience/perceive the technology? In what way does it affect your work? In what way does the technology influence your relationship to road carriers, forwarders, colleagues and customers? In what way is your relationship to your colleagues affected? In what way does the technology influence your view of yourself as a professional driver?

The trucks of the interviewed drivers were registered in 7 different countries:

Nationality	Number
Sweden	9
Denmark	3
Poland	3
The Netherlands	2
The Czech Republic	1
Bulgaria	1
Germany	1

All drivers were male. They were of varying age, equally distributed between 31 and 56 years. There seemed to be no significant pattern between the driver's age and the size of the haulage company. No driver was from a third country. From 20 trucks altogether, two were tankers transporting liquid chemicals to the food industry, five trucks transported refrigerated foodstuffs, and the remaining thirteen transported different kinds of cargoes. Nine trucks had transfer stations as destinations, while the remaining eleven were to deliver their load directly to customers. Three of the trucks that were registered abroad had picked up new loads in Sweden, but the drivers claimed that it was legal cabotage transport.

³⁵ I cannot judge to what extent the interviewed drivers are representative of a larger collective, but I'm content with stating that the interviews highlight a phenomenon in the common driver's everyday life. Cf. Gary Thomas, "A Typology for the Case Study in Social Science Following a Review of Definition, Discourse, and Structure", *Qualitative Inquiry* 17 (6), 2011, p. 514.



The boss looking over my shoulder. Central in the monitoring idea is that the supervised person tends to adapt his behavior to what the person believes is expected of him by the observer. Illustration © Jakob Ottosson.

The use of field technologies

The limited data gives a both coherent and fragmented image of the equipment of the trucks. Certain technology is used as a standard, for example cellphones or GPS devices. But there are differences when it comes to how and in what way this technology is linked to road carriers, forwarding firms and customers.

Technology	Number
Cellphone or PDA	20
GPS	20
Digital tachograph	20
Radio communications unit	18
Equipment for digital receipt management	14
Connected to traffic management or business systems	13
Load temperature measurement	8
Internet-connected vehicle parts	6
Driving style registration	6
Measurement of fuel consumption	6
Breathalyzer	5
Route deviation registration	1

Not surprisingly, each of the 20 trucks was equipped with cellphone, GPS device and tachograph. This exemplifies technology that nowadays is cheap and standardized. With the exception of tachographs, it is also technology that is used by private individuals on a day-to-day basis. Within this use of technology a big variation can be seen. Regarding the use of GPS devices, one truck was only equipped with the private cellphone of the driver, which also served as GPS device. Six trucks had GPS devices that were not connected to the central system of the road carrier. The remaining thirteen trucks had GPS devices that were connected to the central system of the haulage contractor. These drivers said that the organization probably had information about their position, route and available carrying capacity. Slightly fewer had equipment for digital receipt management. Of these, eight used particular devices, while four used a cellphone or PDA. Together with this digital technology, almost all of the trucks had equipment for traditional analogue radio communication.

The trucks had other measurement systems to a relatively low extent. It was relatively common that the temperature of the cargo space was registered and that this information was automatically sent to the road carrier and sometimes also to customers. Six trucks were relatively new and their drivers said that their vehicles were connected digitally to the system of the truck manufacturers. An interesting application was that five trucks were equipped with breathalyzers that were connected to the road carriers. These were not alcohol locks, but the alcohol level in the breath of the drivers was registered. In these trucks, driving style and fuel consumption were registered as well. Finally, one truck had equipment that alerts the road carrier when the driver departed from the assigned route. It should be noted that the drivers were relatively aware of what equipment was in use. But they were at the same time doubtful about how the information generated by the equipment was handled. The trucks owned by bigger haulage firms were throughout more technology intensive and more well equipped regarding field technologies than the trucks that belonged to smaller haulage firms.³⁶ The interviewed union representative pointed out that the cost of the technological systems was relatively high, which meant that owner-operators and other smaller haulers often only equipped the trucks with just a GPS device and a digital tachograph mandated by law.

The drivers' experience

The drivers were of different ages and had been in the profession for different periods of time. However, they all expressed the sense of not just an increase in terms of digital technology in the trucks, but also the sense that the technology of today was "more controlling than before". The drivers were unspecific regarding the time frame and described a creeping digitalizing with an indefinite "now" and "then". At the same time they experienced the difference as big. Not surprisingly, the older drivers experienced the difference as bigger and more dramatic than the younger drivers. Generally, the older drivers were also more negative to the new technology than the younger ones. Several of the older drivers said that the profession was freer when they began working as a driver and that was also one reason for choosing the profession.³⁷ Even though the drivers felt more sur-

36 This relationship is supported by previous research in the field. See e.g. Tranvik & Bråten 2017 p. 326; Irina Harris et al. "ICT in Multimodal Transport and Technological Trends: Unleashing Potential for the Future", *International Journal of Production Economics* 159, 2015, pp. 90, 93; Ian Davies et al., "Assessing the Impact of ICT on UK General Haulage Companies", *International Journal of Production Economics* 106, 2007, p. 19.

37 Conyngnam 2018, p. 273. Cf. Aho 2017, p. 297.

veiled than before, they presented a split image regarding if it was positive or negative.

A trivial example is the option of the driver to choose the route himself. Most of the drivers said that they no longer could choose routes themselves in the same way as before. In some cases the drivers said that they had to strictly follow the route in their driving orders, others felt that they were expected to follow the assigned route, and some unreflecting followed the driving instructions. Some of the older drivers claimed that they were restrained from coping with traffic jams by using shortcuts. One of them formulated his experience with the words: “they no longer trust me”. Similar thoughts were put forward in relation to no longer being able to save time by driving too fast, overtaking other vehicles or the like. One of the drivers used the expressions “pride” and “dignity” when describing his reduced room for maneuvering.³⁸ At the same time, some of the drivers said that it was convenient not to have to read maps and to hold track of one’s position and which way to drive. Some drivers thought that it was good that they could drive on new routes where they could not find their way without using a GPS device.

Yet another example is the technology itself. The older drivers said that they did not understand the technology and that there was less and less that they could do themselves when something stopped working. The drivers who drove the newer trucks did not have the permission to carry out any repair work independently. At the same time, almost all thought that it was good not to have to carry out repairs on truck stops, that it was good that the truck manufacturer automatically controlled the status of the truck, that it was good that there was a service car, et cetera. A fascination for the digital technology in itself could also be seen. Several of the drivers said that the service of the road carriers and the truck manufacturers had made the work “cleaner”.

A third example is the driving style registration and the automatic alcohol check that was installed in some of the trucks. On the one hand the present drivers viewed the alcohol check as a manifestation of suspicion. On the other hand they claimed that they had colleagues who drank too much alcohol on ferries and truck stops. The same line of thinking was put forward regarding registration of driving style. They said that eco-driving competition is a great idea, but also that they knew how to drive a truck better than some “girl at the office”.

All drivers expressed an overall sense of an increased presence of haulage contractors, forwarders and customers. They had generally more contact through digital systems as well as by telephone. This was seen as negative as well as positive. They thought that it was positive that managers and staff management knew where they were. They felt that it brought more security. Some drivers experienced the surveillance technology as de-stressing in the sense that the traffic management office could see that there were traffic jams. One driver explained that he appreciated the encouragement he regularly used to get. One driver thought that the haulage contractor’s eco-driving competition of the was fun.³⁹ At the same time, some drivers expressed that their contact with other drivers had been weakened. The haulages have become increasingly pressured and there is less time for social relations at truck stops. Haulers and forwarders, but also customers, regularly contacted them and asked why they had not arrived yet.

38 Cf. Lena Pettersson, “Masculinities in an occupational setting: A gender perspective on resistance toward formal control”. *Journal of Scandinavian Studies in Criminology and Crime Prevention*, 2006: 7(2), p. 116.

39 Several researchers point out that management uses different competitions as a subtle way of controlling the workforce. According to Elizabet Bjarnason and Stephan M. Schaefer, this phenomenon has been influenced by the opportunities offered by digital technology (Elizabet Bjarnason & Stephan M. Schaefer, “Who’s the Company’s Best Driver? Technology-Driven Competition”, in *Working and Organizing in the Digital Age*, Lund 2018, pp. 53-56; cf. Levy 2015, pp. 170-171).

The image of the way the drivers experienced the digital technology and its potential to surveil and control is split. The material is limited in scope, which makes it hard to see clear patterns, but it seems like their view of the technology depends on two factors: (1) the age of the driver and (2) the relation to the employers in general. Older drivers felt more surveilled than younger. Those who considered their working conditions to be bad from the very beginning felt more surveilled than those who considered their working conditions to be good. The split image that the drivers gave was confirmed by the representative from the Swedish Transport Workers' Union. He was of the opinion that the use of digital surveillance technology was more limited than it appeared in a general picture, particularly among smaller haulers. He said that this was a consequence of the technological systems being relatively costly, while the wages were low. He pointed out that new trucks are well equipped, but that there are lots of old trucks with low-paid drivers from countries in Eastern Europe.

Although the drivers related differently to the digital technology, there is a general pattern to be seen in the fact that they were uncertain of how the haulage contractors handled the information that was collected. They were aware that large amounts of data were generated during their journeys. They also knew that the handling of personal data was regulated in legislation and union agreements. At the same time, they suspected that the reality was different from that, and that usual traffic data affected wages and what journeys they would receive in the future.

Discussion and closing remarks

The technological and organizational changes related to digitalization, which started in the 1970s, have led to a radical reversal of human relationships to time and space. Hence, through the introduction of digital technology, our activities are no longer limited to a physical space. Within academia, this is made noticeable by the problematization of the term mobility.⁴⁰ The theoretical shift probably has its roots in changed, today often internet-based, practices of communication. The technology has also left the traditional computer format and there are mobile internet connections in, for example, smartphones and GPS devices, but also in vehicles and vehicle parts.⁴¹ The state of knowledge regarding the use of field technologies is insufficient, but existing research as well as this study indicates that the utilization of digital surveillance technology has become increasingly important.⁴²

The professional culture that marks the everyday life of the drivers has traditionally been marked by the mobile nature of the work. The mobility of the trucks has given the drivers a great deal of freedom and the possibility to take responsibility themselves for the execution of the work. The digital technology, in the article described as field technologies, aims at increasing the possibility of haulage contractors, forwarders and customers to control the execution of the work.

With the aim to get a picture of the technological use as well as the experiences the drivers had

40 See e.g. Donald Hislop, *Mobility and Technology in the Workplace*, New York 2008; Athina Lazakidou, "Virtual Communities, Social Networks and Collaboration", *Annals of Information Systems*, vol. 11, 2012; Peter Sweatman. "Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Unleashed", in *Keep Moving, Towards Sustainable Mobility*, Bert Van Wee (ed.), Hague 2012.

41 Sweatman 2012.

42 Henrik Sternberg et al., "The efficiency potential of ICT in haulier operations", *Computers in Industry* 65, 2014, pp. 1165-1166; Tranvik & Bråten 2017, pp. 324-335.

of the technology, an interview study was conducted in 2018. Not surprisingly, the study shows that the new trucks had more digital equipment than the older ones. However, all trucks were equipped with a core technology centered on a GPS device. What differed is how the owners of the system handled the data that the trucks generated. That is in itself not surprising if one considers that new applications are constantly being developed that the owners of the system do not quite know how to use. In this context, it is enough to note that the technology is generally present in the trucks and that this technology has a surveillance potential.

The experiences of the drivers were mixed regarding whether they were positive or negative. From their answers, it is nevertheless reasonable to arrive at the interpretation that central parts of the professional culture revolving around independence, responsibility and the possibility of planning the work on your own were challenged by system-driven surveillance and computer-supported decision support. The drivers experienced that the traditional freedom of the work and their room to maneuver had declined. To use the expression of Foucault, omnipresent eye, may be a bit too strong, but it is obvious that the driver felt that the haulers were more present than before.

Furthermore, a paradox emerged in the interviews: the drivers who tended to experience the use of field technologies in a positive way were those who worked for larger haulers and had many field technologies in their trucks. Similarly, drivers who worked for smaller haulers – and had fewer field technologies in their trucks – experienced that their freedom was increasingly restricted. Drivers' views of the use of field technologies – and the panoptical effect – therefore appears to be dependent on employment conditions in general.

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Hauling From the Seventies Up to Now: Truckers' Perceptions on Cultural, Social and Environmental Changes Over Four Decades

Ljuba Fredenman

Introduction

This paper aims to study cultural, social and work environmental changes in a trucker's context over the past four decades. These are changes that I had experienced through my own twenty-six year career in the transporting business, most of that time as a truck driver, but also as taxi driver and courier. After many years behind the wheel, I left the trucking business and completed an MA in Social Sciences. With the issues brought by my personal background as a driver, I decided to conduct this study by interviewing some of my former truck driver colleagues. The research is conducted in the tradition of oral history.

This book chapter is the summary of a survey based on two group interviews with truck drivers, mainly from two haulage companies in Malmö. Both companies are operating within the same worldwide transport corporation and share customers as well as logistics centers. Their main assignment is intercity haulage across Sweden, which is performed in two modes – as intercity truckers by night and as pilots (*lots* in Swedish) in the home region during the day. The two modes are normally performed by the same truckers, although with alternating schedules of four weeks each, after which they swap schedules. The assignment is conducted with big rigs, up to 25.25 meters in length and up to 60 metric tons in weight per equipage. The hauling firms also provide distribution to retailers and others, mainly with smaller vehicles. The truck drivers who are participating in this survey therefore have different types of work within their companies.

Both women and men are represented in the survey. All participants started in the business as truck drivers, but three of them advanced at some point in their carriers, and then became supervisors and/or dispatchers. A total of ten informants participated in the two group interviews, five participants from each company. The average age of all informants is 51.8 years. The oldest trucker is a 75-year-old man, while the youngest is a 26-year-old female trucker. The average age for the women is 35 years, and 59 years for the men. In terms of working experience, the total is 290 years for both genders. The three females have 38 years of combined working experience, while the men have a combined total of 252 years on the job. As we can see, the representation of men and

women is quite asymmetrical in both age and worked years in the business. Regarding how many employers the truckers have been working for, the total is 42. That gives an average of 4.2 employers per trucker. The women have had less employers in comparison with their male colleagues; 1.33 versus 5.43. The general type of work performed at present employers is intercity haulage/piloting and distribution. One of the drivers who recently retired was working for a company that is specialized in international haulage. One of the women works as a dispatcher in international transportation. Two of the truckers have professional experience in overseas driving. The normal pattern among the informants is that they started out as distribution drivers, and as they gained experience, they advanced to become either intercity drivers or pilots, and generally both in combination. Piloting requires the most skills, because the pilot loads, unloads and prepares both vehicles and goods to be safe for the intercity trucker when hauling the rig during the night.

The interviews were conducted on two occasions. The participants filled out a questionnaire comprising nineteen questions that was handed out in advance. These questions and responses gave structure to the following two group interviews. The first interview took place on October 22, 2016, and the second group came together three weeks later on November 5, 2016.

Attitudes, values and changes in daily challenges

To the question of what the best versus worst parts of being a truck driver are, and how the work has changed during their careers, a variety of best parts are mentioned. Some are expected, such as individual freedom or at least the feeling of individual freedom¹ and independence where you can think for yourself to get the job done.² What everybody in the two interview groups agree on as the worst part is time pressure, which the truckers constantly struggle with. The persistent lack of time is likely the biggest stressor. One could argue that it contradicts the conception of freedom and independence as best factors, when the drivers at the same time perceive the time pressure as their worst aspect. In the 1970s and 1980s, they had much more time to perform their duties. What is compensating for that is that the vehicles have become better in all aspects. They are more comfortable, and they provide smarter and easier handling. Loading and unloading is not as time-consuming as before. Forklifts and other utilities are used today at a magnitude that cannot be compared to usage in the old days.³ For that reason, the discussion moves to gender issues. One elderly male informant turns to one of the younger female truckers and says:

You could've never worked as a truck driver back then. The job was too heavy for a woman in those days. Thankfully, lifting utilities have developed. We therefore have more women working with us today, and that is a good thing.⁴

1 Truck driver No 5; Truck driver No 6; Truck driver No 9.

2 Truck driver No 4; Truck driver No 8.

3 Truck driver No 7; Truck driver No 9; Truck driver No 10.

4 Truck driver No 10.

All participants in both interview groups agree that increasing women's representation is good in all aspects. Some argued that the working environment has become better socially and more civilized since women started to get established as truckers.⁵ Heavy lifting without tools is on occasion still a problem for both men and women, especially when delivering to private receivers where there is no one to assist the trucker while unloading. If the goods are bulky, too heavy or in any way far too difficult to handle for one person, the truckers sometimes find themselves in situations where they must decide whether they will put their health at risk or take the goods back to the hub.⁶ In the old days, there would normally be one driver and one pilot to assist. Nowadays the trucker is driver, pilot and assistant all in one. In such cases the problem is most often solved through social skills, and if necessary, the recipient gets a reminder that taking goods back will cost a new delivery.⁷

The interviews show that there is a change in culture not only in regard to women's representation, but also in respecting laws. Nowadays the drivers are not pushed to break either their backs or regulations, like they were back then.⁸ Drivers that returned goods to the hubs were ashamed in the old days.⁹ Today there is no discussion if a trucker calls up the dispatcher and tells him or her that proper unloading is not possible. One of the two dispatchers who is also supervising says:

I always back up my driver. He or she is at the scene and I have full trust in their ability to make the best decision [...]. We are not supposed to break our backs if the customer refuses to provide help when necessary. Today we take the goods back with no hesitation and we will charge the customer for the additional delivery that follows.¹⁰

What is also highly agreed on is the social interaction that the work provides. Many of the drivers expressed great satisfaction in collaborating with customers, represented by people of all kinds. In some cases, there are warehouse workers known as difficult to handle. And for some of the truckers they are a stimulating challenge. The reason given is that a great deal of trucking is about establishing and maintaining good relationships with customer representatives, and of course with fellow truckers. Some participants argued that their social skills have been trained in that sense, and that their interpersonal abilities have progressed during their careers in the trucking business.¹¹ No one agreed on the traditional stereotype trucker as a lone wolf sticking to himself. On the contrary, they all argued that truckers are social beings, enjoying both cooperation and good company. Exceptionally, one informant argued that, depending on the situation, there are occasions when he prefers the moments of solitude that the job also provides. He argues that being social can be expressed in different ways. In his case, he chooses to be social on his own terms. From freely talking to any stranger on the street, to doing his job in comfortable silence without verbal interaction.¹²

Both of the groups point to the tighter schedules as a negative change. As customer demands today go very much into details, the truckers are forced to catch up slot times, on many occasions

5 Truck driver No 7.

6 Truck driver No 3.

7 Truck driver No 4.

8 Truck driver No 2.

9 Truck driver No 5.

10 Truck driver No 2.

11 Truck driver No 1; Truck driver No 3; Truck driver No 4; Truck driver No 7.

12 Truck driver No 4.

open for only fifteen minutes.¹³ That means the departures nowadays are spread throughout the entire day, as opposed to previously, when departures were normally planned to take place at the same time. They therefore mainly drove in convoys as a team. If someone got a flat tire, the whole convoy stopped to help change the tire together. That would only take a short while, and then they were on the road rolling again.¹⁴ That does not exist anymore according to both groups, and the truckers agree on that as the reason for the current split departures that constitute today's norm. If one gets a flat tire or any problems down the road today, they pick up their cellular phone and call for contracted road assistance. That works satisfactorily, but the team feeling that the old days' routines provided is in that sense history now.¹⁵

Impacts of the IT-revolution

The truckers were asked what their thoughts were regarding the IT revolution and what impacts it has had on the transportation business. The first thing that comes up is that the person-to-person dimension has significantly decreased as digital utilities have increased.¹⁶ From frequently using shortwave radios and cellular phones, to now sending and receiving tasks digitally, the daily conversation among colleagues and dispatchers has almost disappeared. The consequence is the truckers' outspoken feeling that they are socially more isolated, with less coherency in their own context.¹⁷ On the other hand, much time is saved when there is less time to chitchat on the phone.¹⁸

GPS (Global Positioning System) can be of help sometimes but is most often a blunt tool for truck driving. Truckers still use maps and are doing research in advance to get information on places they are heading to.¹⁹ Digital positioning systems are more frequently used by dispatchers, who find those tools very convenient to work with. They make route planning easier and more efficient, resulting in time and fuel savings and less impact on the environment.²⁰ The systems also provide better security for both drivers and goods. Any vehicle and consignment down to the smallest parcel can easily be traced on customer demand.²¹ Transparency is therefore increased, but some drivers express that it is at the expense of their privacy.²² Most drivers do not agree on transparency as a problem. The dispatchers argue that they are not interested in whether a driver takes a break during working time for a private errand, even though they can see it on their screens. Even if the dispatchers were interested in similar matters, they would not have the time to engage themselves in such activities.²³

13 Truck driver No 8; Truck driver No 9.

14 Truck driver No 6; Truck driver No 8.

15 Truck driver No 8.

16 Truck driver No 10.

17 Truck driver No 4; Truck driver No 5; Truck driver No 6; Truck driver No 8.

18 Truck driver No 1.

19 Truck driver No 9.

20 Truck driver No 1.

21 Truck driver No 2.

22 Truck driver No 4.

23 Truck driver No 1; Truck driver No 2.

I was curious about the largest work- and environmental-related problems that truckers face nowadays. Both groups expressed the mandatory digital tachograph to be of great concern. They argued that the digital cards have made it more difficult to manipulate and cheat on work-time regulations. The problem still remains among truckers, however, and some of the drivers suggest that the Swedish authorities are indulgent towards those who choose not to respect laws and regulations. An example is given; the German police are known to give fines that must be paid right on the spot, before the trucker can continue the transport.²⁴ In that respect, some argued the Swedish authorities' lack of knowledge and commitment to deal with querulants in the business, especially alleged foreign truckers with low wages. The authorities' lack of interest is also shown in poor road maintenance and under-dimensioned roads.²⁵ This, in combination with increasingly aggressive behavior among motorists in general, impairs truckers' work environments significantly.²⁶

The digital tachograph card is pointed out as a big stressor. Because of the card, drivers feel meticulously monitored. Such hard surveillance sometimes forces them to stop in what is described as an absurd manner. For example, when a trucker runs out of driving time close to the target and is therefore forced to take a break when they are only minutes away from accomplishing their assignment. Such situations often lead to prolonged shifts and costly overtime, leaving the driver incapable of finishing the work in a reasonable manner.²⁷

Another issue that comes up is that many young employees are alleged to show little interest in learning the job from the basics nowadays. Nineteen-year-old rookies show up at work and expect themselves to be driving the newest and biggest intercity long-haul rigs right from the start.²⁸ This is argued to be a new phenomenon, which tends to provoke the elderly truckers who spent their very first years on the job driving the trashiest vehicles and doing the worst assignments until they qualified for handling the bigger rigs.²⁹ Some say the problem starts in the trucking school (secondary) and point out that the youngsters have spent three years doing nothing but receiving their heavyweight driver's license.³⁰ Others blame parents to be spoiling their children all through their childhood.³¹ Everybody agrees on the statement that young people today tend to know what to ask for, and they do not hesitate to openly reject elements they dislike. Some say it is devastating for the business that the employers allow such unexperienced drivers to behave in that matter. There is an objection to this discussion when one informant argues that not many youngsters want to become truckers nowadays. That, it is argued, forces the employers to put up with unreasonable demands from these youngsters just to keep the big wheels rolling.³² Not all young individuals are looked upon so badly, however. Some of the rookies are in fact very good, and young women in particular are mentioned as excellent in terms of both performance and willingness to learn.³³

24 Truck driver No 6.

25 Truck driver No 9.

26 Truck driver No 1.

27 Truck driver No 8.

28 Truck driver No 2; Truck driver No 4; Truck driver No 9.

29 Truck driver No 8.

30 Truck driver No 9.

31 Truck driver No 2.

32 Truck driver No 4; Truck driver No 9.

33 Truck driver No 4; Truck driver No 5; Truck driver No 9.

It is easy to believe that improved vehicles and utilities have made trucking an easier job, but it is still physically challenging. Besides frequently lifting and carrying goods with their own body, the truckers must deal with working in any weather conditions, often left on their own to solve any problem that can occur. In combination with the time pressure that truckers experience, the handling of vehicles can get rough, as traffic accidents increase and cargo breaks. These are stressors that both interview groups point out as everyday problems truckers must face. Night shifts and early morning shifts are also mentioned in that respect.

Trucker's self-image

Regarding the question of what the truckers think about the public's and authorities' perceptions of the status of truckers at present versus in the past, all the informants agreed that the public and authorities hold truckers in low esteem. Some suggest the status has even become lower. It is argued that people outside of the trucking business do not know what it takes to be a good trucker.

They only pay attention to us when we are involved in accidents and block their way. It is hard not to be singled out as bad guys in such situations, because we are so big and intimidating. But people do not see that private cars often cause those accidents and then get away, leaving everybody in a mess. They are not aware of the importance of the work we do. That the whole society would stop in a matter of days if we did not do our job properly. People do not know how complex our job can be.³⁴

I asked both groups what could change that negative perception in the public mind. They suggested both better content in the curriculum of schools that educate truckers, and more adequate information campaigns going out to the public. The first group proposed a new school subject: traffic knowledge. If children learned about traffic matters from very young ages, future perceptions of truckers might change for the better. There are good informative videos used in truckers' on-the-job training. Some suggested that those films should be shown on national television, among commercials.³⁵

The second group was pessimistic about whether the low status could ever be changed. One of the truckers blamed the IT revolution for that and argued that any nineteen-year-old novice could get behind the wheel and complete the assignment by using GPS.

What we had to keep in our heads before is now stored in technology. We do not have to know anything anymore. So how can we be viewed in a better light?³⁶

Other truckers in that group have objections to that statement and start listing complicated moves that take great effort and time to learn, for example backing up with twenty-four-meter long-haul rigs.³⁷ After a lively discussion on that matter, the group finds consensus in that they all know fellow truckers who never in their entire careers learned how to manage that maneuver, as well as other advanced elements relevant to the job. They therefore agree that education for truckers

34 Truck driver No 1.

35 Group 1

36 Truck driver No 8

37 Truck driver No 7; Truck driver No 8; Truck driver No 9.

needs to be improved. They also agree that employers need to increase requirements for employees, and that more women in the business will help the truckers gain more respect and higher status.³⁸ Everybody in the other group agrees on the following statement:

Women are contributing to a more polite vocabulary and humane atmosphere. We all remember how the night-shift terminal workers behaved before the female forklift drivers started working there, do we not?³⁹

Competition from low-paid foreign truckers

One big change in comparison with before is the presence of underpaid foreign truckers, mainly from countries in Eastern Europe and the Baltics. In the past, one could hardly see any of those rigs that now are dominating the international truck traffic.⁴⁰ These foreign truckers are accused of taking jobs from domestic truckers, and systematically violating the law and littering along the roads.⁴¹ The phenomena of foreign truckers from low-wage countries has been a huge issue of concern among truckers. At least it was before I left the trucking business in 2014. The hegemonic discourse amongst my former colleagues was that those truckers were alleged to steal jobs from domestic truckers and were therefore considered to be a problem for the trucking business at large. My question in that respect was: “Do you have any contact with the foreign truckers from low-wage countries?” All informants except one say they never come into contact with this category of truckers. Only one of the informants says that she gets to meet and talk to them. That is because she dispatches international hauls. She describes the low-paid foreign truckers as highly competent, concerned about their job and very service-minded, and states: “They are in no sense trash, as many Swedish truckers would say”.⁴² One of the drivers with experience of hauling abroad states that the biggest problem with those guys is that we do not have a common language.⁴³ Concern about their situation is expressed:

They are not welcome anywhere. They are not welcome in guarded truck parking areas where there are facilities such as showers and toilets. There are few places along the roads where they can stop for breaks or daily rests as the law stipulates. It is difficult to follow laws in such situations.⁴⁴

One trucker says that the foreign truckers should be paid equally to the domestic ones, and argues that that would put an end to the misery they are experiencing:

They are truckers like you and me. They should be treated the same as us. We are doing the same job and they are needed. We could not do all the hauling by ourselves. Give them the same wages as we have!⁴⁵

38 Group 2.

39 Truck driver No 4.

40 Truck driver No 10.

41 <https://www.skd.se/2017/11/15/chaufforer-skrapar-ner-och-gor-sina-behov-mitt-i-byn/>.

42 Truck driver No 1.

43 Truck driver No 6.

44 Truck driver No 8.

45 Truck driver No 9.

Dreams of having a truck of your own

To the question “did you ever dream of buying your own truck?” followed by “do you think truckers have such dreams?”, the older drivers say that they had such dreams when they were young. They never made that dream a reality because of prolonged poor economy in the trucking business. The younger and middle-aged informants declare that they have never had the urge to start their own business as truckers. Generally, the informants think that young drivers have such a dream, but they soon realize that competition and costs are too high.

Anyone with anything in their head knows that there is no profit in this business. You could earn money as a truck owner back in the day, but not anymore. People are used to paying almost nothing for transports these days.⁴⁶

Some imagine that being one's own boss offers freedom and independence, but it would not be worth trying anyway.

Are you a member of a union: Why/Why not?

Eight of the ten informants answered that they are members of a union. Two are not. Of the eight that are members, five belong to the Swedish Transportation Union, *Transportarbetareförbundet*. The remaining three are supervisors and dispatchers, and are thus members of other unions. For most informants, the reason for joining the union was peer pressure in the early stages of their careers. Solidarity and power to accommodate one's interests are also mentioned as factors behind becoming members. One trucker who is still a member says that he does not even know why he joined the union in the 1970s. There is an outspoken opinion that the union is no longer as strong as the organization once was, and that the union sometimes focuses on the wrong things. One example of such a wrong thing, according to the informants, is that the union focuses too much effort on members who are not committed to doing their work. Not everybody agrees and a discussion begins about what things are right and wrong. We will not go into details, but the arguments reflect that the union's mission can be more complex than what it appears to be for the uninitiated. For the two who are not members, their opinion is very clear. They both say that if you do your job properly and do not cause trouble, there is no need to be paying the union. They both have had long careers as truckers, and they never experienced being out of work. They both joined early in their respective careers, but they experienced not being helped when needed. They therefore decided to cancel their memberships. One of them says:

There has always been a shortage of drivers in this business. So if you are good at what you are doing, and have a good reputation, you will instantly find a new job if needed. I do not see the point of joining the union just to be paying for their Danish pastry.⁴⁷

46 Truck driver No 4.

47 Truck driver No 9.

I asked those who went from Transportarbetarförbundet to other unions when becoming supervisors or dispatchers about differences experienced regarding that. They answered that the biggest difference is that the membership fees of the other unions are about half those of Transportarbetarförbundet.⁴⁸ One can wonder what constitutes such a difference, and it is worth mentioning that most of the drivers did not know how much they are paying in fees to the union each month.

Truckers' perceptions on trucker identities and cultures within

“What do you think about the following statement: “the stronger the trucker identity, the less prone to join the union?” This putative statement was presented to the informants, and they supposed that so-called “lone wolves” and “cowboys” have stronger trucker identities, and that those truckers would care less about the union. Those categories or stereotypes are by the informants believed to represent a decreasing minority, at least in Sweden. In the first group, all informants are members of the union and they do not identify as either “lone wolves” or “cowboys.” The second group included two truckers who are not members of the union. The two truckers who are not members of the union do not consider themselves to be stronger in their trucker identity than any other trucker, except those singled out as “cowboys.” Both groups consider the term “cowboys” to be derogatory.

I asked the groups to discuss how they would describe the trucker's professional culture (behavior, music, literature, social interaction among colleagues, clothing, language/jargon, strong professional identity and other similar things). To the participants, trucking is in general considered to be only a job. They do not want to call it a lifestyle, apart from those truckers who drive abroad and live most of their lives in their cabin. They are, however, very proud of what they are doing, and they think that that feeling is shared by most of the truckers. They also present a picture of the “cowboy,” which is a stereotype of truckers that spend tremendous amounts of money on truck decorations and dress in hats and cowboy boots. The “cowboy” in these two groups is viewed a fool.⁴⁹ The language is rude, but at the same time warm-hearted. The jargon is heavy and full of irony, and there is no space to get offended by what truckers are saying to each other. One says:

I could not survive without that language. It is the best part of this job. You can tell a guy “you're an idiot” if you say it in the right way. We can tell it like it is, without anybody getting offended.⁵⁰

Regarding music styles, the older and middle-aged truckers prefer music from the 60s, 70s and 80s. The younger ones mostly listen to what is found in Spotify charts.⁵¹ They also listen to radio stations that provide information on the traffic.⁵² In the old days, the most presented literature was pornographic magazines lying everywhere in truck cabins, offices and break rooms.⁵³ Both groups agree that Facebook is probably the most common reading platform of today.

48 Truck driver No 1; Truck driver No 2.

49 Group 1; Group 2.

50 Truck driver No 4.

51 Truck driver No 3.

52 Group 1.

53 Group 2.

Female truckers of yesterday are described as more masculine than most of the males. That seems to have changed in the sense that female truckers are described as more feminized than their precursors.⁵⁴ “They probably do not have to act like men to be recognized as truckers anymore”, says one of the participants.⁵⁵ The trucker identity has in general weakened, both groups believe. Truckers are not as prone to stand out as they were before.⁵⁶ Some believe that is because of the present lack of unity among truckers.⁵⁷

To the question “do you attend truck meeting venues?”, the older truckers answer that they attend truck meetings on occasion, but not as frequently as before.⁵⁸ The middle-aged and younger drivers have no or little interest in going to such venues⁵⁹, except for one of the youngsters who has a big interest in going to truck meets.⁶⁰ They also know about colleagues that have great interest in anything concerning trucks. One of the truckers that at first is unenthusiastic on the matter suddenly remembers that he participated in several truck races a long time ago. Still he argues that he didn’t like anything about it.⁶¹ One of the supervisors says he is forced by his work to attend the international trade fair for the haulage and transport industry Elmia, held annually in Jönköping since 1983.⁶² If it was not mandatory, he would not even think of going there.⁶³

The following questions were asked: “What do you know about American trucker culture? Do you think American truckers have a stronger trucker identity than Swedish truckers, and do you have any thoughts on how much influence the American trucker culture has had on Swedish truckers’ professional culture?” At first the informants say that American trucking culture has had little or no influence on Swedish truckers.⁶⁴ Later they argue that the U.S.A. affects us in many ways, not only regarding trucking. But they clearly express they are not impressed by American truckers or the American trucking industry.⁶⁵ Their perception of American truckers is that they are retrogressive. For example, the vehicles in Sweden are state of the art with the latest technology, while the Americans until recently have been driving old Kenworth trucks with unsynchronized transmissions. That is like traveling at least forty years back in time in comparison with Swedish conditions.⁶⁶ One trucker has experience of driving such a Kenworth truck and he would not do it again. Those trucks are far behind in comparison with Volvo or Scania, which are the most common trucks in Sweden and are both very comfortable and easy to work with.⁶⁷

54 Group 1; Group 2.

55 Truck driver No 9.

56 Truck driver No 4.

57 Truck driver No 6; Truck driver No 8.

58 Truck driver No 5; Truck driver No 6; Truck driver No 8.

59 Truck driver No 1; Truck driver No 7; Truck driver No 9.

60 Truck driver No 3.

61 Truck driver No 4.

62 [https://webpage Elmia Lastbil](https://webpage.Elmia>Lastbil), <http://www.elmia.se/en/lastbil/For-Visitors/About-the-fair/>

63 Truck driver No 2.

64 Truck driver No 4; Truck driver No 9; Truck driver No 10.

65 Group 1; Group 2.

66 Truck driver No 4.

67 Truck driver No 6.

There is criticism towards reality shows such as “Ice Road Truckers”, which most of the informants say they have watched on rare occasions.⁶⁸ None of the informants follows the show, because they perceive such shows to present a false and heavily dramatized picture of trucking. Some argue that in the real world, truckers in the U.S.A. would most likely be just ordinary people, like in Sweden.⁶⁹ To the question of whether American truckers have a stronger professional identity, the informants highly agree that they do not, after a short discussion based on beliefs, rather than facts. It is obvious that no one is certain, but everyone has an opinion on the matter.

In contrast to what I perceive to be a somewhat miserly view of American colleagues, some of the truckers expresses greater admiration of Australian truckers. They say Australian truckers face more extreme challenges in the Australian outback where extreme climate conditions and heavily oversized rigs take trucking to a whole different level.⁷⁰ That opinion is based on reality shows such as those showing American truckers. Norwegian and German truckers are also praised by both interview groups. Norwegian truckers for working in difficult weather conditions on icy fjord roads most of the year, and German truckers for their long and reputable tradition of good skills.⁷¹

The participants of this study were asked to rate their perceptions of truckers’ professional identities in countries listed in the following chart. The chart given to the truckers was graded from 1 to 5, where 1 represented the weakest professional identity, and 5 the strongest.

U.S.A. got the highest rating. Sweden was put in second place, closely followed by Finland and with Norway as fourth. Denmark and Germany shared the fifth position. There is, as shown below, a gap between the countries at the top of the chart, and countries like Great Britain, Poland, Spain, Romania and Italy. Regarding Poland, Romania and other identified low-paid countries, the informants believe they are not actually truckers; they are assumed to be doing it only for the wages. One informant says “They don’t have trucker culture; they have money culture”.⁷²

Appraised trucker identity

The chart (next page) shows the informants’ aggregated perception of how strong trucker identity is in relation to the presented countries.

“Is there any region or city in Sweden where trucker culture is stronger?” The question was almost concordantly answered in the survey – that they do not know. During the interview, one of the informants says Helsingborg, which is kind of a truck hub with the closest geographic proximity to Denmark and the European continent in Sweden. He states:

Everybody from Helsingborg has a relative working in the trucking industry. There is no other place in Sweden with as many trucks as Helsingborg.⁷³

68 Truck driver No 4; Truck driver No 9; Truck driver No 10.

69 Truck driver No 8.

70 Truck driver No 5; Truck driver No 10.

71 Truck driver No 5; Truck driver No 6.

72 Truck driver No 9.

73 Truck driver No 9.

Apart from that, the question seems odd to the informants. Eight of them wrote “Don’t know” in their survey sheets, but during the interviews and also on two occasions in the survey, Gothenburg and Norrland were mentioned. The subject was of very little interest in both groups. Instead we went to the next question, which gave the following answer in one of the interview groups:

What woman who is not insane wants to enter an industry full of complete idiots?⁷⁴

The question was; “Why do so few women drive trucks? Is the professional culture a possible reason to why women choose not to become truck drivers?” The counter question is rapidly posed by one of the truckers, and it creates laughter among the informants in his group. When the amusement settles, one of the female truckers says that it is only in our heads. Women are taught to think that they are not able to handle such big vehicles.⁷⁵ One of the male truckers confirms that reflection and adds that women are just as able as any man to do an excellent job as a trucker.⁷⁶ Both groups show great awareness of gender roles and consider them to be a big obstacle for women to become truckers. The constant rough language among truckers is believed to not be attractive from a woman’s point of view. One of the informants experienced already in truck school that female classmates dropped out of the program because of harassment from male classmates. When asked why she completed her education, she answered that she is not so easy to offend. Her father is also a trucker, and she guesses that she therefore was well prepared when entering the profession.⁷⁷

Chart 1.

U.S.A	3.3
Sweden	3.2
Finland	3.1
Norway	2.8
Denmark	2.7
Germany	2.7
Great Britain	2.2
Poland	2.2
Spain	2.2
Romania	2.1
Italy	1.9

⁷⁴ Truck driver No 4.

⁷⁵ Truck driver No 1.

⁷⁶ Truck driver No 2.

⁷⁷ Truck driver No 7.

Conclusions

So, was it better in the old days? According to the findings of this study, the comradeship has declined, since the structure of the work in contrast to now allowed truckers to work in teams. Departures were mostly gathered at the same time on a daily basis, so rigs generally drove together in convoys. Long-haul departures are nowadays spread throughout the day to meet customer demands, consequently forcing the truckers to work in solitude. The IT revolution has in some sense compensated for that loss, providing digital tools and communication platforms such as cellular phones and positioning systems. Digital solutions have also had a big impact on rationalizing time. The consequences of that are higher stress levels among the truckers, as delivery slots are often tightly time regulated, leaving little or no room for delays. That, in combination with mandatory digital tachograph cards, registering every minute and every kilometer, make truckers feel more monitored and controlled than they did before. The freedom that once was a major incentive for becoming a trucker has thus decreased.

All informants strongly agree that the increasing presence of female truckers has not only improved the work environment, but also proven that women are as able to perform, and in some cases, even better in comparison to male colleagues. Still, the truckers believe that their public status is low, or even lower than before. To lift the trucker's status, improved education is requested by the informants. Asymmetric competition from low-paid foreign truckers is also expressed as one of the largest temporary problems in the industry. Although the majority of the participating informants have very little or no contact with the singled-out group, they are worried about the current situation. Both interview groups express concern for the discriminated truckers that must live on the roads, without access to basic facilities such as showers and toilets. Surprisingly, and in contrast to the hostility so often directed toward these truckers, the informants suggest every trucker, regardless of which country they are from, should be paid equally in order to solve that problem.

Finally, I would like to say that this study revealed both expected results and unexpected insights. For me as a former trucker with twenty-six years in the business, the most surprising thing is that several of my former colleagues in these two interview groups consider trucking to be just a job. Actually, that was how I related to my job as a trucker, and before this study, I was convinced of being quite alone amongst truckers in having such a view. That perception was in fact one critical reason why I eventually decided to switch careers from hauling and loading to studying and eventually writing about the context in which truckers are and have been situated. I therefore express my deepest gratitude to all participants of this study for sharing their experiences, and thereby contributing to improved understanding of how their daily conditions have changed over the past four decades.

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Interviews

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Truck driver No 1, October 22, 2016

Truck driver No 2, October 22, 2016

Truck driver No 3, October 22, 2016

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The Paradoxical World of Trucking

Eddy Nehls

In this article, I am going to return to the empirical data that I gathered when I worked on my PhD thesis,¹ and here I will reflect on the material in the light of what has happened since then. During my fieldwork, I participated in the everyday life of 13 drivers and I travelled 25,000 kilometers all over Sweden and Europe. Over a total period of seven weeks, I lived as a participant observer in different truck cabins and gathered impressions from freight ferries, loading sites and social intercourse among truckers. I did 25 qualitative interviews with long-haul truck drivers and read hundreds of articles in different truck-related magazines.

A masculine image connected with paradoxes

When I started to work with my thesis, I found that most people made an instant connection between trucks and masculinity. This has not changed. Trucks are loaded with symbolic masculine values and truckers are regarded as masculine cultural icons. One of the most obvious signs of the symbolic meaning of trucks is the fact that almost every article in Swedish daily newspapers, about anything connected with transports, is still illustrated with stylized pictures of trucks and their male driver. When I read the Swedish *Trailer* magazine (a popularized publication for people interested in trucking) today, the same kinds of images as in the 1990s are depicted. Even if you do not see the kinds of coffee table books idealizing trucks and truckers' lives on the road today, the same narrative of this quote from one of them is still depicted.

It doesn't matter where in the world you meet a truck driver. Everywhere he is the same. A loner who, without compromise, persistently carries out whatever hauling assignment he gets.

It doesn't matter if he is working behind the steering wheel of a road-train that is roaring through the outback of Australia, or if he is standing in a seemingly endless line of trucks at a border crossing in Central Europe. He still carries out his mission with the same patience and devotion.

This book is about that man. It substantiates his achievements in the world. It gives the reader an insight into life on the road, with its toil, loneliness and gloominess. But it also demonstrates the pride, unity and joy of work that truck drivers feel.

It is a book for everyone all over the world with an interest in trucking.^{2,3}

1 Nehls, Eddy. *Vägval. Lastbilsförare I fjärrtrafik – perspektiv på yrkeskultur och genus*. Göteborg: Etnologiska föreningen i Göteborg förlag 2003.

2 All translations in the article are done by the author.

3 *Trucking world wide*. 1984, p 1. Malmö: Förlagshuset Norden. In co-operation with: Karlskrona: Förlags AB Albins-son & Sjöberg, *Trailer*.

My thesis had the aim of investigating prerequisites for gender equality work in the haulage business, and I found that these kinds of images and the narrative of the man and his truck affected the general opinion on who is most suited to drive trucks and move goods. I also found out that the business had (and still has) a hard time recruiting new staff. And as my assumption was and still is that there is nothing that says that men are better suited to drive trucks than women, this narrative and its connotations are important to take into consideration when working with gender equality and recruitment in the haulage business. The analysis of my interviews with truckers actually showed that the most important work qualification that was mentioned was *social flexibility*, which is quite the opposite of a masculine characteristic. This is just one of many paradoxes that one has to understand when trying to change the conditions and open up the trade for other categories of potential drivers.

Some reflections on theory and previous research

Constructive gender theories were the most important analytical tool in my interpretations of the empirical evidence. I regard masculinity as something culturally constructed, a set of culturally acquired characteristics that is not essential and not connected to any specific sex. I agree with Lynne Segal (among many others)⁴ when she claims that men and masculinities can and do change, even if it takes time. I also agree with her and other feminist scholars when they argue that it is important that men begin to engage in the struggle to obtain gender equality, and this article is my contribution to that work.

Robert W Connell's definition of masculinity as a project or a discourse in which social practices are created has helped me to understand the driver's hierarchies and the male identity negotiations among truckers.⁵ In the transportation sector, the long-haul driver can be regarded as an embodiment of what Connell calls hegemonic masculinity. The long-haul driver is – in the culture that has evolved in the transportation sector – connected with many of Connell's hegemonic characterizing attributes, even if truckers do not have the same institutional power in society as the white, heterosexual, middle-class man that Connell writes about. Even so, I have found the term hegemonic masculinity fruitful in my analysis because the whole transportation sector and the culture among drivers is actually organized in a way that gives long-haul drivers a hegemonic status. This I found indications of when I interviewed some delivery truck drivers. They were working with smaller trucks and their work was organized more like a regular daytime job, which made them able to see their family every night, and for them this was very important. But they clearly did not regard themselves as “real” truckers. I have interpreted this category of drivers as a marginalized male category in the overall trucking culture, and to speak with Connell one can see their view of themselves in relation to long-haul drivers as a complicit position. The hegemony is supported by lots of other male and female subject positions that accept the long-haul driver as the ideal of the driver culture. And this gives rise to some of the paradoxes that are going to be discussed here.

4 Segal, Lynne. *Slow Motion. Changing Masculinities Changing Men*. London: Virago 1997.

5 Connell, Robert W. *Masculinities*. University of California Press: Berkeley, Los Angeles 1995.

Masculine social practices are never isolated though; they are always and everywhere involved with other structures such as class and race. Paul Willis's classic study *Learning to Labour* has been important for my understanding of the male, working-class logic of truckers.⁶ Willis analyzes male working-class identities that are negotiated in relation to knowledge of and control over machines. Willis discusses the consequences of young men's blue-collar anti-school logic that both determines and prepares the *Lads* for work in unskilled working-class occupations. I found the same kind of logic and consequences in the transportation sector.

The myth of the strong and independent driver has been totally deconstructed and revealed as false by the social anthropologist Michael A. Agar in his book *Independents Declared: The Dilemmas of Independent Trucking*.⁷ His conclusion is that trucking is one of the most regulated businesses in the USA and that freedom in trucking is just a masculine myth. That myth is alive among Swedish truckers and my discussion is an attempt to further deconstruct it by identifying some of the paradoxes that I found in my empirical data.

Masculinity, trucks and drivers' urgent need to signal trustworthiness

The driver and his truck in many ways represent a unity, and the truckers I met showed a great sense of responsibility and exhibited a passionate and almost symbiotic relationship with their truck.

Yes, I am very interested in my job you know, in my truck. I keep informed about where it is and those kinds of things. I never really make a complete break with my truck. I can't do that.

I asked one of my informants – an owner-operator – how many trucks he had owned over the years. He quickly counted them up, with details on which year he bought them, the brand, horsepower, and specific characteristics. He counted sixteen trucks and every one had its own story and memories connected to it.

Another example of the driver's identification with their truck is the different driver categories that appear on the road. It is the type of truck that decides who drivers regard as their closest colleagues. Two of the most distinctive and recognizable categories are drivers of 24-meter combinations (a regular truck with a platform and a trailer) and drivers of trailer-tractor combinations (the cabin and the trailer are two separate units).

At my firm of haulage contractors, there is very little comradery among us drivers. The other guys look down on my buddy Benny and me because we're driving trailer tractors and not 24-meter combinations. They say that we belong to the B-team. But then I say to them that I've got the same salary as you and I'm working less. It must be me that belongs to the A-team!

For most truckers, the symbolic value of the truck clearly stretches beyond the limits of working life and the truck has an influence on both the drivers' personal lives and on their identities.

6 Willis, Paul. *Learning to Labour*. Gower Publishing Company Limited 1977.

7 Agar, Michael H. *Independents Declared: The Dilemmas of Independent Trucking*. Washington, D.C. London: Smithsonian Institution Press 1986.

I think I'm stuck with this in some way. I mean, I can hardly think of myself in an office or something like that... I don't want to... I want to have the sense of freedom I have. I'm minding my own damn business. I do everything on my own in this job and that's good. But you also get a little bit disturbed from time to time, when you are always on your own. You are used to going your own way and that makes it difficult to have to take consideration for other people's needs.

The loneliness in the cabin strengthens the driver's characteristic individualism and some of the informants had a hard time adjusting to other people's demands and wishes. I found many examples of drivers' emphasized individualism in stories about different strategies to manage the job in a more flexible way that gives the driver coveted time margins.

There is one type of load that other drivers don't get up on their trailer, because they don't know how to manage it... For example, at Volvo Olofström, I'm the only driver that can manage to haul goods that are 2.55 meters sideways on a trailer that measures 2.48 meters from side to side on the inside. And I will never tell anyone how I do it. That's my job secret and I share it only with the forklift driver at the plant. "Then you got that load", he says. I never tell anyone anything; it is up to them... These sorts of things I find out on my own. You know, when you are out on the road, you have time to figure out lots of things. There's a lot of waiting time in this work you know, and sometimes I sit in the truck and sketch out different solutions to various problems. I sit there with my paper and pencil. There's a plant, you know, where we load big rolls of paper. The management there wasn't satisfied with our loading capacity, but one day when I wasn't in a hurry, the forklift driver and me, we said "Let's try this out." We did so and so and tried some different combinations and suddenly we got the solution to the problem. We managed to get double the amount of load on the trailer. At first no one could figure out how we did it, but after a while they understood, and the word was spread in no time. Then I've invented some new types of packing. It was when we were loading some fuel tanks that were constructed in a crazy way. I said, why don't we do it this way instead, and now it's standard. This kind of thing one could get paid for, I think, but we drivers don't get a penny, and the forwarding agencies, they just rub their hands together. To be honest, I believe that I've got some perks though. At my forwarding agency, the average driver runs about 2,500 kilometers per week and I get to run almost 3,000, so I guess I got a little bit more.

It is hard to tell if the individualism in this narrative comes from the loneliness in the cabin, or if the driver took this job because he was a loner in the first place. My interpretation is that one has to understand this in the light of the urgent need among drivers to signal trustworthiness. Being entrusted with a large truck alone on the road substantiates the driver's personal ability and skill and also the hegemonic ideal of the driver culture. The more time a driver spends in the truck and the more responsibility he is entrusted with, the more status he collects among other drivers. This relationship is fragile, though.

We got our loading reports, where it says that you have to behave properly and have clean clothes. We are dependent on the customer, not the other way around... If you have any problems delivering the goods, then you have to call your forwarding agency and not stand there arguing with the customer yourself. But these cowboys, they were tough as shit. They smoked cigars and talked on their CBs, and then they were tired as hell before sunset... Now I have never thought highly of them...

The cowboy is also a masculine cultural icon, just like the trucker. But in the driver context, being a cowboy implies being someone that you can't trust – here today, gone tomorrow. And that kind of masculine ideal is not in style in the transportation sector. The driver, who is entrusted with a big and expensive truck and load, is the core base on which the haulage business is built and being regarded as trustworthy is something essential for all drivers. Attaining responsibility as first driver on a truck is a goal that many drivers are ready to suffer a lot to reach. The value of the cargo is of little importance for the feeling of responsibility. It really doesn't matter if the driver hauls paper, vodka or cellular phones. Fulfilling the honor code of responsibility and trust substantiates the driver's ability and skill and also encapsulates the hegemonic masculine values among drivers. One of my informants told me that the truck was his first priority in life: "Well, it has meant the world for me; I've put it before everything."

Another example of the urgent needs to signal trustworthiness is this story: I was travelling with a young and – as the transportation foreman told me – promising driver. The driver was a future man of the company. When we were on the road back home from southern Europe, the foreman of the company became a bit worried over the phone when the driver asked for permission to take some holiday during Christmas because he and his girlfriend were getting engaged. "You're going to end up as a gravel-hauler at home if you keep on that track", said the foreman then, and he used the word gravel-hauler as a humiliation. "They don't have to worry", said the driver later and told me that his girlfriend would never stop him from working in the long-haul business.

One driver category that really takes the trucker identity to its limit is the owner-operator that, as the name indicates, owns the truck they are driving. That kind of driver really substantiates the unity of a man and his machine. Most of the owner-operators literally live in, by and through their truck. Their whole life circulates around the truck and its needs and demands. For many of them, driving is also a way of life and the will to stay in the business is therefore very strong. Earning money by driving trucks is just one aspect of the occupation: "Well, work and work; it's my hobby at the same time."



Just finished loading car parts in Småland. Now we have to hurry back to Gothenburg. The boat for England leaves at 8 PM. Photographer Eddy Nehls

The owner-operator in many ways embodies the whole myth of the trucker, but a big truck costs a lot of money and a solitary driver with big loans is not in a good bargaining position when he is offered loads and becomes dependent and fragile. I heard lots of stories about owner-operators that accepted hauling assignments for prices far below the actual costs of the truck, just to keep it rolling:

Yeah, when they've finished their assignments, they've got a worn-down truck and an empty wallet. Many of them are ruined. I have a buddy and he's an owner-operator. He's always working, but he basically gets nothing back.

Not just owner-operators but all categories of driver are caught in the middle in this way. The truck has to earn its costs, the forwarding agency has to make a profit, the customer has to be satisfied, and the driver has a life of his own and a family to take care of. According to this combination of facts, it is easy to understand why many drivers experience stress from time to time when they can't live up to the cultural image of a strong and independent male figure:

How can it be permitted to introduce, in the transport business, a thing called just-in-time! It's a gravedigger thing. It's dangerous. It's an invitation to the driver to speed up the work. You have to drive like hell, cause tomorrow the goods have to be delivered. The customer has to wait. We can't be forced into death for this.

No wonder that many drivers told me that they were driven to manipulate with the tachograph, exceed the speed limits and use other illegal methods to fulfil the promise to deliver the goods at the stipulated time. Today drivers and their trucks are monitored much more rigorously (with GPS technology), but the underling, masculine-coded culture has not changed, and this possibly puts the individual trucker under even more pressure. Here more research is needed, because society's need for transportation is not going to decrease in a foreseeable future.

Driver identity

Hauling assignments to Spain, Portugal and Italy were highly coveted among truckers in Sweden. These long and sometimes adventurous assignments demand a lot of the driver, and by performing them he gets acknowledged, both as a driver and as a man. One of my informants told me that he was one of few drivers that could cope both physically and mentally with transportation assignments down to Southern Europe. The informant told me that he was the fifth driver in a short period of time to take over the first driver responsibility of the company's regular truck route to Spain. The other drivers had abandoned it after one or two trips; they could not cope with the pressure, he said:

The first one I had to help down to Madrid, I was working for another hauler back then, and he followed my tail all the way down to Madrid. I did half the work for him then. When he eventually got home, he had a nervous breakdown. They hardly got him out of the truck. He was totally devastated.

Drivers I interviewed, who were working with assignments to Spain and Portugal, talked about their work in a less glamorous way than one maybe would expect. These drivers told me that those drivers who just seek adventures and glamour:



After a busy week on the road it's time to close up and drive home to the family. Photographer Eddy Nehls.

No, they seldom cope. It's different. It's not just the language. It's everything. Lots of waiting, just sitting there in the truck. One of my colleagues had a mental breakdown. For him it was caused by alcohol. That's a big problem for drivers down in Europe. The liquor is very easily accessible there, and lots of it too. They get the whole range at every damn gas station. Lots of drivers can't manage that part.

I participated on a journey with a long-haul driver who had always been driving in Europe. After 20 years of marriage, his wife left him. Six months later, he met a new woman and began a relationship. This new situation in life had put him in a dilemma. The new woman in his life had big problems with his work and the many nights away from home. The driver was struggling throughout the trip with this problem. He was obviously torn between his two loyalties (his love and his work). For him it was a hard and new situation to be forced to make a choice. This became obvious when the driver-foreman asked him if he could accept an instant trip to southern France when he got back from the assignment he was on. The problem was that he had promised his girlfriend to stay at home that weekend. On the other hand, if he did not take the assignment, he was worried about the consequences that a refusal would lead to. Would he get any assignments in the future and could he continue as first driver on the truck? This story can be interpreted as a story regarding identity both as a driver and as a man and how hard it is to live up to them both.

The first-driver status implies that the driver has to subordinate himself to the different demands of the truck. The truck, from day one on the job, dictates the life of the driver. The system with one regular first driver of every truck is common at most hauler contractors and it implies that the driver and his family have to subordinate themselves to the demands of the masculine narrative of truckers that is illustrated in the first quote in the article.

To live up to the cultural standard, many long-haul drivers are forced to be absent fathers. This unfortunate situation is emphasized in the transportation sector even more as being a family man is regarded as a quality that encapsulates responsibility and reliability, or as one hauler contractor from the US puts it: "Drivers who like being home are the ones we want. They are strong and dependable family men."⁸ These kinds of ideals are quite cynical when everybody knows that a driver is expected to live out on the road for up to 220 nights per year. Tough competition in the haulage business strengthens the negative consequences of this.

Bad unity, and hard and sometimes unfair competition among drivers have been argued by Swedish writer Risto Kellokumpo to be common characteristics of the hauling business since the beginning of the century.⁹ Instead of complaining about it, it is a code of honor to cope and to play the game.

I'm sure he wouldn't have accomplished what he has if he hadn't been playing an ugly game... They say that he, in the beginning, had a contact for some regular haulage assignments at a factory together with a colleague. These two guys had a couple of cars each. NN talked with his colleague and he said that they should raise the prices on their transports. They agreed on that and the colleague raised his price but NN did not; he was just eager to get the full assignment, and he took it over. So... but that's the way it is. That's the name of the game everywhere probably – haulers play dirty.

8 *Brand platform for Volvo as a truck brand.* Volvo Truck Corporation 1997.

9 Kellokumpo, Risto. *Åkeriarbetaren.* I *Alla dagar alla nätter.* Stockholm: Svenska Transportarbetareförbundet 1997.

My purpose has never been to come up with any solutions or recommendations. I just highlight and discuss some of the paradoxes of the hegemonic masculine ideal among truckers and how it affects the principles of work organization in the transportation sector in Sweden.

The paradoxical concept of freedom

Almost all of my informants told me that they felt free when they drove their truck. The truck itself symbolizes for some drivers relaxation and peace, and the cabin was often described as a place for thinking and meditation. One driver, for example, said that he regarded loading and unloading as work, but driving was just pure pleasure for him. Another informant was lyrical in his description of the loneliness in the cabin:

There's nothing in the world that's so lovely, really, as when you have parked the truck for the night and it starts raining. You hear the raindrops falling on the roof and you have the radio on softly. You take a Coke, whiskey, beer or whatever you have, and then you lie there till you fall asleep. That's damn good. I think it's great.

My interpretation of this is built on the fact that Swedish truck drivers, with almost no exception, come from some kind of working-class background and their level of education is relatively low.¹⁰ The occupational alternatives these men have are usually oriented towards different blue-collar jobs in factories. Their choices are in many ways limited, which can explain the symbolic value of freedom in trucking, even if many drivers are well aware of the paradox:

You delude yourself when you say that you are free in this line of work. But well, on the other hand, I can take that. There has been more freedom in this work then it has now, you know, but I think that freedom under responsibility and these kinds of things... you have to deliver a certain quantity of goods here and there. It is just in time everywhere, you know. But at the same time, with some help from the telephone you can manage some flexibility. I can always call the customer up and ask – How are you managing? Do I have to be there at seven, as my forwarding agency tells me? No, you can be here at nine, it's ok, they often say. Then in my work I always meet a damn lot of funny people, both Swedes and foreigners. You get yourself a contact network that's incredible. You operate in big areas, you know, and even if you don't get to know everybody in the same way, you get to know lots of nice people. And then these kinds of things, you know, when you pass by a place that you like, and the weather is nice. Then you can pull the brakes, make some coffee and in the summer go swimming. Yes, you can always take 15 to 20 minutes to just not give a shit about anything. Okay, you have to make it up later, but still, you can do it. You can't do that if you work in a factory or at an office or something like that. You can't just go to a lake and take a dip all of a sudden.

With a gender perspective, it is important to put light on the fragile ground of masculine identities and show that it is a flexible and culturally constructed quality. In the male-dominated transportation sector, lots of attributes that in other contexts would be regarded as feminine, are there

10 *Yrkeschaufförernas levnads- och arbetsvillkor*. 1979, p. 16. Stockholm: Svenska Transportarbetareförbundet.

interpreted as masculine. In other words, living up to the demands of trucking is not at all easy, glamorous or, in relation to gender equality, harmless. To achieve the required manliness of trucking, the driver has to change tack between vast extremes. To obtain freedom, the driver has to tie his whole life to the truck and devote himself to the trucker culture.

Conclusion

I want to sum up the analysis in a somewhat unconventional way by illustrating the underlying masculine paradox with a reflection on the lyrics to a well-known song by the country artist Jonny Cash: "A Boy Named Sue". What makes the lyrics useful in this context is that it gives an inside view of the process that one is forced to undergo in order to acquire the kind of masculinity that is encapsulated in the trucker myth.

The song is a story about a boy that was named Sue by his father, just before leaving home. Having a female name is, within the context in which the boy grows up, about the worst one can imagine. Throughout school, this boy named Sue that Cash sings about is harassed because of his name. And when he grew up, he leaves his hometown and starts to travel from place to place, in shame. Because he does not accept being mocked, he is constantly in battle. "Life's not easy for a boy named Sue", he says. He feels no resentment of the father abandoning the family though, but since he gave him a girl's name, he has assigned himself a life task, to search for his father and kill him. Finally, he finds him in a dark corner of a bar. The meeting inevitably results in a violent settlement between the men, first with fists, then with a knife. Father and son finally end up in the street, opposite each other and Sue holds a loaded pistol in his hand. The day of revenge has finally come. But then the father smiles:

And he said, "Son, this world is rough.
And if a man's gonna make it he's gotta be tough.
And I know I wouldn't be there to help you along.
So I gave you that name and I said goodbye.
I knew you'd have to get tough or die.
And it's that name that helped to make you strong."
Yeah! He said, "Now you just fought one hell of a fight
And I know you hate me and ya got the right.
To kill me now and I wouldn't blame you if you do.
But you oughta thank me before I die.
For the gravel in your gut and the spit in the eye.
'Cause I'm the son-of-a-bitch that named you Sue."

The explanation leads to reconciliation. But when Sue thinks of his own children, he says, emphatically in the end of the song, and this is the moral and also the point I want to make here, he will name them: "Bill, George, anything, but Sue." The emphasis Cash puts behind the words when he lists the classic boy names can be seen as a sign of ambivalence in relation to the male ideal presented in the song, which has a lot of resemblances with the trucker myth. What Sue and drivers in the long-haul business have to endure in life provides the men with coveted masculine attribu-

tes, but since Cash points out that he does not intend to give his own children female names, and with reference to the paradoxes I have pointed out in trucking, one might suspect that it simply costs more than it's worth.

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Volvo trucks and cowboy hats

American Trucking Music in Swedish Packaging

Hans Wallengren

Truck drivers are probably, besides seamen, one of the most lyricized occupations, and at the same time perhaps the one that has the strongest professional culture and most symbiotic links to popular cultural expressions in general. This has been the case at least since the 1960s when the North American truckers' professional culture was commercialized and spread around the Western world as popular culture. The proliferation is usually linked to a number of popular Hollywood films from the 1970s, most notably perhaps Sam Peckinpah's *Convoy* (1978), but also to country music, especially to the subgenre called truck driving country. Which further circumstances contributed to the American trucking culture managing to take root even in other countries, especially but not only among truck drivers, is however quite unknown among researchers.

An interesting issue in this context is how the American trucking culture came to adapt to different national cultural discourses. For example, if you look through the Swedish magazine *Trailer* from the early 1980s, a trade periodical where trucking culture at the time was diligently cultivated, it hits you how much of the material seems to be taken directly from the United States: the ads about cassette tapes with American trucking music, the range of imported American truck posters and truck decorations, reports from Swedish trucking festivals "with show, country, square dance, cool cars and barbecue", cowboy hats and the whole jargon – all accompanied by articles and reports with uncritical tributes to American truckers and trucking culture.¹ However, the picture is not entirely clear. Here and there you'll see shades and cracks in the formerly authentically apparent, which reveals that the result of the transnational transformation is also the result of a negotiation between cultural discourses.

This text will examine some of these attempts to transfer and more or less deliberately adapt elements from the American trucking culture into the Swedish cultural discourse and traditions among truck drivers as well as among the general public in the 1980s and 1990s. What became the (negotiated) results of these transnational processes and how should they be understood?

1 Citation from *Trailer* 1983, no. 6.

The social base of US trucking culture

US truck drivers in long-distance traffic had already by the 1940s emerged as a clearly profiled, often controversial and a bit wise mythical occupational group. Their social background was usually what could be called rural proletarian, such as small-scale farmers or farmworkers.² As truck drivers in remote traffic, they drew a sharp boundary between themselves and local drivers in and around cities: “delivery boys run around the city; drivers are out on the road”, as a trucker with a sarcasm based in professional pride described the dividing line in the 1970s.³ Historically, the American truck drivers seem to have shared their rural proletarian background with their Swedish colleagues.⁴ The link between the American drivers and rural areas is also one of the reasons why the professional culture has from the early days included country music, even if this music has grown far beyond its rural origins in recent decades. Another explanation is to be found in the very pronounced masculine ideology that has been a part of country music since the 1930s, and which also, to a very high degree, came to be associated with truck drivers.⁵ The fact that truck drivers also deliberately adopted the cowboy myth, as well as the fact that most of their time was spent along highways and country roads, of course also contributed to strengthening their link to the countryside and to country music.

However, the rural-urban dichotomy is not the only social dimension of importance to understanding the drivers’ professional culture. Another and at least as important dimension is that of the production relations and the drivers’ relation to the means of production, i.e. the trucks. Strongly simplified, you can talk about three categories of long-haul drivers, and this is a structure that in principle still applies – even in Sweden.

The first category, “owner-operators”, consists of drivers with their own trucks. In the United States, it is here we find the most classic trucker and with him the core of the trucking culture, both as a popular cultural icon and in social reality.⁶

Secondly and closely linked to this core group, we find all those drivers employed by small haulers, that is, wage earners without trucks, but a category who in many or perhaps most of the cases look at themselves as presumptive owner-operators or owners of a small haulage firm. Becoming integrated into the trucking culture will then be of importance for them to show their belonging and loyalty to the group of owner-operators.⁷

The third category is comprised of drivers employed at large-scale hauling companies or at companies in varied industries with their own truck fleet and drivers. In the United States, and probably also in Sweden, it is within these latter categories of drivers that the strongest affiliation

2 Shane Hamilton, *Trucking Country. The Road to America’s Wal-Mart Economy*, Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press 2008, pp. 44 ff.

3 Lawrence J. Ouellet, *Pedal to the Metal. The Work Lives of Truckers*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press 1994, p. 67.

4 Eddy Nehls, *Vägval. Lastbilsförare i fjärrtrafik – perspektiv på yrkeskultur och genus*, Göteborg: Etnologiska föreningen i Västsverige 2003, p. 43.

5 Hamilton, 2008 pp. 189 ff. and Mats Greiff, “Från fri och obunden kvinna till manlig cowboy. Om social förändring, maskulinitet och musikomvandling i Appalacherna” in Lars Berggren, Mats Greiff et al. (eds.), *Samhällshistoria i fokus. En festskrift till Lars Olsson om arbete, migration och kultur*. Malmö, BigBadBooks 2010, pp. 343 ff.

6 Hamilton 2008, p. 189.

7 Ouellet 1994, p. 198 ff., Nehls 2003, p. 58 f.

to unions is to be found – and the weakest links to trucking culture.⁸ In addition to these three categories, in recent years there have been some additional groups. In the EU, for example, so-called “fake” self-employed drivers are hired from low-wage countries in order to circumvent collective agreements and labor laws. In this context, these new categories can be ignored.⁹

Trucking culture

As already noted, we are here dealing with a highly pronounced masculine culture. Within the trucking culture imagined male attributes, such as strength, control, individualism and strict traditional gender relations, were expressed. The long-haul trucker was mythologized as the heritor of the American cowboy (“asphalt cowboys”) and the free folk hero of the road. Nation was also an important notion in the trucking culture. The truck drivers saw themselves as true patriots who with their work cared for the American economy and American values. With the strong emphasis on freedom, the adoption of the cowboy role and the ideals of masculinity, there also followed a touch of rebel and outlaw. Thus, within the American trucking culture the idea was also cultivated that it was right to oppose what could be perceived as unfair restrictions on the sole driver’s freedom to perform his work according to his own free decisions. Such resistance could be directed not only against employers, powerful authorities and bureaucratic hassle but also against unions.¹⁰ The rebellious feature could also be manifested in collective action, for example during the violent protests by US truckers in the early 1970s against fuel prices, speed restrictions and other government regulations that affected the trucking industry. These protests were in fact parts of the neo-populistic wave that swept across the United States in the 1970s and 1980s, and they effectively contributed to the deregulation of the transport market that took place in 1980. The deregulation, in turn, led to increased opportunities for drivers to become owner-operators, but in the long term also contributed to significantly falling wages and deteriorating working conditions in the American trucking industry.¹¹

The main expression of trucking culture was the individually decorated truck, but it was also communicated by clothing style, manners and a special truck driver lingo. Trucking culture was a very performative professional culture, a culture that was performed not only between drivers but also against the entire heterogeneous audience of other road users, gas station employees, roadside servants, police officers, prostitutes, hitchhikers and road workers, in short all those people who worked or traveled along the roads. Not least, however, trucking culture was spread and popularized through popular cultural expressions such as movies, television shows, advertisements, trade periodicals, trucking festivals and – not least – through truck-driving songs.¹²

8 Ouellet 1994, p. 200 ff.

9 Annette Thörnquist, *False (Bogus) Self-Employment in East-West Labour Migration. Recent trends in the Swedish construction and road haulage industries*. Linköping: REMESO, Linköping University 2013.

10 Reg. the attitudes towards unions, see e.g. Ouellet 1994, ch. 9.

11 Hamilton 2008, p. 207 ff. Reg. deteriorating working conditions, see also Michael H. Belzer, *Sweatshops on Wheels: Winners and Losers in Trucking Deregulation*. New York: Oxford University Press 2000.

12 Ouellet 1994, Hamilton 2008, Scott Von Doviak, *Hick Flicks. The Rise and Fall of Redneck Cinema*, Jefferson and London, McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers 2005, James H. Thomas, *The Long Haul. Truckers, Truck Stops & Trucking*, Memphis State University Press 1979.

Towards the end of the 1970s, trucking culture had spread and developed into a transnational popular cultural phenomenon, and thus not only among truck drivers but also among groups and individuals that in some way were close to the profession or for some reason were fascinated by trucks and trucking culture. The fact that an American-packed popular culture, based largely on traditionalist values such as family, individualism and masculinity, spread widely in the 1970s may seem a bit strange considering the left-wing wave and anti-Americanism that has come to characterize the image of the era. However, it should be remembered that during the same years a strong fascination of the United States and American popular culture flourished in some groups. One such group in Sweden was so-called *raggare*, i.e. youngsters, mostly with working-class backgrounds, who were seen in and around big American cars, looking for sex, booze and rock'n'roll.¹³

In Sweden, the Swedish Cowboy Club (*Svenska Cowboyklubben*) was formed in the late 1970s by truck drivers with a passion for American trucking culture. The club made attempts to copy their American colleges by organizing convoys as a means of protesting against state regulations and transport policy.¹⁴ American trucking culture was also cultivated in *Trailer*, a trade periodical founded in 1980, which like the Cowboy Club had the ambition to organize owner-operators as well as employee truck drivers in protests against perceived injustices in state transport regulations, such as the so-called weekend ban.¹⁵ The wave of US-inspired trucking culture then slowly faded in the 1980s, not only in Sweden and Europe but also on the other side of the Atlantic. The Cowboy Club was transformed into a branch of the European Truckers International Association (TIA), a still-existing association of both employee drivers and owner-operators that initially was also devoted to trucking culture and tried to profile themselves as a kind of alternative trade union. However, the TIA has later made efforts to wash away their cowboy stamp, perhaps because it stood for a willfully outlaw ideal that was fundamentally incompatible with the “steadiness ideal” of the Swedish working class culture.¹⁶ At least in the Swedish Union of Transport Workers, American trucking culture has long been frowned upon. The fact that it still has followers in certain circuits can easily be noted by looking into websites of truck meets, trucking festivals and the Swedish Facebook page *Truckers Paradise*. It may be added that trucking culture as we know it from its heydays in the 70s seems to have undergone similar developments in other Nordic countries, and that it has been, and still is, somewhat strong in countries like England and in particular Germany.¹⁷

13 Tom O'Dell, *Culture Unbound. Americanization and Everyday Life in Sweden*, Lund: Nordic Academic Press 1997, p. 140 ff.

14 Nehls 2003, p. 134 f.

15 A law from 1970 prohibiting heavy goods transports on the weekends. See *Trailer*, e.g. no. 3 and 4 1980.

16 Reg. TIA's attitudes, see discussion on *Sweden Truckstops Lastbilsforum*, <http://www.tulldahl.se/truckstop/forum/viewtopic.php?f=26&t=1857>.

17 Reg. trucking culture in Germany, see Ruth E. Gruber, *Sturm, Twang, and Sauerkraut Cowboys: Country Music and "Wild Western Spaces" in Europe*, <http://ruthellengruber.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/sturm-twang1.pdf>, 2012, p. 17 ff.

Trucking Music

Even if the song that is considered to be the first trucking song, that is, a song whose lyrics in one way or another are about values and experiences of fictional or true truck drivers, is a swinging blues song from 1939 written by the country singer Ted Daffan and recorded by the western swing musician Cliff Bruner, most of the North American trucking music, as previously mentioned, falls under the heading of country music.¹⁸ The search string “trucking music” on Spotify, however, provides all kinds of exceptions to this rule, especially during the 2000s, since the impact especially of metal rock seems to have increased significantly. Although plenty of songs with trucking motifs were recorded in the 1940s and even more in the 1950s, it is probably not until the mid-1960s that we can talk about trucking music as a special subgenre of its own. The great breakthrough came in 1963 with Dave Dudley’s classic recording of “Six Days on the Road”. In this song, which is closer to rockabilly than to country music, with powerful electric guitar and a swinging beat, a number of central motifs in trucking culture are addressed: the freedom of the roads, the longing for the faithful woman back home, the truck’s performance and a willful disregard of laws and regulations (in this case cheating with the job log, overloaded truck, violation of speed regulations and the use of “little white pills” to stay awake).¹⁹

A group of American sociologists who examined the lyrics of more than one thousand US trucker songs found that all themes, including the topic of work, are about masculinization, that is, the lyrics through discursive links design and confirm the masculine status of the truck drivers. According to the text analyses, this happens in two ways.²⁰

Firstly, by essentialization, that is, by linking the male body to the profession in different ways. In the songs, for example, it is quite common that drivers are “born to be truckers” or that the profession, almost in a genetic sense, is presumed to be inherited from father to son. Related motifs are about blood inheritance, for example in songs like “Diesel in My Veins” or “Trucking’s in My Blood”. Sometimes the profession can also be described as a (male) disease, for example in Merle Haggard’s classic “White Line Fever”, with lyrics by Ian Klimister and Alan Edward from 1975.

Secondly, by emphasizing the national importance of the profession, for example for the US economy (songs such as “America Moves by Truck” or “The American Trucker”) or the male status of the occupation, for example through identification with different male icons, above all with the highly mythologized cowboy, but also by emphasizing the dangers associated with the profession, such as in Dick Curless’s song “A Tombstone Every Mile”. In addition to the theme of masculinization, all the trucker songs dealing with the truck itself or its handling should also be mentioned here, that is, the truck regarded as a skill-demanding, powerful, heavy and mechanical, hence masculine-coded, tool. Incidentally, it has been claimed by American historian and country music expert Bill C Malone that trucking songs are probably “the most common form of modern country songs that relate to work,” and that is certainly no exaggeration.²¹

18 Reg. Daffan and early trucker music, see Hamilton 2008, p. 108 ff.

19 Cowboy Lyrics.Com, <http://www.cowboylyrics.com/lyrics/dudley-dave/six-day-on-the-road-12235.html>.

20 Jason T. Eastman, William F. Danaher, Douglas Schrock, “Gendering Truck Driving Songs: The Cultural Masculinization of an Occupation”, in *Sociological Spectrum*, no. 33 2013, pp. 419 ff.

21 Bill C. Malone, *Country Music, U.S.A.*, Austin: University of Texas Press 2002, p. 320 f.

Returning to Dave Dudley, he stayed within the genre of trucking music throughout his career. So did a bunch of other artists who became big in the 1960s and 1970s, such as Red Simpson and Red Sovine. Most trucking songs, however, have been recorded by country artists who have not mainly been focusing on trucking music – ranging from international stars like Willie Nelson, Kris Kristofferson and Johnny Cash to a great number of other less famous musicians.

The real explosion of trucking music, “trucker mania”, as the era has been called, aiming not just at the music but also at the trucker as a popular culture icon, dates back to the mid-1960s and goes a bit into the 1980s. How many trucker songs have been recorded over the years is impossible to say. Searches on YouTube, Spotify and Allmusic.com provide extremely large numbers of hits, although there is great uncertainty in the results.²² The abovementioned sociologists who analyzed gender constructions in American trucking songs had, as we know, been using material consisting of over a thousand trucker songs. Hence, the number of songs in the US is very big. That is not the case in Sweden.

Swedish trucking music

Most trucking music consumed by Swedish truck drivers – and of course by everyone else who liked trucking songs – has been brought directly from the United States. This also seems to have been the case in other Nordic countries, whereas in Germany, for example, there has been since at least the 1980s a considerable production of German-language trucking songs recorded by German musicians, some of them big stars like Tom Astor and the band Truck Stop.²³

The number of Swedish-produced trucking songs – here defined as songs whose lyrics in one way or another are about trucks or truck drivers – can be estimated at less than one hundred. Through various music sites and with the help of Thomas Hydén at Trucknet Radio in Örebro, I have been able to find a total of eighty-four recordings distributed over seventeen artists or bands with the following temporal distribution:

Swedish-produced trucker songs per decade	
1970s	16
1980s	18
1990s	1
2000s	26
2010s	23

Sources: YouTube, Allmusic.com and Spotify

²² Allmusic, the most comprehensive music site, provides for example 22,000 hits on songs and 1,800 hits on albums with the word trucker in the title. Unfortunately, however, nearby search terms such as “tucker” etc. appear to be included.

²³ Gruber 2012, pp. 15 ff.

Most of the songs, twenty-nine, were recorded by the band The Viking Truckers, followed by country artist Red Jenkins with twenty-three songs and the singer-songwriter and truck driver Bert Gren alias Trinity with twelve songs. Even with these three artists excluded, the pattern will be the same over time, that is, the most songs in the last two decades followed by the 1970s and 1980s, and in between a decade of deep decline. The dip is even longer if you look at years instead of decades. Between 1987 and 2006, I was able to find just one single trucker song by a Swedish artist dedicated to the Swedish market, namely Svenne Rubin's "Keep on Truckin' Martin" from 1992, a quick blues-rock song, making jokes about Swedish truck drivers – to an extent that one could ask if the song really should be seen as part of the trucking culture, or just as an ironic comment on different truck driver stereotypes.²⁴

In this text, as already stated, I will keep to the earlier period, i.e. the 1970s and 1980s, when the American-inspired trucking culture was new in Sweden and had to adapt to the Swedish popular culture as well as to the professional culture of Swedish truck drivers and Swedish working-class culture. It was also in those decades that the trucker culture in Sweden and elsewhere peaked, both within popular culture in general and among truck drivers. In addition to lyrics and music, as far as possible and in cases of relevance, I will also take note of the visible signals from disc covers and promotion pictures of the musicians.

Swedish trucking music in the 1970s and 1980s

Let's begin by saying something about The Viking Truckers. The band was formed around 1980 in Gothenburg by two members of the, at that time, still existing and already legendary guitar band, The Spotnicks. In 1983, the band recorded an LP on the record label TMC by the name of *Love on the Road*. However, the company went bankrupt only a few weeks after the disc was released and the songs are therefore difficult to find. After the debacle with their first LP, the band sold the rights to its music to a Swiss record company and continued during at least the 1980s to issue trucking records on this label, though with different names such as The Winston Brothers. In total, more than one million records were sold on the European market in countries such as Germany, France and Spain. These records were never sold in Sweden though, and have therefore been left outside this survey. However, the band made a renewed entry into the Swedish market after reforming in 2009.²⁵

Most of the songs on *Love on the Road* belong to what could be referred to as quite nice mainstream or happy country songs, in a few cases on the verge of joke songs. All appear to be their own compositions. It's striking though, that the songs can be said to be lacking in the masculine appeal that are associated with US trucker songs in general. This impression is reinforced when looking at the disc cover. It depicts the band's two front figures dressed in black riveted western wear, with forced seductive seriousness and well-trimmed beards, leaning against a Volvo truck with bluish smoke billowing around their legs.²⁶ In all, the effect becomes the opposite, given that one of the purposes of the image was to highlight the masculinity of the band.

24 Svenne Rubin's website, http://www.svennerubins.nu/texter/keep_on_truckin.htm.

25 *Göteborgstidningen* 12 September 2011.

26 Katastrofala omslag, <http://katastrofalaomslag.blogspot.se/2012/12/viking-truckers-love-on-road.html>.

Two other bands from the period that just like The Viking Truckers seem to have profiled themselves as trucker bands but that, unlike The Viking Truckers, became neither long-lived nor anywhere near as commercially successful, were Trucker Joe Band from Skellefteå and Jack Daniels Band from Örebro. Unfortunately, I have only been able to get hold of one song from Trucker Joe band – the title track from their first and only album *Trucker Cowboy* (1981). It's no country song, but instead is a typical Swedish "dance-band song" from the time.²⁷ So-called dance band music is, or at least was, a very popular, very Swedish or Scandinavian genre with close ties to working-class people – though the themes in the lyrics of this song are more or less related to American trucker songs. The song is in Swedish and the refrain goes something like "Trucker cowboy, trucker cowboy, the truck is rolling in a convoy, everything is all right and we are keeping the time, and I'm listening to the Swedish public service radio, Channel 3" (which used to play a lot of Swedish popular music). And then about how well the truck is running and that the driver is thinking about his wife and kids back home "so far from a trucker cowboy". The image on the disc cover depicts a sitting blonde guy, Trucker Joe, with a friendly, almost shy look, the guitar on his knee and dressed in a fringed cowboy jacket and a hat that more resembles a fisherman's hat than a cowboy hat – definitely not any macho looking "trucker cowboy". The background rather reinforces the impression. A soft European, possibly German landscape, through which there's a road where a Volvo truck is seen on a slight uphill.²⁸

Jack Daniels Band from Örebro can also be seen in a picture, although instead of a disc cover this picture is from a report in *Trailer* in connection with a performance at the trucking festival in Husqvarna 1983, "the highlight of the year for the Nordic truck drivers" according to the magazine. The band, who had been "finalists in the Competition for Nordic Country musicians" with their "truck driving song" "Diesel Cowboy", is photographed in front of a bus dressed up like cowboys with cowboy boots and cowboy shirts and some of the members in what seems to be real cowboy hats.²⁹ Despite the equipment, the six band members don't look very credible in their roles as tough American truckers or cowboys. In particular, and again, the masculine radiance of the iconic American model is missing. Even clearer than in the case of The Viking Truckers, the somewhat demasculinized impression is reinforced when linking the visual to the musical signals. The singer simply doesn't sound very convincing when he, in the refrain of the borrowed US trucking song "Diesel Cowboy", claims that he was "born to be a diesel cowboy". Though it should be added that the musical deviation from the original by Ray McAuley is rather small. Jack Daniels Band's version has a slower pace, a somewhat less stylish approach and is performed with a slight "Swenglish" accent, which in combination give – again – a slightly demasculinized impression.

Red Jenkins, or Björn Raita which was his real name, was, when he recorded his first album with American trucking music, *Highway Cowboy* (1979), already one of very few rather established Swedish country artists. Unfortunately, only a few of the songs can be found on the Internet. The recordings provide a more solid musical impression than the examples mentioned above and without any traces of demasculinization. The same goes for the album cover, which shows a

27 Reg. Swedish dance-band music, see Lars Lilliestam, "Swedish Dance Bands", in Alf Björnberg & Thomas Bossius (eds.), *Made in Sweden. Studies in Popular Music*, Routledge, NY 2017.

28 http://katastrofalaomslag.blogspot.se/2013_01_01_archive.html.

29 *Trailer* 1983, no. 6.

young bearded Red Jenkins in cowboy hat and denimwear, a man who could very well be taken for an American truck driver – if he had been photographed in front of a Peterbilt or a Kenworth instead of a Volvo, that is. This could of course also be interpreted as a conscious adaptation to Swedish conditions.³⁰

With some exceptions for Mats Rådberg & Rankarna, who with their country-inspired music seem to have appeared quite often at trucking festivals and truck meets, as far as I've been able to see, other bands and artists with trucking songs on their repertoire don't seem to have any links to trucking culture. Apart from Pierre Isaksson and Mats Rådberg with their Swedish versions of C.W. McCall's "Convoy", "*Vänner på vägen*" ("Friends on the Road") and "*Vän med vägen*" ("Friend with the Road") and Pierre Isaksson's Swedish version of Dave Dudley's "Six Days on the Road" ("*Snart kommer jag hem*"), the rest of the trucking songs recorded in Sweden seem to have been songs composed by Swedes: Janne Lucas "*Jag når fram till målet*" ("I Reach the Goal"), Janne Öennerud's "*Långtradarlåten*" ("The Trailer Truck Song"), Hasse Andersson's "*Betsy*" ("Betsy"), Thor-Eric's "*Chaffistankar*" ("Trucker Thoughts"), Red Jenkins's "Run Rabbit Run" and Pierre Isaksson's "*Hemma*" ("At Home"). Among these there are just two country songs, Hasse Andersson's sentimental country ballad about a truck named Betsy and Red Jenkins's country ballad about a truck called Rabbit. Of the four remaining songs, three could be classified as Swedish dance band music and one, Janne Lucas's song, "*Jag når fram till målet*" ("I Reach the Goal") as more of an odd pop song, all of them with more or less straight-out trucking themes. The use of Swedish dance band music should of course be noted, reflecting a conscious adaptation of American trucking culture into a Swedish popular musical genre with strong support among the working class. Germany, whose nationally produced trucking music, at least from this period, must be defined as a subgenre of the traditional German Schlager music, can be mentioned as another good example of this phenomenon.³¹

What then, to get to the lyrics, can be said about the three remaining American songs with Swedish text in this collection: the two Swedish versions of the song "Convoy" and Pierre Isaksson's "*Snart kommer jag hem*" ("Six Days on the road")? The latter is an extremely slow version of Dudley's original. All country and rockabilly feelings are blown away, something that is further emphasized by Isaksson's unique and very odd bass song. The lyrics follow the original rather well, albeit with a little more decency. Isaksson's truck driver does not take any "little white pills" to stay awake. Like the driver in Dudley's original version, he exceeds the speed limits but unlike him, he's not carrying any overweight or "dodging the scales". To talk about a demasculinization in the case of Isaksson would be an over-interpretation. Let's just point out that Isaksson's version is very different and less "outlawish" than Dudley's.

The song "Convoy" was recorded in two Swedish versions, Pierre Isaksson's from 1976 and Mats Rådberg's from 1980. Musically they are both quite close to the original by C.W. McCall with spoken lyrics, elements of fake CB-radio communication and a catchy powerful refrain. However, the Swedish lyrics differ from its American model in a very obvious way. In McCall's original, which was a number-one hit on the American Billboard List in 1975-1976, there are implicit references made to the militant strikes or shutdowns by truckers that took place through-

30 Discogs, <https://www.discogs.com/Red-Jenkins-Highway-Cowboy/release/6485540>.

31 Tom Astor's superhit "Hallo Guten Morgen Deutschland" (1984) is a good example.

hout the US in 1973.³² Even apart from that, it's very obvious that the film, as well as the song, is a tribute to the outlaw trucker. The truck drivers are taking the convoy – “with a thousand screaming trucks” – through the USA in permanent and very violent battle with the police and other authorities.³³ In the Swedish version, “*Vänner på vägen*” (“Friends on the Road”), every trace of rebelliousness is lost. It's about two drivers who are driving together through the night on their way home, although one of them, by accident it seems, was speeding outside Malmö and therefore had to pay a fine. The refrain, which is quite tame even in McCall's original, but which, in view of the theme, can still be interpreted as a collective appeal for upheaval, in the Swedish version only points out that it is a good thing to help each other and be “friends on the road”.³⁴

American original version	Swedish version (transl. from Swedish)
Cause we got a mighty convoy rockin' through the night	Come let's be friends on the road and follow our caravan
Yeah, we got a mighty convoy, ain't she a beautiful sight?	Yes let's be friends on the road, follow us away from town
Come on and join our convoy ain't nothin' gonna get in our way.	Let's be friends on the road, help (each other) when we can.
We gonna roll this truckin' convoy 'cross the U-S-A.	Be friends in all situations, friends with one another.

And now let's return to those Swedish trucking songs where there are no American originals and see which motifs and themes are present. Apart from the fictive driver in Janne Önnerrud's “*Långtradarlåten*” (“The Trailer Truck Song”) who in his eagerness to get home to his wife violates the speed limit, there are no hints of any outlaw behavior. No traces of rebelliousness either or any struggle against injustices, although Pierre Isaksson's driver in his song “*Hemma*” (“Home”) seems to complain about his “fifteen heavy years on the roads (and his) struggle for the owners”. As for the rest, most of the previously mentioned motifs appear more or less frequently. The longing for the family or the woman back home – or at a truck stop – are common themes, preferably in combination with an emphasis of the loneliness on the road. In Red Jenkin's “Run Rabbit Run”, the longing for the family is so strong that the driver, after fifteen years on the roads and when it suddenly strikes him that his children are almost grown, quits his profession and drives home for good. It is noteworthy that such a pillar within the trucking culture as “freedom” is surprisingly absent. It is called upon by The Viking Truckers in their song “Red light Blues” but is then located in the American Southwest. In Hasse Andersson's “Betsy”, it's rather the truck Betsy that is the living subject, who is longing for freedom, while the driver yearning for freedom in Isaksson's “*Hemma*” carefully points out that freedom has its price in the form of loneliness. No lyric deals with the importance of the profession for the nation, and the dangers of the profession are men-

32 Hamilton 2008, pp.220 ff, Von Doviak 2005, p. 126 ff.

33 Metrolyrics, <http://www.metrolyrics.com/convoy-lyrics-cw-mccall.html>. The song inspired Sam Peckinpah to make the film *Convoy* (1978) and also became the theme of the film. This theme, however, with slightly modified lyrics, is not as clearly linked to the dramatic events of 1973 as in the original song.

34 YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EorXeVCrr4s>.

tioned in only one song. The latter in Janne Lucas' "*Jag når fram till målet*" ("I reach the goal"), whose main character incidentally encounters "fools" in traffic.

Finally and again the theme of masculinity. We have already noted that some of the Swedish artists as well as songs seem to have had a slight demasculinized touch. Just as Eastman and others noted for American trucking songs, however, masculinity is present even in the Swedish lyrics, both pronounced and disguised in the discourse. For example in The Viking Truckers' "Son of Truck Driving Son of a Gun", the fictional driver tells us about how his profession was inherited from father to son in three stages. In the "To Heaven in a Truck" by The Viking Truckers, they let their driver essentially unite with his truck to the point that he can no longer be separated from it even when he dies and therefore has to follow it into heaven. Hasse Andersson sings in his "Betsy" as a matter of course by "the men of the roads" and Janne Lucas links in his "*Jag når fram till målet*" ("I reach the goal") the heavy weight of the truck with hard work and hardness of the male trucker. You may wonder though if it does not violate the truckers' ideals of masculinity that, like the driver in Red Jenkins' "Run Rabbit Run", he eventually puts his family before his profession.



Jack Daniels Band at the "Trucking Festival" in Husqvarna 1983. Photo: Trailer

Conclusions

In short, the most striking observations have been, firstly, the diminished or weakened masculinity in the Swedish songs compared to their American models. The visual signals emitted by the artists on images and album covers reinforce this impression. Secondly, the lack of, or at least strongly weakened outlaw theme in the Swedish trucking songs. Trucker culture and trucking songs were originally part of an American cultural discourse adjusted to a more violent and harsh reality, not least on the labor market – a social reality that also corresponds to a more macho type of manliness. The more masculine and violent American trucking culture then had to be negotiated with what's been referred to as a more "soft" type of manliness in Sweden – probably also among Swedish truck drivers – breaking in at the time, as well as with a more disciplined and peaceful working-class culture in Sweden with its, ever since the early 1900s, very strong hang-up on the notion of "steadiness". Our analysis of Swedish trucking music is well in line with such an assumption. And thirdly, there seems in part to have been an adaption of the trucking songs to Swedish "dance band music", a popular musical genre strongly attached to the working class – a phenomenon whose counterparts can also be found in other countries.

Finally, what happened then with the Swedish trucking music after the 1980s? As noted, there was just one trucker song produced in Sweden between 1987 and 2008. With The Viking Truckers' rebirth in 2009, the genre seems to have followed the international trend in a more metal-inspired direction – and thereby also towards a more masculine image. It is also worth mentioning that trucking music in its new and harder appearance in recent years has also been used by truck manufacturers in the business of branding new truck models. Red Jenkins' "trucking album", *Truckers Paradise* (2008), was thus produced and realized in collaboration with Scania Sweden, while Volvo Trucks, for their part, invested in The Viking Truckers and their album *Highway Songs* (2010), distributed free of charge to 150,000 registered Volvo owners.³⁵ The appearance of the multinational truck manufacturers on the stage certainly gives a new and interesting dimension to trucking music as being part of a working-class and professional culture.

³⁵ Scania Sweden's website, <http://www.scania.se/om-scania/mil/2008/> and *Expressen* 12 September 2011.

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Reading Truck Drivers – A Success Story

David Ericsson

My interest in writing and reading started early. By age eight, I had already published my first commentary in the daily paper where my father worked. It was about the sad fact that they were taking out the trams from the streets of Stockholm. I also wrote a whole novel at the age of 14, which I sadly lost somewhere. After that I didn't write anything until I was thirty. But I read a lot and I had the same big interest in literature as my father and mother. I quit school when I was sixteen and started working in a lumberyard. After that I travelled around and worked in different countries in Europe. I had an idea to write about the things I saw and my experiences in jobs, such as fruit picking in France, working in a lumberyard in northern Norway, dishwashing in Finland and digging graves in Copenhagen. But I was too occupied just by living my free life! At the age of twenty I went back to Stockholm. I met a girl with whom I'm still married after forty years. Soon enough we had two children and I had to find a job to pay our rent and make a living. Becoming a truck driver felt natural after all my traveling around Europe.

After many years, when I was around thirty, I began to feel that driving trucks in northern Europe wasn't enough for me. And after a big party with a friend who is a poet, I thought that maybe even I could write something. So with a severe hangover the day after the party, I wrote a short poem on the motor hood of the truck (it was a cab-over-engine truck). After that I wrote many poems along the roads at night. It nearly became a mania and also a way to stay awake. But it could sometimes, in the daylight, be difficult to see what I'd written on the paper on the hood. At that time I was an owner-operator with an old truck. But I was tired of working. I had been working heavy jobs since I was sixteen, and didn't want to buy a new truck. Instead, I sold my truck and took a year off to go to school to become an author. I did it just for fun. But soon I learned how to write short stories, which I sold to several magazines. My first published book was a collection of short stories called *Truckstop* (of course) and it attracted a lot of publicity in many media channels. After a while I went back to my work as a truck driver. But now as an employee and more or less half-time driving, half-time writing books and articles. I quickly became involved in the Transport Workers' Union. The fellowship with employed truck drivers and other workers was something I'd missed as an owner-operator. Soon I realized how little workers and especially truck drivers read books and newspapers.

At a seminar for workers who actually had started libraries in their workshops and industries we discovered that something must be done. Reading is important for everyone, including for those who have heavy industrial jobs. It's good for understanding other people's situations as well as our own and for being aware of the surrounding society. Or just for the pleasure of reading. As

a member of the Transport Union I was thinking about how to help truckers, who often are a long way from home and seldom see a library, to be able to access literature. Truckers are of course always occupied with what happens on the road. But they can still listen. So an idea came up: audiobooks! Not so many, but some books were recorded and downloaded onto CDs. But how could we reach the truckers out on the road? The trucks are usually too big to get into the cities where the libraries are. Someone suggested: “the roadhouses and the gas stations!” And we started to discuss libraries in truck stops. Easy to reach and a system where the local unions of the transport workers and the restaurant workers could take care of the books and make sure they came back after being borrowed.

Said and done. We contacted several truck stops and they were all interested in the idea! Maybe because they saw an opportunity to attract drivers to stop at their places for eating, filling diesel – and borrowing audiobooks. Some of the roadhouse keepers thought that they would sell less of their own audiobooks. But the opposite happened. Their sales increased when the drivers didn’t find what they wanted in the roadhouse library. The government (Social Democrats) supported the project with a small amount of money. But the biggest part came from the unions of the transport workers and of the restaurant workers. We opened the first roadhouse library in 2004 at Tönnebro. A small village near a crossroad at the main road from Stockholm to Sundsvall, just a bit north of Gävle. The success was immediate. Media wrote about it and the public service television did a story about truckers listening to audiobooks driving along the roads. We opened more and more roadhouse libraries all over Sweden and in the end we had fourteen of them. At one place an airplane pilot came in on his way to work. He asked if he could borrow a book. Well, the personnel at the gas station couldn’t deny that to this high-flying trucker.

Many newspapers helped with things like giving us the audiobooks they got from publishers for criticising. They also made people change their attitude towards truck drivers. Instead of just seeing them as something in the way for private cars, people began to see them as intellectual people who could both understand and discuss literature. In fact, it was also possible to see a difference between younger and older drivers. The younger drivers listened much more to books. This was in contrast to the rest of the society and other occupations where the young men and women didn’t read so much. It all became a popular, or at least a truckers’, movement where most of the books in the road libraries were checked out all the time. It led the trucking men and women to other, more difficult books, such as classics by authors like August Strindberg. When Internet and smart phones came into the trucking world, truckers even began listening to documentary pods from the radio, news and more books. In the end it turned out that truckers could be one of the most well-read and literary groups in our society. Even more than academics and librarians. Nowadays the movement is like a self-playing piano. Good for the audiobook companies, the authors and probably also for the truck companies, who have engaged, hopefully more awake and in many ways well-educated employees.

But times are a-changin’. CDs are no longer the best way to listen to books. They sometimes break. Or a CD might get lost when the driver scrambles around in the cabin. Many new trucks don’t even have a CD player. Now everything relies on the Internet. Some of the roadhouse libraries have followed that development and started downloading stations for audiobooks so drivers can download books for free. That is also very popular and gives access to a wealth of literature, including the Bible and the Koran! So the success story of book-listening, hard-working men and women continues. And as an author – and a truck driver – I can honestly say that my best and most initiated critics are – truck drivers!

Author presentations

Mona Bråten is a sociologist. She is a researcher at the Fafo Institute for Labour and Social Research, Norway. Her research is concentrated on industrial relations, trade unions, working conditions/HES and labor market regulations.

David Ericsson is a Swedish author, journalist and truck driver. He made his debut in 1999 with the acclaimed short story collection *Truck Stop*, which was followed by the novels *Redlight* 2001 and *Taxfee* 2004. His latest novel, *Döden är inte nog*, was published in 2018. He is also a well known columnist in *The Swedish Transport Workers' Union's* paper, *Transportarbetaren*.

Ljuba Fredenman (M.A. in Peace and Conflict Studies) was born 1968 and raised in Malmö. He worked in the transport industry from 1988 until 2014. During the last years of his trucking career he studied Social Sciences and graduated from Malmö University in 2012. He then started the project “Livsberättelser ur ett Malmö i förändring”, writing and publishing books based on life stories from elderly people living in Malmö. He is currently working as an officer in the social and healthcare administration.

Shane Hamilton is Senior Lecturer in Management at The York Management School, University of York. His first book, *Trucking Country: The Road to America's Wal-Mart Economy* (Princeton, 2008) won the 2009 Theodore Saloutos Award for Best Book in Agricultural History. With Sarah Phillips, he is the co-author of *The Kitchen Debate and Cold War Consumer Politics: A Brief History with Documents* (Bedford, 2014). His most recent book is *Supermarket USA: Food and Power in the Cold War Farms Race* (Yale, 2018).

Eddy Nehls is an ethnologist and his PhD is an investigation of prerequisites for gender equality in the Swedish haulage business. After that he has been doing research in a wide range of fields: alcohol and drugs, sustainability, work integrated learning, diversity. In later years he has been working on a series of books on cultural theory and analytical tools that can be used in sustainability work. The red thread that runs through all of his research is prerequisites for change.

Mikael Ottosson, PhD in History and Associate professor in Work Science at the Center for Labor History, Department of History, Lund University, Sweden. His research encompasses different topics in the field of social and cultural history. He has conducted research on topics such as craftsmanship in the Swedish glass industry, gender and nationalism, digitalization of working life, and the moral economy of work. In recent years his research has focused social norms in relation to performance of work and the role of trust, loyalty and gratitude in the Swedish labor market.

Kåre H Skollerud is a sociologist and researcher at Institute for Transport Economics, Norway. His main topics are working condition in the transport sector, transport for different groups, including people with special needs and the Taxi industry.

Ragnhild Steen Jensen is dr. polit in Human Geography. She is a researcher at the Fafo institute for Labour and Social Research, Norway. Her research interests center on working conditions, working time and gender and work.

Annette Thörnquist, PhD in History and Associate Professor, is educated at Uppsala University. Her main research interests are in industrial relations in the private as well as public sector, precarious employment, occupational health and safety, and labor migration. She is an affiliated researcher at F.A.T.K., University of Tübingen and at REMESO, Linköping University.

Hans Wallengren, PhD in History and Associate professor at the Center for Labor History, Department of History, Lund University, Sweden. His research encompasses different topics in the field of social and labor history, such as housing, migration and xenophobia. Recently he has made research on Swedish immigrants living in shanty towns in the US during the Great Depression.

