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Sundelin, Anna; Wassholm, Johanna

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# Transnational networks in northern European mobile trade in the late 1800s

Anna Sundelin and Johanna Wassholm

Faculty of Arts, Psychology and Theology, Åbo Akademi University, Turku, Finland

## ABSTRACT

Peddlers of varying geographic, ethnic and cultural background played an important role for everyday consumption in late nineteenth century northern Europe. In the sparsely populated region, peddlers answered to a growing demand on consumer goods, spurred by industrialization and rising living standards. Many traders originated from outside the region, from Germany in the south to the multi-ethnic Russian Empire in the east. Their possibilities to succeed in the foreign environments largely depended on the networks that they established. This article examines the role that networks played for peddlers from the outside. First, we analyse the connections that traders from a certain region (Eastern Jews, Tatars, Russian Karelians, Germans) established between themselves to further their business in the Nordics. Second, we study the networks formed between peddlers from the outside and their local customers. And third, we examine the role of transnational, national and local networks for the acquisition and transport of goods over long distances. The article illuminates the various types of networks that characterized peddling in northern Europe as well as their functions. It also illustrates how the possibilities to study networks depend on the types of sources used and underlines the importance of analysing various types of sources to identify networks.

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## Introduction

Itinerant traders of different geographic, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds played a significant role for everyday consumption, as well as for the occasional purchases of luxuries, in the late nineteenth-century Nordics. Many traders were ‘outsiders’ in the region, originating from Germany in the south to the multi-ethnic Russian Empire in the east.<sup>1</sup> Situated in the northern periphery of Europe, the Nordic countries were sparsely populated agrarian societies covering vast territories, except for Denmark which was more like the continental regions to the south. Like the rest of Europe, the Nordics in the second half of the nineteenth century was characterized by incipient industrialization and expanding economies. A growing average income led to rising living standards, not least among the lower strata of society, and this, in turn, spurred consumption.<sup>2</sup>

**CONTACT** Anna Sundelin  [anna.sundelin@abo.fi](mailto:anna.sundelin@abo.fi)  Åbo Akademi University, Tehtaankatu 2, 20500 Turku, Finland

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Nordic consumers acquired access to commodities through informal as well as formal exchanges. The rural population had traditionally manufactured items at home or acquired them through barter, and exchanges of goods also occurred at places where people regularly convened, for example outside the church on Sundays.<sup>3</sup> In the first decades of the century, shops were only allowed in towns where regular fairs also offered shopping opportunities. Shopping opportunities in the countryside improved from the middle of the century, as an incipient liberalization of trade legislation allowed the opening of rural shops. However, although new shops were opening and mail order businesses emerged, many rural consumers, especially in sparsely populated areas, still depended on older forms of retail, such as fairs, auctions, and peddling.<sup>4</sup> Partly due to the long distances between communities in most of the Nordics, peddlers had a central function in the circulation of commodities.<sup>5</sup>

In this article, we examine the role of networks in transnational itinerant trade in the Nordics, departing from the assumption that various types of networks played a key role for the ability to succeed in peddling.<sup>6</sup> Peddlers from the outside depended on networks, as they were often marginalized in foreign environments and new homelands in terms of economy, legislation, and pejorative ethnic stereotyping.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, sedentary societies tended to view mobile people with suspicion, perceiving them as potentially untrustworthy, hostile, and dangerous strangers.<sup>8</sup> In such marginalized positions, formal and/or informal networks offered peddlers access to social and commercial resources.<sup>9</sup>

The networks are investigated from three perspectives. First, we analyse the connections that various groups of traders – Eastern European Jews, Tatars, Russian Karelians, and ‘German’ hair cutters – established with other traders from their home regions to further their trade. Second, we study the functions of the networks that peddlers formed with their local customers. And third, we examine the role of transnational networks for the acquisition and disposal of goods. The article has two main aims. The first is to disclose the multifaceted networks that characterized transnational mobile trade, and their various functions. The second is to highlight the importance of analysing several types of sources to identify the networks, and to discuss how the possibilities to study networks in peddling depend on the types of sources used.

Although mobile trade was a strikingly transnational livelihood, previous research on peddling in the Nordics has focused on a solitary group of peddlers in a specific national setting. Of the explored groups, the Russian Karelians (also known as ‘Rucksack Russians’) have drawn the most interest among researchers, primarily in Finland.<sup>10</sup> The Eastern Jewish and Tatar peddlers, who were less numerous and emerged in the Nordics only from the 1860s, have been studied in a number of publications from the 1990s onwards.<sup>11</sup> We ourselves have also studied transnational itinerant trade from the perspective of peddlers focusing on specific goods, such as human hair and rags, and the ambivalent encounters between itinerant traders and the sedentary societies that they visited.<sup>12</sup> We argue that transcending the national framework will offer a broader and more nuanced insight into the functions of transnational networks for the diverse groups of mobile traders seeking a livelihood in the late nineteenth century Nordics.

Due to its informal character and existence in a grey zone between the legal and illegal, peddling has left few and fragmentary traces in historical sources.<sup>13</sup> To meet the

challenge posed by the scarcity of documentation, we combine three types of sources: newspaper articles, responses to ethnographic questionnaires, and interviews with former Russian Karelian peddlers.

Searchable historical newspaper archives in the Nordic countries have opened new possibilities to localize the fragmentary mentions of mobile trade in the press,<sup>14</sup> offering insights into the diverse networks that peddlers were entangled in. While the articles are contemporary with the depicted events, they also pose source-critical challenges that need to be acknowledged. They usually represent the local authorities' and merchants' negative attitudes towards peddlers from the outside and can therefore be expected to describe the peddlers' contacts in neutral or negative terms.<sup>15</sup>

To access depictions of the functions of networks from the perspective of the peddlers and their customers, we analyse interviews with former Russian peddlers in Finland, conducted in 1950–1955,<sup>16</sup> and three ethnographic questionnaires dealing with itinerant petty trade: the questionnaire Russian Itinerant Traders (Kringvandrande ryska handelsmän, 1957/1968), held at the Cultural Studies archive *Cultura* at Åbo Akademi University in Turku; the West Gothians' Trade-questionnaire (*Västgötarnas handel*, 1933), preserved at *Nordiska Museet* in Stockholm; and the questionnaire Trade and Fairs (*Handel och marknad*, 1938), held at ULMA in Uppsala.<sup>17</sup> Starting in the 1920s, ethnographic questionnaires were aimed at documenting the traditional Nordic agrarian societies, but from the 1950s they also were a means to examine cultural contact and societal change. As they are retrospective in character, the responses may be influenced by factors such as forgetfulness, nostalgia, and reliance on second-hand information.<sup>18</sup> Still, they gave a voice to people who had encountered peddlers in their everyday lives and formed personal networks with them.<sup>19</sup>

## Multiple mobilities

The Swedish ethnologist Göran Rosander states that the late nineteenth century was the zenith of mobile trading in the Nordics in terms of scope and variety.<sup>20</sup> In addition to growing trade within the region, the period saw an influx of peddlers from the outside. Many arrived from the multi-ethnic Russian Empire, especially to Finland, which in 1809 had transformed from an integral part of the Swedish realm into an autonomous grand duchy of the empire.<sup>21</sup> Others came from Germany to the south, crossing the border into Denmark, and from there further into Sweden and Norway, who formed a political union from 1814 to 1905.<sup>22</sup>

The influx of traders from the outside can be ascribed to two main factors. First, the growing supply of and demand for consumer goods that industrialization spurred from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, offered new livelihood opportunities to groups of traders who could distribute the items.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, advertising and falling prices kindled new dreams and desires for commodities, placing the novelties within reach of increasing numbers of new consumers.<sup>24</sup>

Second, the development of modern transport technologies made migration, travel, and the transport of commodities faster and more efficient both within states and across national borders.<sup>25</sup> The expansion of the railway network on the European continent connected Denmark for example to Germany, Poland, and the Netherlands.<sup>26</sup> The linking of the Finnish railway to that of Russia in 1870 made the Nordics more

accessible to peddlers from the vast and multi-ethnic Russian Empire to the east.<sup>27</sup> In addition, regular steamship routes shortened journey times between Nordic port cities, facilitating the transport of both imported and local items.<sup>28</sup> Locally, the peddlers mainly moved on foot, although some had access to horses and carts. For this reason, peddlers preferred lightweight goods that were easy to carry on their back.<sup>29</sup>

The four main groups of peddlers examined in this article were of diverse geographic backgrounds. Most of the Russian Karelians originated from White Sea Karelia in the Arkhangelsk Governorate of the Russian Empire, bordering the Grand Duchy of Finland. Peddlers from the region had traded all over Finland, as well as in northern Sweden and Norway for centuries.<sup>30</sup> In comparison, the Eastern European Jews were newcomers in the Nordics. Jews residing in the Pale of Settlement, an administrative unit in the Russian Empire's western borderlands, started to migrate to Sweden from the 1860s, and to Norway from the 1880s.<sup>31</sup> They were part of a broad migration movement from east to west within Europe, a result of several concurrent factors, such as a demographic crisis in the home region, harsh economic conjunctures, and pogroms. The majority of the more than two million Jews who left Eastern Europe in the decades preceding the First World War aimed to migrate to the United States, but some permanently settled in Western Europe, including Sweden, Norway, and Denmark.<sup>32</sup>

The Tatars appeared at the same time as the Eastern European Jews, being part of a migration of diverse groups of Tatars from the Russian interior toward the Baltic Sea.<sup>33</sup> Of the Nordic countries Tatars only arrived in Finland, mostly from a few villages in the Nizhny Novgorod Governorate east of Moscow. Many had previously resided in St. Petersburg, where they had gained a seasonal or permanent livelihood as petty traders.<sup>34</sup> From around 1870, the Nordic press observed an influx of yet another group of newcomers, warning readers that 'notorious' hair buyers were allegedly 'roaming about everywhere', frequenting urban fairs and 'inundating' rural regions.<sup>35</sup> These traders were drawn to the region by a new hair fashion, the chignon, which had the shape a soft bun of hair placed in the neck. As few women had enough hair of their own for the lavish chignon, the fashion stimulated demand for false hair, braids, and poufs in the urban centers of Europe. To answer to this growing demand, mobile procurers of hair arrived not least in its peripheral regions, including the Nordics. Commonly referred to as 'Germans,' the hair buyers' geographic and ethnic origin is difficult to establish, but many were presumably Jews.<sup>36</sup>

The mobile traders from outside the region differed from both each other and their stationary customers in terms of culture, ethnicity, and confession, which gave peddling in the late nineteenth-century Nordics a multi-ethnic character. The Russian Karelians differed from their mainly Finnish customers through their Orthodox faith and some cultural attributes, such as clothing, but, although they were neither Finns nor Finnish citizens, they were perceived as being closely related to the Finns. Most also spoke Karelian, in this period considered a dialect of Finnish, and could therefore communicate effortlessly with their Finnish-speaking customers.<sup>37</sup> The Jews and Tatars differed more from the host communities, and therefore faced stronger negative stereotyping. The Tatars were the first Muslims that people in the Nordics could encounter in their everyday lives, and attitudes toward them were affected by a derogatory 'Oriental' stereotype.<sup>38</sup>

Jews, in turn, were associated with negatively charged anti-Semitic stereotypes that had influenced European thought for centuries.<sup>39</sup>

The Tatar and Jewish peddlers were few in absolute numbers, amounting to a few thousand at most. Yet, against the background of pejorative preconceived notions, they attracted attention in the host communities due to their mobile lifestyle and their distinct appearance.<sup>40</sup> Peddlers from the outside were also often marginalized in terms of legislation. A conspicuously liberal Swedish trade law allowed peddling for foreigners from 1864, but a growing protectionist opinion led to a revision in 1887 that again forbade it.<sup>41</sup> In Finland, which as a separately administered unit within the Russian Empire had its own internal legislation, peddling was forbidden to anyone without Finnish citizenship rights. This included the Orthodox Russian Karelians and the Tatars, who as Muslims could not even acquire such.<sup>42</sup> Despite the formal prohibition, it is a well-established fact that the customers, often even the authorities, turned a blind eye on illicit peddling.<sup>43</sup>

Arriving in the Nordics, peddlers from the outside encountered a variety of competing local itinerant traders, some of whom like them conducted transnational mobile trade. Danish peddlers gravitated toward Hamburg, Swedes occasionally crossed borders into Norway, Denmark, and Finland, while St. Petersburg was of importance for Finnish peddlers.<sup>44</sup> Finnish rag collectors residing near the Finnish-Russian border exchanged pottery for rags that they sold to paper mills in Finland and Russia,<sup>45</sup> and female hair artists from Dalarna in Sweden traversed the Nordic countries, the Baltics, Russia, Germany, and England on their journeys.<sup>46</sup> As will be discussed in the following sections, what united all these groups was that their livelihood depended on itinerancy and various forms of networks that supported the mobility of both people and goods.

## Networks between peddlers

Peddling and other forms of mobile livelihoods have often provided auxiliary sources of income to people residing in regions where it has been difficult to secure an income for the whole year.<sup>47</sup> In the receiving end, in turn, peddling has been a typical livelihood for newcomers in society, not least for ethnic minorities.<sup>48</sup> As Marta Gjernes states in an article on the Eastern European Jews in Norway, many upon arrival engaged in itinerant trade, as it was a low-threshold livelihood that did not require investment.<sup>49</sup> Economic necessity, combined with a tradition that encouraged trading and offered access to existing networks was a resource for people from specific regions who wished to pursue long-distance peddling. In this section, we examine the functions of the networks that peddlers formed with people of the same geographical and cultural background.

One central function of such networks was to offer efficiency in terms of mobility, an aspect that is emphasized in the peddlers' own accounts. In an interview, the former Russian Karelian peddler V.I. Arhippainen recounts how he set out on his first trading journey at the age of 14 in 1894, accompanying a group of more than 20 men from his home village Kiestinki in White See Karelia. He describes the solemn atmosphere in the village as the group departed for the more than 1000 kilometres long journey to south-western Finland, and how relatives of peddlers already residing in Finland sent gifts to them along with him.<sup>50</sup>



Peddlers travelling together are also noted in the press, for example, when a group consisting of about twenty 'German' hair buyers was spotted traversing Norway in 1870.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, the first Tatars who arrived in Finland were commonly mentioned as travelling in groups, arriving by steamboats from St. Petersburg and visiting fairs along the Finnish coast.<sup>52</sup> However, rather than depicting the collective travel as a resource from the point of view of the traders, the press usually portrays the mobile groups as a potential threat to the sedentary local societies. They were also commonly associated with derogatory stereotypes; for instance, the newspaper *Åbo Tidning* in 1885 describes a group of mobile Tatars as a hoard of 'Orientals' moving around as a 'procession of nomads'.<sup>53</sup>

At the destination, the networks primarily played a role for the trading through the so-called trading companies that peddlers who conducted long-distance trade were often organized in. Such associations united several individuals in the acquisition of goods, the sharing of economic risk, and the dividing of the local market among its members. Each company gathered at a specific place – and as several companies tended to co-operate, certain locations became centres for peddlers with the same background.<sup>54</sup> The companies' main function was to procure commodities for its members, as will be illustrated in the last section of the article.

As a mobile lifestyle always encompassed an element of danger, the companies can also be seen as security measures. Newspapers contain portrayals of peddlers being physically harassed while selling, often by a husband, brother or father of a female customer or child.<sup>55</sup> Harassment could also be collective, as in the story of a 'mob' of locals that took the law into their own hands, threatening a group of Jewish traders spotted near the Swedish coastal town of Hudiksvall in 1871 with violence if they were ever to return.<sup>56</sup> Such narratives reflect a patriarchal ideal and pejorative ethnic stereotype, as collective action was usually taken against Jews. This suggests that peddlers who differed most from the Nordic host communities, ran the highest risk of being attacked.

In the worst case scenario, peddlers risked being robbed, or even murdered, a threat that former peddlers themselves acknowledge in the interviews conducted with them.<sup>57</sup> This danger was most tangible for individuals traveling alone in remote regions, carrying with them money and valuable goods, often on side roads as not to be caught by the police.<sup>58</sup> The newspapers contain examples of peddlers from all the groups under study falling victim to violent crime.<sup>59</sup> Such accounts also appear in responses to the questionnaires, where they reflect the local society's oral tradition and collective memory. Many respondents recount that they had heard stories of peddlers being robbed or murdered in a specific place.<sup>60</sup> Interviews with the former peddlers also highlight the functions that the networks formed with others from the home region had for physical security in foreign environments. V.I. Arhipainen mentions that peddlers kept in touch with other traders nearby, gathering regularly at specific places on agreed times. Thus, if someone failed to turn up, the others would suspect that something had happened and start searching for the missing person.<sup>61</sup>

The networks that peddlers with a shared geographic and ethnic background established were an economic and social resource that worked in two directions. On the one hand, they established a link between the home region and the area where traders from that specific region operated. On the other, they offered a means to co-operate with peers in new and often challenging environments. Especially in the early phases



of mobility, peddlers from the same cultural and geographic background commonly established a closed social structure, which strengthened collective identity. Citing Curtin, one might argue that they lived 'among aliens in associated networks'.<sup>62</sup> The networks were strengthened by marriages between families hailing from the same region.<sup>63</sup> They also played a role in social advancement, as peddlers who permanently settled down and opened shops could provide opportunities to other newcomers from the home region by offering them work or helping them in gaining a livelihood.

### Networks with the locals

Itinerant traders earning a living distant from home also needed to form connections with the local population, whom they depended on for basic needs such as food and shelter. Peddlers sometimes stayed at inns along their routes, or slept outside in the warm season, but mostly found shelter in private homes.<sup>64</sup> They also largely depended on private households for procuring food. The opportunities for eating out in the rural and sparsely populated Nordic region were still underdeveloped, while providing visitors with food was perceived as a social obligation.<sup>65</sup> As people were less prone to let unknown travellers into their homes, forming friendly relations with people in the local societies was a prerequisite for success.<sup>66</sup>

The networks that peddlers established with people in the local societies they visited are best reflected in responses to the ethnographic questionnaires. While the encounters that the trade gave rise to evoked contradictory emotions,<sup>67</sup> the responses suggest that the peddlers were usually received well in the local community.<sup>68</sup> Some respondents describe their visits as a welcomed break from an otherwise relatively monotonous everyday life, or – as one respondent puts it – a 'breeze from another, more eventful, world'.<sup>69</sup> As mobile traders tended to follow the same routes annually, they became regular visitors to specific households.<sup>70</sup> These contacts, stretching over years or even decades, in many cases gave rise to long-term friendships, which in the responses to the questionnaires are reflected in mentions of peddlers being received as 'old acquaintances', or 'kind of kin'.<sup>71</sup>

It must be noted that such mentions exclusively refer to peddlers who were culturally close to their local hosts, in this study especially the Russian Karelians. Jews and Tatars are rarely mentioned as guests, and therefore we know little about their interpersonal relations with locals. Mentions of Jews and Tatars are equally absent in the gendered context of personal relations reflected in the questionnaires. While many respondents imply that especially young girls and women welcomed peddlers,<sup>72</sup> such encounters were at times described in negative terms, as in the following response: '[The trader] was mostly seen as reliable, but fear and suspicion occurred when he played a bit of Don Juan towards the women.'<sup>73</sup> Occasionally, love relationships formed between peddlers and local women, some of which even resulted in marriage.<sup>74</sup> Thus, while marrying people with a shared geographic background was a means to strengthen internal networks with others from the home region, marriages with locals reinforced networks in the area where the peddlers traded.

Another observation is that, compared to the Russian Karelians, who commonly appear in the responses with personal names, for example Petter, Simon, or Vasili, as well as positive characterizations,<sup>75</sup> Jews and Tatars are not mentioned as individuals

but as a collective associated with anti-Semitic or Oriental stereotypes. A partial explanation to this is that they were few in numbers, another the simple fact that the questionnaires did not contain specific questions about them. To be able to analyse the personal relations of Jews and Tatars with the locals in depth, we would therefore need access to alternative types of sources. For instance, Jacqueline Stare has found examples of hospitable reception and friendships between Jewish peddlers and their local Swedish customers in interviews with Jewish peddlers and in letters written by them.<sup>76</sup>

Good relations with the locals also had a multitude of functions for the trade as such. Primarily, locals formed the itinerant traders' customer base – without their demand for items the peddlers could not dispose of their stock. And, as will be shown in the next section, the peddlers also bought items from their customers. Some peddlers even engaged locals as trading assistants. For example, the 'German' hair cutters hired local women to make the 'harvesting' faster and more efficient, so that they themselves could concentrate on organizing the trade.<sup>77</sup> The Swedish press in the early 1870s reported that hair cutters had also hired a soldier, a crofter's son, and a former farmhand's wife as local associates.<sup>78</sup> On another occasion it is described how in Norway 'one of the hair buyers who are currently roaming around the Nordic countries has left town accompanied by two girls whose task is to facilitate the "commerce"'.<sup>79</sup>

Relations with the locals were also important as far as they could protect the peddlers from the police. As peddling was illegal for non-Nordic citizens for most of the examined period, peddlers constantly risked being caught by the local law enforcement on suspicion of conducting illicit trade. Swedish newspapers repeatedly contained short paragraphs about peddlers having been detained, for instance reporting that a group of Polish Jews from Stockholm, Lund, and Malmö had been arrested near Uppsala in 1901.<sup>80</sup> Likewise, the Finnish press reported on detainments of Russian Karelians and Tatars.<sup>81</sup> However, both the newspapers and responses to the questionnaires contain evidence of the local consumers commonly siding with the peddlers.<sup>82</sup> While in the questionnaires, examples of the customers assisting the peddlers are recounted as entertaining anecdotes, the newspapers convey the perspective of annoyed authorities. A frustrated writer in the Finnish *Aura* newspaper in 1888 complained that even locals who had been ordered to assist the police in catching peddlers sided with the latter: 'few obey the orders of the police, and even when forced to take part, those same assistants are not trustworthy when help is needed. They are often only of use to the peddlers'.<sup>83</sup>

Friendly networks with the locals were of value to peddlers in a more human sense too. We have found an example of a Russian Karelian peddler, who during his travels in Western Finland was taken care of by a local family, when he fell seriously ill after a stroke. He was later given an Orthodox funeral that was attended by a large crowd of people. The strength of these kinds of networks is highlighted in the sense that references to them are found in both the contemporary press and in responses to the questionnaire.<sup>84</sup> Finally, such networks were of significance for peddlers who sought to settle down permanently and open a shop. For instance, in Finland, persons without citizenship rights in the grand duchy were allowed to open shops only after the issuing of the Trade Act of 1879. Therefore, people without such rights could only get involved in the local business by opening shops in the name of a local acquaintance or by marrying

a local woman. This opportunity was important not least for the Russian Karelians, many of whom in time abandoned their itinerant lifestyle to become stationary shopkeepers.<sup>85</sup>

The interpersonal networks brought reciprocal gains to the locals. One advantage was economic or material, as the peddlers paid for lodging and food with ready money or goods.<sup>86</sup> Another was that the relations offered access to information from the outside world, as mobile people acted as important solicitors of news and information.<sup>87</sup> For example, a respondent from the secluded south-western Finnish archipelago maintains that the peddlers, in a sense, substituted for the still rare telephones.<sup>88</sup> Peddlers also conveyed news and private letters between relatives and acquaintances residing in villages along their routes, for example containing information about deaths or children being born.<sup>89</sup> In this sense, peddlers played a significant role for maintaining networks between the local communities and the outside world.

### Transnational networks of goods

The third function of networks studied in this article focuses on the two types of transnational flows of goods that peddlers depended on. First, they needed access to networks that provided them with the commodities that they sold. Second, networks were needed for disposing of the items that they bought from their local customers during their travels. Itinerant trade usually revolved around minor items such as sewing accessories, medicines, various prints, and sundry groceries. The main commodity comprised of fabrics of various kinds, with ready-made clothes becoming more common with industrialization toward the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>90</sup> One respondent from the Åland Islands between Finland and Sweden, described the variations in the multitude of textiles as ranging from 'shiny silk scarves with long lashes and colourful woollen muslins to murky small-patterned bombazine fabrics'.<sup>91</sup>

An advantage that the peddlers from outside the Nordics often had, was access to transnational trading networks. As the trade was usually informal, even illegal, determining the origin of the goods is not an easy task, but the ethnographic questionnaires and the interviews with former peddlers can give some indication. In the trading companies, it was custom that the leader provisioned goods for the other members, and interviews with former peddlers indicate that they provisioned the goods in major Russian trading centres, such as St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Arkhangelsk.<sup>92</sup> With the expansion of the railway, the transnational networks of goods were expanded even further into the Russian interior, including major market towns such as Kazan and Nizhny Novgorod. The role of Nizhny Novgorod was especially important for the Tatars, whose home region was nearby.<sup>93</sup>

Networks were equally important for disposal of the goods that peddlers acquired from their local customers. As ready money was scarce, barter became important for consumption. For peddlers, it offered a means to expand the customer base, and to create flows of goods that brought profit in several directions. For the customers, in turn, the possibility to exchange non-needed items for desired commodities was a way to make purchases even without money.<sup>94</sup> The goods that itinerant traders procured from their local customers included furs, horsehair, human hair, rags, and butter,<sup>95</sup> and they were sold locally or redistributed through transnational networks.<sup>96</sup>

Transnational networks played a key role for the trade in human hair, which rested on the idea of exchanging simple goods such as pieces of cloth or silk scarves for hair. To make the trade profitable, peddlers depended on networks through which they could dispose of the collected hair. Therefore, they had their own networks of buyers, who in turn had contacts with customers willing to spend their money on false braids and other hairpieces.<sup>97</sup> Hair was also exported outside the Nordics, and in 1869 the newspaper *Norrbottenskuriren* reported that Sweden had become a net-exporter of human hair.<sup>98</sup> Other sources show that Nordic hair was flowing from Finland to Sweden, from Malmö in southern Sweden to Lubeck and from Finland to Hull and St. Petersburg.<sup>99</sup>

Fairs were also important for the transnational flows of goods, and certain places offered opportunities for peddlers to exchange their collected items, such as furs and foodstuffs, for consumer goods to sell on their next journey. One such place was the Sunga fair on Lake Onega, which was visited by merchants from St. Petersburg, procurers for the international fur industry, and by sales representatives of large textile industries, for instance from Lodz in Poland.<sup>100</sup> Collected furs could also be disposed of at the Great Russian Fair in Nizhny Novgorod, which was a hub for the exchange of goods between Asia and Europe, and well-known for its lively fur trade.<sup>101</sup>

## Conclusions

The focus in this article lies on peddlers as actors within various forms of commercial and social transnational networks. It discloses the multifaceted functions that such networks had for itinerant traders from outside the Nordics in the late nineteenth century. The connections that peddlers formed with others from their home region was a resource in terms of tradition, mobility, security, and the efficiency of the trade in general. The peddlers acted as intermediaries between the home region and the destination, and networks had a function both for their activities at home and in the areas where they conducted their trade. Further, peddlers who over time abandoned their itinerant way of life, settling down and opening shops, became a useful resource for others from the home region whom they could offer access to existing networks or hire to work for them.

The networks formed in the area where peddling was conducted were equally important. Friendly contacts with people in the local communities provided the peddlers with basic needs such as food and lodging and were seminal for securing a demand for their commodities. Local networks also gave support in conflict situations, for instance when the local police tried to detain peddlers for illicit trade. Further support from the local society was of value when peddlers, who were often disadvantaged in terms of legislation and negative stereotyping, wished to settle down permanently in the area where the traded. Finally, networks provided peddlers with the commodities that they sold, and connections through which they could dispose of the goods that they acquired locally through barter. Manufactured goods from large cities and market towns outside the Nordics were sought after among the customers, as well as goods taken from the local country stores. With goods flowing in several directions, access to a variety of national and transnational networks was a prerequisite for success in the trade.

The ability to create and maintain a broad range of networks was of importance especially for peddlers who travelled and traded over long distances, and who were perceived as 'strangers' in the local societies that they visited. Therefore, if we want to create

a deeper understanding of the multifaceted functions of networks in mobile trade, it is essential not to restrict the analysis to a single group of peddlers in one state. Considering the transnational character of peddling, comparative studies that combine the history of consumption with theories on mobility and ethnicity would further complete existing knowledge of trade and consumption in Europe.

The article also highlights how the possibilities to draw conclusions on the functions of networks in peddling depend on the types of sources used. To identify such multifaceted networks in northern Europe, we have examined answers to ethnographic questionnaires, interviews with former peddlers, and newspaper writings dealing with mobile trade. By combining diverse types of sources, it is possible to illustrate the multiple roles that networks played for peddlers in different contexts, and on various levels of society. The approach gives voice not only to the authorities, but also to the customers, and most importantly, to the peddlers themselves, thus illuminating the contradictory perceptions of peddling. This adds to a polyphonic history of transnational networks in mobile trade.

## Notes

1. Rosander, *Gårdfarihandel i Norden*, 10; Wassholm and Östman, "Introduktion," 10.
2. See e.g. Honningdal Grytten and Minde, "Konsum og levestandard," 61; Hjerpe, *The Finnish Economy*, 41–2.
3. Anna Sundelin, "'Medan prästen predikar för tomma väggar,'" 33–58; Wassholm and Östman, "Introduktion," 11–12.
4. Alanen, *Suomen maakaupan historia*, 206–7, 229, 275; Furnée and Lesger, "Shopping Streets and Cultures," 1–3; Nilsson, *En förbindelse med en större värld*, 11–13.
5. Honningdal Grytten and Minde, "Konsum og levestandard," 61; Rosander, *Gårdfarihandel i Norden*, 21–22; Lundqvist, *Marknad på väg*, 19–20.
6. Fontaine, "The Role of Peddling in Consumption."
7. Hammarström, "Judar öfversvämna landet."
8. Runefelt, *En idyll försvarad*, 183–4; Häkkinen, "Kiertäminen, kulkeminen," 226–7.
9. Light and Karageorgis, "Immigrant Networks," 659–660; Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade*, 3.
10. Nevalainen, *Kulkukauppiaista kauppaneuvoksiin*; Naakka-Korhonen, *Halpa hinta, pitkä mitta*; Storå, "Ostkarelische Wanderhändler als Kulturvermittler in Finnland"; Storå, "'Rucksack Russians' in Finland"; Wassholm and Sundelin, "Emotions, Trading Practices and Communication."
11. Stare, *Judiska gårdfarihandlare i Sverige*; Carlsson, *Medborgarskap och diskriminering*; Hammarström, *Nationens styvbarn*; Hammarström, "Judar öfversvämna landet"; Ekholm, "Jews, Second-Hand Trade and Upward Economic Mobility"; Gjernes, "Uldjøder, tøjjøder og klesjøder"; Wassholm, "Judar och tatarer på Finlands marknader"; Wassholm, "Tatar Pedlars in the Grand Duchy of Finland"; Elmgren, "Visual Stereotypes of Tatars."
12. Wassholm and Sundelin, "Gendered Encounters in Mobile Trade"; Wassholm and Sundelin, "Rag Collectors"; Sundelin and Wassholm, "Hospitality and Rejection."
13. Mikkola and Stark, "Himotut ja halveksitut kulutustarvikkeet," 4–6; Wassholm and Östman, "Introduktion," 17–19.
14. Digital newspaper archives in the Nordics: Denmark ([www2.statsbiblioteket.dk/mediestream/avis](http://www2.statsbiblioteket.dk/mediestream/avis)); Norway ([www.nb.no/samlingen/avis](http://www.nb.no/samlingen/avis)); Sweden ([tidningar.kb.se](http://tidningar.kb.se)); Finland ([digi.kansallisarkisto.fi](http://digi.kansallisarkisto.fi)).
15. Sundelin and Wassholm, "Hospitality and Rejection," 331.
16. Naakka-Korhonen, *Halpa hinta, pitkä mitta*, 6–7.
17. The questionnaires are hereinafter referred to as Nm 48, ULMA M148, and KIVA 9/9b.
18. Hagström and Marander-Eklund, "Att arbeta med frågelistor," 16–20.

19. Sundelin and Wassholm, "Hospitality and Rejection," 331–2; Söderberg and Magnusson, "Inledning," 7.
20. Rosander, *Gårdfarihandel i Norden*, 21–22 (for variants of petty trade, see 12–13); Lundqvist, *Marknad på väg*, 19–20.
21. Wassholm, "Threatening Livelihoods," 221.
22. Rosander, *Gårdfarihandel i Norden*, 10; Wassholm and Sundelin, "Gendered Encounters in Mobile Trade," 3–4.
23. Lundqvist, *Marknad på väg*, 19–20.
24. Stearns, *Consumerism in World History*, 47–9; Trentmann, *Empire of Things*, 37–9.
25. Trentmann, *Empire of Things*, 609.
26. Milward and Saul, *The Economic Development of Continental Europe 1780–1870*, 381.
27. Hjerpe, *The Finnish Economy*, 81–2.
28. Lundqvist, *Marknad på väg*, 138.
29. Naakka-Korhonen, *Halpa hinta, pitkä mitta*, 35.
30. Nevalainen, *Kulkukauppiasta kauppaneuvoksiin*, 84.
31. Hammarström, "Judar öfverswämna landet," 32; Gjernes, "Uldjøder, tøjjøder og klesjøder," 145.
32. Brinkmann, "Introduction," 3–5; Bredefeldt, "Ekonomi och identitet," 34–5. Jews were prohibited to settle in Finland until 1858, when a Russian decree allowed former soldiers of the Russian army to settle in the town where they had been stationed. Civil Jewish communities were established in major Finnish towns, but livelihood was restricted to local petty trade. Ekholm, "Jews, Second-Hand Trade and Upward Economic Mobility," 77–9. While peddling was prohibited for Finnish Jews, they did visit fairs around the grand duchy. See Wassholm, "Judar och tatarer på Finlands marknader."
33. Cwiklinski, "Introduction," 3.
34. Leitzinger, "Tataarit Suomessa," 25; Wassholm, "Tatar Pedlars in the Grand Duchy of Finland," 14. Individual Tatar traders also moved to Sweden, but they were too few to form a community: see Sorgenfrei, "Establishing Islam in Sweden," 82–4.
35. See e.g. *Dagbladet* 2.2.1870, 2; *Barometern* 17.6.1871, 2; 13.1.1873, 2; *Aftonbladet* 24.10.1871, 2; *Helsingfors Dagblad* 1.12.1871, 2; 4.2.1872, 2; 1.5.1872, 3; *Dagens Nyheter* 24.10.1871, 3; *Åbo Underrättelser* 29.1.1872, 3; *Folkets Avis* 5.1.1873, 3.
36. Wassholm and Sundelin, "Gendered Encounters in Mobile Trade," 5–6. Other groups of mobile traders, such as the Russian Karelians, female hair artisans from the Swedish province of Dalarna, and domestic peddlers, also seized the opportunity to buy hair as a side-business to their main trade.
37. A shared language facilitated communication, but previous research has shown that linguistic differences did not pose a severe impediment. Peddlers usually quickly learned the basic vocabulary needed for trading. Storå, "Ostkarelsche Wanderhändler als Kulturvermittler in Finnland," 34; Wassholm and Sundelin, "Emotions, Trading Practices and Communication," 145–7.
38. For early mentions of Tatars in the Finnish press, see *Tammerfors Aftonblad* 8.9.1882, 2; *Kaiku* 28.7.1883, 2; *Satakunta* 12.9.1883, 3; *Åbo Tidning* 23.9.1885, 3. On the stereotype, see Elmgren, "Visual Stereotypes," 27–9.
39. Carlsson, *Medborgarskap och diskriminering*, 141.
40. Sundelin and Wassholm, "Hospitality and Rejection," 335.
41. Carlsson, "Immigrants or Transmigrants?," 57–8; Wassholm, "Threatening Livelihoods," 228.
42. Wassholm, "Tatar pedlars in the Grand Duchy of Finland," 16.
43. Lundqvist, *Marknad på väg*, 17; Sundelin and Wassholm, "Hospitality and Rejection," 334.
44. Rosander, *Gårdfarihandel i Norden*, 10; Lundqvist, *Marknad på väg*, 43.
45. Wassholm and Sundelin, "Rag Collectors."
46. Levander, "Hårarbete i Dalarna," 146.
47. Nevalainen, *Kulkukauppiasta kauppaneuvoksiin*, 84.
48. Fontaine, *History of Pedlars in Europe*, 8–11.



49. Gjernes, "Uldjøder, tøjjøder og klesjøder," 148.
50. Interview with V.I. Arhippainen, 23–4, 27; *Toukomies* 5/1927, 69–71.
51. *Dagstelegraf* 30.5.1870, 2. For similar accounts in other parts of the region, see e.g. *Strenghäns Weckoblad* 23.6.1871, 3; *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning* 25.5.1870, 2; 30.7.1870, 3; *Smålandsposten* 29.3.1871, 3.
52. *Åbo Posten* 21.8.1883, 4; *Satakunta* 12.9.1883, 3. The arrival of Tatars can be traced in passenger lists published in the newspapers. See, e.g. *Åbo Underrättelser* 21.7.1882, 4.
53. *Åbo Tidning* 23.9.1885, 3.
54. Storå, "Rucksack Russians' in Finland," 81–2; Sundelin and Wassholm, "Networks in Trade," 10.
55. *Fäderneslandet* 26.7.1871, 2. For other examples of violence against Jews, see, e.g. *Nerikes Allehanda* 26.2.1875, 2; *Trosa Tidning* 11.12.1880, 2.
56. *Göteborgs Annonssblad* 4.4.1871, 2.
57. See, e.g. Interview with V.J. Arhippainen, 32.
58. Diner, *Roads Taken*, 127–30; Blom, "Mordet på den judiske gårdfarihandlaren," 95–103; Nevalainen, *Kulkukauppiasta kauppaneuvoksiin*, 125–31.
59. *Hufvudstadsbladet* 22.4.1871, 2; 28.5.1875, 2; *Blekinge Läns Tidning* 14.2.1874, 2; *Wiipurin Uutiset* 15.5.1880, 3; *Borgåbladet* 23.8.1882, 1; *Mikkelin Sanomat* 16.5.1888, 3; *Rauman Lehti* 19.5.1888, 2; *Östra Finland* 9.10.1888, 2.
60. KIVA 9/9b: M 781:5, FM 910:8; Nm 48: E.U. 5618, 5666; ULMA M148: 13745, 15607, 19104.
61. Interview with V.I. Arhippainen, 14.
62. Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade*, 3.
63. Sundelin and Wassholm, "Networks in Trade," 16.
64. KIVA 9/9b: M 722:3, FM 980:3, 985:4; Nm 48: E.U. 3991, 5695; ULMA M148: 13406, 13663, 13668.
65. Beardsworth and Keil, *Sociology on the Menu*, 101, 104.
66. Nm 48: E.U. 5695.
67. See, e.g. Naakka-Korhonen, *Halpa hinta, pitkä mitta*, 210–36.
68. KIVA 9/9b: M 678:2, 683:4, 686:1, 715:1–2, 716:3, 764:3. See also, *Wasa-Posten* 5.5.1899, 2.
69. KIVA 9/9b: M 2075:2, 2093:5–6, 2302:1, FM 960:10.
70. KIVA 9/9b: M 722:3, FM 980:3, 985:4; Nm 48: E.U. 3991, 5695; ULMA M148: 13406, 13663, 13668.
71. KIVA 9/9b: M 722:3, 985:4; Nm 48: E.U. 3991, 5568, 5695; ULMA M148: 13406, 13572, 13663, 13668.
72. KIVA 9/9b: M 695:2, 727:2, 747:4. See also Naakka-Korhonen, *Halpa hinta, pitkä mitta*, 176–7; Rosander, *Gårdfarihandel i Norden*, 80.
73. KIVA 9/9b: 2059:7.
74. KIVA 9/9b: M 722:3, 985:4; Nm 48: E.U. 3991, 5568, 5695; ULMA M148: 13406, 13572, 13663, 13668.
75. Positive descriptions include, for instance, "good-natured" and "joyful"; see, e.g. KIVA 9/9b: M 729:1, 734:2, 778:2, FM 988:2; Nm 48: E.U. 459.
76. Stare, "Judiska gårdfarihandlare i Sverige," 22, 24–5, 29.
77. *Dagbladet* 2.2.1870, 2; *Morgenposten* 4.2.1870, 3; *Morgenbladet* 6.2.1870, 2; *Bergens Tidende* 5.3.1870, 3.
78. *Göteborgs Annonssblad* 4.4.1871, 2.
79. *Göteborgs-Posten* 9.6.1871.
80. *Tidning för Skaraborgs Län* 18.1.1901, 3.
81. *Hämeen Sanomat* 7.12.1886, 2; *Päivälehti* 4.5.1898, 4; *Wasa Tidning* 7.5.1898, 2; *Kotka* 14.4.1898, 3.
82. For examples of this in the questionnaires, see, e.g. KIVA 9/9b: M 691:2, 698:3, 724:4–5. See also Nevalainen, *Kulkukauppiasta kauppaneuvoksiin*, 119–20.
83. *Aura* 20.4.1888, 10.
84. *Jakobstads Tidning* 15.1.1938; KIVA 9/9b M 746:1, 757:1, 2058:1.
85. KIVA 9/9b: M 699:1, 709:2, 2076, 2140, FM 916:2.



86. KIVA 9/9b: M 722:3, 734:2, 737:1, FM 844:4: See also, Nm 48: E.U. 3991.
87. Rosander, *Gårdfarihandel i Norden*, 84; Häkkinen, “Kiertäminen, kulkeminen,” 250.
88. KIVA 9/9b: M 2143:3.
89. KIVA 9/9b: M 2128, 2140:3, 2143:3.
90. Naakka-Korhonen, *Halpa hinta, pitkä mitta*, 135.
91. KIVA 9/9b: 2075:1.
92. See, e.g. Interview with V.J. Arhippainen, 25–6; Interview with J. Arhippainen; *Karjalan Kävijä* 8/1908, 8, 11; KIVA 9/9b: FM 870:2, 890:2, 916:3, 924:2, 998:3.
93. Wassholm, “Tatar Pedlars in the Grand Duchy of Finland,” 13–14.
94. Lundqvist, *Marknad på väg*, 185; Sundelin and Wassholm, “Hospitality and Rejection,” 343.
95. KIVA 9/9b: M 897, 922, 935, 951:1.
96. Naakka-Korhonen, *Halpa hinta, pitkä mitta*, 207–10.
97. Tarlo, *Entanglement*, 45; Lehto and Pehkonen, “Kaipuun kiharat,” 228.
98. *Norrbottnenskuriren* 11.11.1869, 3.
99. From Malmö: *Aftonbladet* 14.3.1871, 3; *Norrlandsposten* 15.3.1871, 3. From Hanko: *Nya Pressen* 12.3.1890, 4; *Tammerfors Aftonblad* 14.3.1890, 2; *Åbo Tidning* 18.4.1891, 3.
100. Pamilo, “Karjalaisten kauppatiet,” 153–4.
101. Wassholm, “Tatar Pedlars in the Grand Duchy of Finland,” 13–14. On the Great Russian Fair, see Lincoln Fitzpatrick, *The Great Russian Fair*.

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## Notes on contributors

PhD *Anna Sundelin* is a researcher at Åbo Akademi University. She has published articles on peddlers from Russian Karelia in the Grand Duchy of Finland and the reception of their goods. Together with Wassholm, she has edited a special issue on petty trade in *Historisk Tidskrift för Finland* (2018).

PhD *Johanna Wassholm* is a specialist in Finnish-Russian relations in the 19th and early 20th centuries. She has published extensively on topics dealing with national and linguistic identification, the political uses of history, and cultural encounters in ethnified mobile trade.

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