Annihilation of Time and Space or Increased Asymmetry? The Usage of the Electric Telegraph by two Swedish Regional Newspapers, 1850–1870

Jonas Harvard

RESÜMEE

Der elektrische Signale verarbeitende Telegraph habe, so wird oft gesagt, Zeit und Raum „ausgelöscht", indem er Kommunikation vom physischen Transport der Nachrichten trennte. Der Artikel prüft die empirische Stichhaltigkeit einer solchen Feststellung durch den Vergleich der Ausbreitungsgeschwindigkeit von Neuigkeiten in zwei schwedischen Provinzzeitungen zwischen 1850 und 1870. Die eine wurde im südschwedischen Helsingborg herausgegeben, wo eine gute Anbindung an klassische Transportwege bestand. Die andere erschien im Norden, in der weit abgeschiedeneren Stadt Piteå. Beide Orte waren seit den 1850er Jahren an das Telegraphennetz angeschlossen. Es ließe sich annehmen, dass die Unterschiede in ihrer relativen Distanz zur Hauptstadt Stockholm und zum europäischen Kontinent durch die neue Technologie aufgehoben würden, was sich am Zeitverzug der aufgenommenen Nachrichten messen lässt. Die Resultate zeigen, dass die neue Technologie im Süden rasch vollständig implementiert wurde, im Norden dagegen nur sporadisch zum Einsatz kam. Statt die Distanzen zu verringern führte die neue Technologie sogar zum Anwachsen der relativen Entfernung zwischen den Orten. Dies lag vor allem an Faktoren wie den Kosten für die Verwendung von Nachrichten, die über den Telegraphen übermittelt wurden, im Verhältnis zum Einkommen aus dem Zeitungsvertrieb, sowie den vermuteten Bedürfnissen der Leser.

The electric telegraph, it is often said, by separating communication from physical transport, "annihilated" time and space.[1] But how did it actually impact the way in which people in the peripheries interacted with the rest of the world? An area where the new technology really was able to make a difference was the circulation of news. The story about how the telegraph came to bring rapid reports to distant areas previously untouched by modernity is well known and often told. But is it true? The current article investigates the reality behind this often presumed "annihilation" of time and space.

The news reporting in two Swedish provincial papers, both founded in 1847, provide the basis for the analysis: *Öresunds-Posten* which was published in the southern coastal town of Helsingborg, close to the Danish border, and *Norrbottens-Posten*, published some 1500 kilometers north, in a sparsely populated town named Piteå. Telegraph lines were extended from Stockholm to these towns in 1854 and 1857 respectively, with Helsingborg becoming the gateway to Denmark and the rest of the European telegraph networks. The difference in their locations relative to the continent provides an opportunity to discern what the new technology really meant for bridging distances. Did the telegraph change the temporal proximity between the capitals of Europe and the fringes of the continent? How did the telegraph affect the representation of foreign events?

The article begins with an introduction discussing what the role notions of time and space played in mid 19th century rhetoric on the electric telegraph, and relates these to general ideas about time and technology. After this previous findings on how newspapers in the period used the telegraph, and in particular its relation to other communication technologies are introduced. Then local experiences of how time was related to the electric telegraph are recounted. Finally, a quantitative case study is presented, which compares the temporal horizon of news items in the two newspapers in 1850 (before telegraph offices had opened) with those of 1860 and 1870. The article concludes with a summary of the findings, and suggests some possible explanations to the differentiated impact of the telegraph, such as economy and demography.

The article is first and foremost based on news reporting in the respective papers, but it also makes extensive use of archival documents from the Swedish National Telegraph Agency, as well as some examples of ideas expressed in Swedish Parliamentary debates.

The telegraph as idea and reality

The observation that the telegraph for the first time separated communication from physical transport mainly represents a statement about the nature of the technology itself. Those actually studying the effects of the telegraph on the representation of time and space point out that only under certain conditions could the technological promises be realized. Economic barriers and the lacking reliability of the technology, often hin-

---

1   The groundbreaking study on this topic is "Technology and ideology: the case of the telegraph" by James Carey, from 1983, reprinted in J. W. Carey, Communication as culture : essays on media and society, Boston 1989.

dered the actual use of the innovation.[2] Where supporting structures and conditions in the surrounding society were un-evenly fitted to the new technology, it sometimes even accentuated the unequal conditions created by geography.[3]

That the success of the telegraph depended a lot on context is underlined by existing empirical studies, which show that the promise of the telegraph as an intrinsically distance-bridging device could only be realized in relatively closed and well-structured institutional settings such as the financial world, within the military or in diplomatic affairs.[4] These settings essentially represented private channels of communication, where the value of the information exchanged lay in its privileged nature.

A difficult issue here is the chronology of events. Although prominent writers point to the telegraph as an invention inherently restructuring the experience of time and space, the timing of cause and effect in this case is puzzling.[5] Despite the fact that the electric telegraph gained widespread use in both Europe and America already from the 1840's, scholars of the culture of time and space such as Stephen Kern dates the transformation of the notions of time and space to the period 1880–1920. By then, other innovations such as telephony and wireless telegraphy also had emerged and railways were since long commonplace. Furthermore, often the existence of earlier ideals regarding the expansion of temporal experience is neglected. Clearly the development in the mid 19th century must have built on earlier conceptions, but the exact nature of this relationship and its implications for conceptions of time and space has not yet been investigated.

The perseverance of modern notions about the intrinsic effect of the electric telegraph has probably been fuelled by the notorious optimism surrounding the telegraph in the 1840's and 1850's. During that period numerous writers, presented visionary projections of the soon-to-come abolition of mental and physical distances.[6] This optimism reached a peak with the celebrations surrounding the first successful attempt at telegraphic communication across the Atlantic in 1858.[7]

The essence of these ideas were the connection between improved communications and improved understanding. As Armand Mattelart has reminded us, already enlightenment writers hoped for the return to a pre-Babel state as infrastructure would facilitate the exchange of ideas between people. The philosophers projected that the differences be-

---

2   On American newspapers see R. B. Kielbowicz, News Gathering by Mail in the Age of the Telegraph: Adapting to a New Technology, in: Technology and Culture 28 (1987) 1, pp. 26-41.

3   J. Harvard, Modernitetens depescher? Telegrafen och den norrländska pressens tidshorisonter 1850–1870, in: Presshistorisk årsbok, 2007.

4   D. P. Nickles, Under the wire: how the telegraph changed diplomacy, Cambridge, Mass. 2003. On financial systems see R. B. du Boff, The Telegraph in Nineteenth-Century America: Technology and Monopoly, in: Comparative Studies in Society and History 26 (1984) 4, 571-586. On the economic effects see the classic A. D. Chandler, The visible hand : the managerial revolution in American business, Cambridge, Mass., 1977. The military use is commented in I. Lebow, Information highways and byways: from the telegraph to the 21st century, New York 1995.

5   Carey. J. B. Thompson, Medierna och moderniteten, Göteborg, 1995; B. Sundin, Den kupade handen : historien om människan och tekniken, Stockholm 1991.

6   This theme is developed in greater detail in the paper by Yakup Bektaş in this special issue.

7   D. J. Czitrom, Media and the American mind : from Morse to McLuhan, Chapel Hill 1982.

tween peoples and nations would disappear once all of mankind became united under the common flag of reason. In the early 19th century people adhering to Saint-Simonism, like Chevalier, explicitly linked the abolishment of mental distances to the development of new infrastructure technologies. The ideas later associated with new communication technologies like the telegraph thus to a large extent fed upon or echoed enlightenment notions of universal communication.[8]

An example of how the telegraph served as a symbol in which integration across time and space was linked to the abolishment of differences in interests is found in the wording of the speech which the French Minister of Foreign Affairs gave at the signing of the treaty marking the founding of the International Telegraph Union in 1865:

> *We are gathered here in a genuine Congress of peace. If it is true that war, more often than not, is born out of misunderstanding, are we not removing one of its causes by facilitating the exchange of ideas between people and by placing at their disposal this amazing transmission system, this electric wire through which thought can travel across space at the speed of lightning, and which permits swift and uninterrupted dialogue between the scattered members of the human family?*[9]

In his view the good things coming from the telegraph stemmed from the combination of speed and distance. As the exchange of ideas over large distances could take place with "the speed of lightning", the fraternizing process of mankind would materialize in the form of "uninterrupted dialogue". He viewed the technology as a channel for the sharing of meaning, rather than as a means of transferring messages. The telegraph in his vision became an instrument of universality, not of cultural domination or unequal advantages.[10]

Another example of how the telegraph was seen as a universal instrument relevant to the whole world, is found in this statement made at a peace congress 1847 by Victor Hugo and the leader of the English free trade movement, Richard Cobden:

> *How peoples touch each other! How distances are growing shorter! And growing closer is the beginning of fraternity… In a short time, man will travel the Earth just as the gods of Homer travelled the sky, in three steps. Just a few more years, and the electric wire of concord will embrace the whole world.*[11]

---

8   A. Mattelart, Networking the world, 1794–2000, Minneapolis, Mn. 2000. See also C. Marvin, When old technologies were new : thinking about electric communication in the late nineteenth century, New York 1988.

9   Quote from Mattelart. p. 20.

10   In reality, examples to the contrary are not hard to find. A telegraph operator in Persia cherished his instrument because it provided a "bit of civilization in a barbarous country" and, as Carolyn Marvin aptly observed about the early use of the telephone, "experience at a distance consisted in recognizing friends, not in becoming acquainted with strangers". According to her analysis, the most optimistic visions about cultural encounters through technology concerned "inventions that did not exist, and about communication with cultures that did not exist, concerning which, therefore, unlettered fantasy could run free." Marvin. pp. 197-202.

11   Quote from Mattelart., p. 20.

They too had a world-wide perspective, envisioning telegraph wires embracing "the whole world". The ideological roots of the notion of the "annihilation" of time and space provide an explanation of the power latent in these ideas. The telegraph not only gave rise to the curiosity and admiration of a new invention, but also represented the promise of a better world.

Time, space and technology

The power of such ideas regarding the transformative nature of technology should not be taken as proof that this abolishment of distances actually took place. One way to separate well-known ideas about the telegraph from the role it actually played in transforming communication is to distinguish between different aspects of the categories of time and space. Time and space as socially construed categories (in the Durkheimian sense) differ from the same categories referring to objective signifiers of time – seasons, sunsets, or timekeeping technologies – and the equivalent manifestations of space, such as measurable distances and geographies. The social and objective aspects of time and space have a dynamic relationship, and distinguishing between them makes a deeper understanding of how the telegraph affected the representation and perception of time and space possible.[12]

A dichotomy capturing the dynamics between such socially anchored notions of time and the historical process affecting representations of time and space has been presented by a Swedish scholar of time, Lennart Lundmark. According to him, the limited communications in pre-modern society meant that the inhabitants of the countryside had experiences of limited spatial scope. Lundmark presents a model derived from the writings of Karl Mannheim, according to which older society was based on a notion of *conspatiality*, where the time perspective stretches far backwards into history but stays geographically limited. This means that people are supposed to share the conditions for existence with their ancestors, living in the same place and interpreting them in the same way. As improved communications began to connect places separated in space, the modern notion of *contemporality* evolved. Here, the world is understood according to a short "now", not limited in space, but stretching out over vast spaces, reaching globally. The spatial aspect was expanded, but the temporal compressed. Now man was separated from his local ancestors, instead moving forward in linear time, together with the rest of humanity.[13]

---

12   M. Crang / N. Thrift, Thinking space, London 2000. See also the essays in the sections "mediated spaces", "mediatised space" and "a mediatised sense of space" in J. Falkheimer / A. Jansson (eds) Geographies of communication : the spatial turn in media studies, Göteborg 2006.

13   L. Lundmark, Tidens gång & tidens värde, Stockholm 1989. Similar ideas have also been expressed by other writers. See T. Falk / R. Abler, Intercommunications, Distance, and Geographical Theory, in: Geografiska Annaler. Series B. Human Geography 62 (1980) 2, pp. 59-67. In his analysis of how the telegraph through its effect on the representation of time changed the perceptions of risk among fishermen in northern Norway, Narve Fulsås

Historians of technology have shown how technology sometimes fosters the 'technification' and abstraction of time, a process which takes the place-related aspect out of time. Through the fact that "natural" time is replaced by a sense of time which is created and represented materially by man-made artefacts, time becomes more and more controllable and rational. Experiencing time as you watch the sun set from a particular hill, is different than experiencing it as the movement of the hands of a clock. The most striking about technology in this sense is thus "its ability to seemingly collapse time and space" as it "abstracts time and parcels it out in ever more minute bundles" and then finally "masters it, defeating the future and the distant".[14] Herein lies the fundament of the deterministic trap. Through its non-human character technology comes across as invincible, as did the electric telegraph to 19th century observers. It becomes the final product of reason, a quality which sets it apart from the normal laws governing time and space. But the essential word in the above quote is "seemingly". These notions do not mean that technology actually has those qualities, but rather that it raises those expectations.

The vision of temporal integration would thus imply that technology enabled the possibility to interact across space without significant delay. In a face-to-face situation there is no delay hampering the exchange of meanings. The more technology makes swift interaction across large distances possible, through "the illusion of simultaneity", the more the relationships upheld through the technology take on the properties of the face-to-face situation.[15] What signifies a face-to-face situation is more than anything the experience of being present in the moment. Being present, means being here *now*. Drawing on the work of Canadian geographer Edward Relph, Birgit Stöber analyses the "placelessness" that communication technology through mass media brought about. With the aid of infrastructure, mass media as a tool for transportation or transmission of ideas freed communities from their geographical constraints, which in turn reduced the significance of place-based communities. New communities emerged, which were upheld through the media.[16]

The development of large infrastructure networks made increased integration across space possible. But what dynamics governed the possible integration in time? From a technological point of view, it seems that the establishment of contemporality / simultaneity in the sense that Lundmark specifies, would require a more developed technology, simply due to the higher speed required. The telegraph represented a significant step forward, and as its speed already in the first experiments dwarfed that of the railroad, its precedence in this respect was obvious to everyone. However, with regard to news, at least on the American continent, the most dramatic changes in the time it took to transfer news across large distances took place *before* the advent of the telegraph. Inspired

uses an equivalent conceptual framework. N. Fulsås, Havet, døden og vêret: kulturell modernisering i kyst-Noreg 1850–1950, Oslo 2003.

14   J. M. Wise, Exploring technology and social space, Thousand Oaks 1997, p. 8

15   H. Nowotny, Time: the modern and postmodern experience, Cambridge 1994.

16   B. Stöber, Media Geography: From Patterns of Diffusion to the Complexity of Meanings, in: J. Falkheimer / A. Jansson (eds), Geographies of communication: the spatial turn in media studies, Göteborg 2006, p. 309.

by geographer Allan Pred, Menahem Blondheim has shown just how complex this process was. The mean time from an event's occurrence in Baltimore until it was known in Washington decreased over the period 1790–1817 from 18 to 6 days, and by 1841 had decreased from 6 to 3 days. When the telegraph was opened in 1846, the absolute savings in time was only about 24 hours.[17]

The work of Blondheim provides an important perspective on the often mono-technological way in which improvements in communication are often analysed. The system of transportation was, with regard to the diffusion of information, essentially of a patchwork nature. Rather than one technology replacing another, old and new modes of interconnecting regions, institutions and peoples, worked together. Any news chain had numerous links, and due to technological or economic barriers, often the fastest route was not used. Instead, the older modes lived on, and in selective combinations with newer technologies they created new flows, not dependent on one single technology, but acting as a system whose properties was the result of those specific combinations.[18]

Furthermore, technology was not the only variable in this process. In his article "News Gathering by Mail in the Age of the Telegraph", published in *Technology and Culture*, Richard B. Kielbowicz points to economy as a reason behind the fact that many American papers were slow to adapt to the new technology. The existence of privileged postal rates for exchanging newspapers between editors in America was so essential to the economy and operation of local newspapers that it outweighed the advances in speed offered by the electric telegraph. Hence, many papers developed a selective model according to which the telegraph was not used on a regular basis, but came into use only on special occasions when sensational or unexpected developments motivated the extra expense. Kielbowicz sees the telegraph as merely one link in a larger and more slowly transforming societal system of communication.[19]

The modern time reaching the Northern periphery

Early on the telegraph was used to synchronise the measurement of time over large distances. It did not take the railway companies long to realize the advantages of coordinating departures and arrivals. The risk of meeting other trains on the tracks lessened considerably. Earlier research points to the telegraph as an invention which due to these and other uses, came to be closely associated with time, and the keeping of time.[20] The following section, focusing on the development in the northern town Piteå, shows the

---

17   M. Blondheim News over the wires : the telegraph and the flow of public information in America, 1844–1897, Cambridge, Mass. 1994, pp.11-17.

18   On the combinatory modes of infrastructure see A. Kaijser, I fädrens spår : den svenska infrastrukturens historiska utveckling och framtida utmaningar, Stockholm 1994.

19   Kielbowicz, News Gathering.

20   C. Stephens, 'The Most Reliable Time': William Bond, the New England Railroads, and Time Awareness in 19th-Century America, in: Technology and Culture 30 (1989) 1, pp. 1-24.

observations regarding time that the new technology gave rise to. It also points to the difference between the experiences of telegraph personnel, who had immediate access to the new telegraph, and those of the general population.

One of the very first announcements regarding the telegraph office in Piteå in *Norrbottens-Posten*, concerned the opening hours. It was a short note stating that the "Telegraph-Bureau" would be open to the public all days from 8 am to 1 pm and from 3 pm to 9 pm. A small clarification at the bottom, however, added that "The time is calculated according to the average Copenhagen-time".[21] No doubt this awakened the curiosity of potential senders of telegrams. How were they to know what time it was in Copenhagen? Of course the office itself surely did enlighten those wondering, but in using Copenhagen as a central point of reference, the telegraph system in fact probably heightened the awareness of time as something linking the local office with places far away.

The difficulty in keeping track of time as the telegraph connected far away cities with each other also bothered the inspector at the Piteå Telegraph station. In his report for the 2nd quarter of 1862, he complained about the cameral system of the telegraph authority which obliged the stations to keep track of the times when telegrams were sent and received. Due to repetitions between stations and numerous timestamps, this had become a difficult task. The inspector complained that noting the difference between the time a telegram was registered and when it was dispatched, was quite complicated, especially in the cases when it had come from far away or had passed many stations since it was dispatched. Often times were not noted at all. On other times, instead of, which was the correct procedure, noting the time that had passed between the first dispatch of the telegram and its final arrival, in many cases the time-stamps instead referred to one or another middle station. The inspector tried to make it clear, that in those cases, the time calculated for the sending of the telegram referred not to

> […] *the time passing between its first dispatch and final arrival, but the time, that has passed between its original dispatch and its arrival at the station that has repeated or forwarded it.*[22]

Under such circumstances time was most certainly becoming an abstract and calculated entity, separated from the organic realities of seasons and sunrises. The increasing abstraction of time, and the transformation of the general sense of time from something place-bound into an abstraction representing a continuing moment moving across the globe, depended to no small amount on the telegraph, which more than other revolutions in the area of communication spotlighted the issue of time-differences between places.

The contrast between the exactness required by the telegraph and the everyday concepts of time preceding it perhaps become the most evident in a comparison with the regular mail. A telegram published in *Norrbottens-Posten* on July 9, 1864, was accompanied by a

21   Norrbottens-Posten, October 10 1857.
22   Report for 2nd quarter 1862, Televerket, VI distriktet, Piteå CSO, Utgående skrivelser 1861–1885, B1:1, Concept-Bok 1861–1866. Härnösands landsarkiv. [County archive of Härnösand.].

very careful specification of the moments involved in its transmission. On the 5th at 8.30 in the evening it had been sent from Stockholm. On the same day at 8.40 it had been received at the Piteå station. And finally, on the following day at 8.20 in the morning it had been delivered to the recipient.[23] Against this background the advances in the regular mail service seemed bleak. In an article the following year it was reported that the regular mail service would be expanded from two deliveries a week to three. In this comparison, the telegraph came across as symbol of modernity and its exact timings strengthened the image of time being a sequence of "now:s", following after each other.[24]

With the general development of infrastructure, the mail service seemed less and less satisfying. Extending the number of deliveries was a small improvement since sometimes the mail did not arrive at all. In 1868 in Piteå this happened twice during a single summer, which was considered outrageous: "The communications in our time are so developed, that a town located at a distance of only 700 Kilometres from the capital cannot be satisfied with receiving a single mail per week [during summer]…"[25] The existence of quicker alternatives made people dissatisfied with the old forms of communication. In 1870 the invention of steam-driven road carriages "with wheel-rings made of vulcanised cautschuk" awakened new hopes for an improvement of the road transports.[26]

The telegraph brought with it a new way of thinking about time. With regard to the actual standardization of time however, the telegraph was one of many inventions that formed part in a process which soon made standard time seem inevitable. As long as the interaction between parties using different times, adjusted by the sunsets and local conditions, was reasonably slow, the difference in time measurements was no big issue. But as the connections gradually became faster and faster, the relative importance of these differences grew. The telegraph made these changes visible. In the situations when communication could take place practically without delay, these differences again and again caused confusion.[27] The process of standardization of time in Sweden took place from the late 1870's and onward. The conflict over whose time which would be deemed "normal" and who would consequently have to rise before the sun was up, was finally solved in 1879 when a place in the middle between Stockholm on the eastern coast and Gothenburg on the west coast was deemed normative.[28]

As in many cases, the development within the technical systems took place some time before the aforementioned standardisation was enacted on the societal level. In 1871, an article in *Norrbottens-Posten* reported about a new suggestion for the timing of tele-

---

23 Norrbottens-Posten July 9, 1864. Also the railway and its exact departures became a symbol of the exact time-keeping required by the new technology. Se the article on the inauguration of the southern railway line in Norrbottens-Posten on December 24, 1864, and for a general discussion W. Schivelbusch, The railway journey : the industrialization and perception of time and space in the 19th century, Leamington Spa 1986.

24 Norrbottens-Posten. May 3, 1865.

25 Norrbottens-Posten September 5, 1868.

26 Norrbottens-Posten July 21, 1870.

27 E. Zerubavel, The Standardization of Time: A Sociohistorical Perspective, in: American Journal of Sociology 88 (1982) 1, pp. 1-23.

28 Lundmark, p. 51-57

grams. The originator was a man from Vienna, who was suggesting that "all telegraphs around the world" should start using a common time, since both railways and telegraphs constantly were experiencing inconveniences due to the existence of differences in time between different places. The paper reported that a special clock had been construed, the "cosmorologion", which in itself represented "this general time". The article concluded that it was the 210th degree east, which would act as "the common world-hand at the dial".[29]

Time annihilated for telegraph personnel

Where the telegraph in the north had minor effects on the representation of time in the public sphere of print, in the private sphere of individuals to a large degree it made immediate communication possible all over the country. This can be shown by pointing to those closest to the telegraph: the personnel. To employees all around the country, long distance communication soon seemed natural, as work-related messages could be sent back and forth without waiting times. In everyday affairs, an employee could, for example, request a temporary leave on very short notice. A message was sent from the local station to the capital, and if the wish was granted, it could be executed right away. On the 22nd of November, 1858, an employee from Helsingborg asked the Stockholm officials if he could take a temporary leave – beginning the next day.[30]

Also in the contacts with foreign stations, the existence of "lightning-fast" communication must have been both obvious and natural to the employees. Dispatches were frequently sent back and forth, inquiring about the reception of telegrams, correcting fee calculations or passing on departure times for foreign ships. A telegram sent to the Piteå station from Hamburg on the 21st of August 1858 reminded the officials that the fee for a telegram recently sent from Piteå to Neustadt should rightly be 16 skilling.[31] A telegram from Berlin sent on the 15th of December, 1858, which the Helsingborg station passed on at 10.30, notified the sender of a telegram the previous day in Fredriksdal, Norway, that his or her telegram had not yet been delivered, since the addressee had not yet arrived in Berlin![32] On these and other occasions, the private individuals must have experienced a definitive shrinking of their temporal horizons.

29   Norrbottens-Posten, August 3, 1871.
30   Copy of telegram sent November 22, 1858. Televerket, Helsingborgs centralstation, Konceptböcker 1858–859, B1:1, Landsarkivet i Lund [County archive of Lund].
31   Copy of Telegram sent August 21, 1858. The message was passed on by the Helsingborg station which on the telegram stands as sender. Televerket, Helsingborgs centralstation, Konceptböcker 1858–1859, B1:1, Landsarkivet i Lund [County archive of Lund].
32   Copy of telegram to Fredriksdal, December 15, 1858. Ibid.

Analysing the temporal horizon through places and dates

In the following section the results from a quantitative analysis of how the temporal horizons in news reports evolved over time are presented. As has been remarked by many writers, news dissemination takes on a spatial bias as new channels for the flow of information appear.[33] In addition, news also reflects the temporal conditions governing its transmission. How were the dynamics between the spatial and the temporal aspects of the news printed in the two papers affected by the telegraph? In this section the categories time and space are approached as objective and measurable entities. The following tables contain the number of dated foreign and other news items published in the two newspapers during the months January and July in 1850, 1860 and 1870, and their age in days. These years represent different stages in the development of the Swedish telegraph system with regard to news reporting. The first year, 1850, represents the time before a national network of electric telegraphs existed. The second year, 1860, represents a time when telegraph offices had opened in the publishing locations of both papers. In Helsingborg, the telegraph had been present for 6 years, and in Piteå the office in 1860 had existed during 3 years. The last year, 1870, represents a time when a news agency had opened in Sweden. Tracking the changes at these points gives an opportunity to discern how the time-perspective developed over time, and the possible consequences of the development of the telegraph. The tables do not present all cities from which the news originated, but are chosen from a wider set of data in order to provide a full image of the development in compressed form. The most frequent cities are included, and some less frequent cities are added to the table to widen the geographical distribution. Left out are a number of cities from which dated news appeared less frequently, such as Munich and Hanover. Also some local Swedish cities are included for the purpose of comparison, two which were situated in the proximity of Piteå: Sundsvall and Umeå, and two close to Helsingborg: Malmö and Lund. Finally some examples of news from America are included in the tables. In some cases where no news existed from the corresponding towns, towns have been replaced by similar locations from which news were published. Those cases are indicated in the table captions.

A comment on methodology might be appropriate. First of all, the figures contain only those news dated clearly, e. g. "Paris July 3". In some cases dated events which can be obviously attributed to a city, for example events in the English Parliament which can be attributed to London, have also been included. The foreign news at times was dated with reference not to cities but to papers, e.g. *The Times* writing about events in Italy. In other cases the names of foreign papers were presented under a headline specifying the city from where the paper was quoted. For example, both French and English papers were often quoted under a Hamburg dateline. In these cases the location which the date most clearly refers to has been included.

---

33   Crang/Thrift. See also the essays in Falkheimer/Jansson. In Tuchmans' classic news is described as a constructed
       reality. G. Tuchman, Making news: a study in the construction of reality, New York 1978.

A difficulty also lies in the existence of dates written as weekdays. Although these might signify both dated news, and a sense of intimate connection with the place mentioned (e.g. "In Hamburg last Tuesday"), such data sometimes are not correct, and therefore they have been included only where circumstances makes it possible to determine a definitive date. The errors appear most often when original temporal references are kept as news items are quoted from mediating sources. So if "Last Tuesday" actually was last Tuesday in the first notice, several Tuesdays might have passed before the item got printed in one of the Swedish papers. Another difficulty is an article in the Swedish language, meaning approximately "the same": "dennes". If a date was mentioned with word "dennes" after it, it meant "the current month". When older material was published, these references were seldom changed, and so dates sometimes refer to the wrong month. On rare occasions the papers acknowledged such errors. A letter from Chicago published in *Öresunds-Posten* July 7 1870 wrote about events taking place "the 7 and 8 this month [dennes]".[34] A miniscule correction printed in the next issue, made clear that "In yesterday's article, page 2, column 2, row 15 it says: 7 and 8 this month, read: 7 and 8 June."[35] This was an exception, and in most cases such errors remained uncommented.

The mechanisms governing which news was dated and which was not, themselves represent an interesting scientific problem. Did presenting news without a date signal an interest in qualitative aspects? Or did providing news with a date represent a higher degree of interest in time? This is not the place to provide definitive answers to those questions, but it can be concluded however, that attaching a date to an event, probably meant either a) that the event had a special importance or b) that the actuality of the event was important or c) that the event had to be positioned chronologically vis-à-vis other related events.

Although a lot of information is provided in the tables, the most relevant parts have been marked with a black outline. The development of the figures in the column "Fastest – days old" essentially show how the temporal horizons successively came closer. In Helsingborg that is. There, already by 1860 and certainly by 1870, news from most European cities was almost instantaneous. In 1870 the fastest news from America only had a delay of 2 days. In Piteå, a successive development took place, reducing the average time delay. But the changes were small. Obviously the paper only used the telegraph on very special occasions. Therefore, the gradual change most likely reflects improvements in regular transports.

One result of the uneven impact of the telegraph, was that the relative "backwardness" of *Norrbottens-Posten* increased. Where the time-difference to Stockholm in 1850 was 4 days for Helsingborg and 8 for Piteå, in 1860 it was zero in Helsingborg and still 9 in Piteå. The gap was similar to all locations from which *Öresunds-Posten* received rapid news and *Norrbottens-Posten* did not.

---

34   Öresunds-Posten, July 7, 1870.
35   Ibid.

The temporal horizon of European news in 1850

The first table is from the year 1850, when the papers only had been around for a few years. Already, the eagerness of *Öresunds-Posten* to date its news is obvious. In this period, *Norrbottens-Posten* also had its share of foreign news during this period, although less than *Öresunds-Posten*, but as a rule the news was not dated. During January and July 1850 *Norrbottens-Posten* carried a number of reports both from Sweden and abroad, which were deemed to have a value without the date being specified.

Table 1: Dated news from major cities in *Öresunds-Posten* and *Norrbottens-Posten* January and July 1850. *a= Wasa, Finland.

	Öresunds–Posten 1850					Norrbottens–Posten 1850				
Town of news item	Number of news Jan.	Number of news Jul.	Total	Fastest – days old	Slowest – days old	Number of news Jan.	Number of news Jul.	Total	Fastest – days old	Slowest – days old
Sweden										
Stockholm	3	4	7	4	14	1	6	7	8	43
Gothenburg	–	–	0	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Umeå	–	–	–	–	–	1	1	2	18	26
Sundsvall	–	–	–	–	–	–	2	2	13	16
Malmö	2	2	4	2	5	–	–	–	–	–
Lund	3	3	6	2	10	–	–	–	–	–
Europe										
Copenhagen	16	25	41	1	7	–	–	–	–	–
Hamburg	–	2	2	7	7	–	–	–	–	–
Berlin	8	–	8	4	10	–	2	2	17	18
Paris	9	22	31	4	9	–	–	–	–	–
London	6	4	10	6	12	–	–	–	–	–
Vienna	3	1	4	4	8	–	–	–	–	–
Naples	1	1	2	13	22	–	–	–	–	–
Madrid	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Constan-tinople	2	1	3	22	24	–	–	–	–	–
St. Petersburg	–	–	–	–	–	1*a	–	1	38	38
America										
New York	2	–	2	33	39	–	1	1	45	45

As the table shows, for *Öresunds-Posten*, the key sources of foreign news which were dated in the paper, were Copenhagen and Paris. Copenhagen was close, and under ideal conditions, what was known there could be printed in the paper the next day. With regard to Stockholm, *Öresunds-Posten* printed news which was 4 days old or more. For *Norrbottens-Posten* the corresponding figure is 8 days. The fastest news from Berlin at this point was 4 days old in *Öresunds-Posten*, but 17 days old in *Norrbottens-Posten*. A smaller relative difference is found in news from America. Since news from America was

already old when it arrived to Sweden, the extra days added by the transport up north made little difference.

The temporal horizon of European news in 1860

The following table, including data from 1860, represents a time when both cities were connected to the telegraph. For *Öresunds-Posten*, the difference in age between news from different cities has become smaller. News from Stockholm, could now be published on the same day. Time and space had indeed become compressed. The distance in time to other European cities also had decreased, with news from Copenhagen, Hamburg, Berlin, Paris and Vienna being only a single day old at the fastest.

Table 2: Dated news from major cities in *Öresunds-Posten* and *Norrbottens-Posten* January and July 1860. *a= Palermo, *B=Jainesville, Ohio

	Öresunds–Posten 1860					Norrbottens–Posten 1860				
Town of news item	Number of news Jan.	Number of news Jul.	Total	Fastest – days old	Slowest – days old	Number of news Jan.	Number of news Jul.	Total	Fastest – days old	Slowest – days old
Sweden										
Stockholm	28	13	41	0	16	12	9	21	9	78
Gothenburg	9	8	17	2	3	–	–	–	–	–
Umeå	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	1	17	17
Sundsvall	–	–	–	–	–	1	–	1	10	10
Malmö	3	4	7	2	17	–	1	1	18	18
Lund	–	4	4	1	2	–	–	–	–	–
Europe										
Copenhagen	13	9	21	1	7	–	–	–	–	–
Hamburg	34	41	75	1	5	1	1	2	16	14
Berlin	3	1	4	1	4	–	1	1	15	15
Paris	12	20	32	1	9	–	–	–	–	–
London	11	13	24	1	4	–	–	–	–	–
Vienna	1	5	6	2	4	–	–	–	–	–
Genoa	6	8	14	2	8	–	1*a	1	31	31
Madrid	2	–	2	3	8	1	–	1	25	25
Constantinople	–	1	1	4	4	–	–	–	–	–
St. Petersburg	1	1	1	4	4	–	–	–	–	–
America										
Washington	1	–	1	27	27	–	1*b	1	74	74

It is interesting to note that Copenhagen news was not so frequently dated in *Öresunds-Posten* in 1860. The fact is that the paper had an abundance of Danish material at this time and often presented it under a special headline. But it seems that due to the

proximity, the temporal aspect of news from Denmark did not merit special attention anymore. Copenhagen was integrated in the local sphere of Helsingborg, and every reader could, if he wanted, take one of the many daily steamships to the Danish capital and get quick news for himself. Therefore, the dating of Danish news was no big issue. Many of the dated news items relating to Copenhagen, here had financial content. The same goes for most of the London and Gothenburg news.

As the table shows, during this period news from Hamburg increased quantitatively. In this year it was the most common source of dated foreign news during January and July, with 75 news items published during these months alone.

With respect to *Norrbottens-Posten*, the time-perspective in the foreign news was basically the same as in 1850. It was very restrictive in its use of telegrams, and the improvements in regular communications do not seem to have had any discernable effect.[36]

The temporal horizon of European news in 1870

The figures for the year 1870 show quite interesting results. In this period, most of the foreign news in *Öresunds-Posten* was presented in longer articles introducing foreign events together with comments and analyses. As a rule the news from various cities appearing in those articles was not dated. With regard to the dated news, in this year the dominance of Hamburg as a source for foreign news had disappeared. This year news from Paris dominated quantitatively. In general, it also seems that the habit of publishing incoming telegrams in given sequences as they arrived had disappeared. Despite the fact that telegraph news at this point was readily available, it was used with discrimination. During January *Öresunds-Posten* only published a few telegrams of its own, all from Swedish cites. The reason why the news from European cities still was so fast, is probably the quick access to foreign papers now provided by the railway system.

But a decisive break occurred in mid July. As the war between France and Prussia broke out, all of a sudden the paper was flooded with telegrams. The paper learnt of the "feared catastrophe" via a telegram from London on July 16, which arrived "at the very moment the paper is put in the printing-press" and was dated in London the previous evening at 6:20.[37] Suddenly the news was rapid, and dates were carefully specified. An early note told the readers that "special arrangements" had been made for the paper to "… everyday receive telegrams about the war, which will be announced partly through regular editions of the paper, partly through extra editions."[38]

---

36   Special occurrences like the Danish-German war in 1863–1864 prompted the Norrbottens-Posten to publish a
       fair number of telegrams from Stockholm, recounting the latest developments, but the effect of these are not
       visible in the above table for January and July 1860.
37   Öresunds-Posten, July 16 1870. As a matter of fact this telegram was supplied to the paper by a reader.
38   Öresunds-Posten, July 18, 1870.

Table 3: Dated news from major cities in *Öresunds-Posten* and *Norrbottens-Posten* January and July 1870.

Town of news item	Öresunds–Posten 1870					Norrbottens–Posten 1870				
	Number of news Jan.	Number of news Jul.	Total	Fastest – days old	Slowest – days old	Number of news Jan.	Number of news Jul.	Total	Fastest – days old	Slowest – days old
Sweden										
Stockholm	14	13	27	0	11	6	8	14	7	56
Gothenburg	7	9	16	2	6	–	–	–	–	–
Umeå	–	–	–	–	–	1	2	3	10	21
Sundsvall	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	1	9	9
Malmö	2	4	6	0	9	–	–	–	–	–
Lund	3	–	3	2	12	–	–	–	–	–
Europe										
Copenhagen	13	15	28	0	4	–	1	1	10	10
Hamburg	8	14	22	1	4	–	1	1	10	10
Berlin	–	20	20	1	4	–	1	1	11	11
Paris	20	43	63	1	18	–	1	1	10	10
London	13	27	40	1	5	–	1	1	10	10
Vienna	1	8	9	1	4	1	–	1	27	27
Florence	–	5	5	2	5	–	–	–	–	–
Madrid	2	1	3	2	9	–	–	–	–	–
Constan-tinople	–	1	1	2	2	–	–	–	–	–
St. Petersburg	–	2	2	1	1	–	–	–	–	–
America										
Washington	1	2	3	2	18	–	–	–	–	–

Öresunds-Posten was putting its resources into covering the war. From later telegrams, it turns out that it had started a subscription with the recently started Danish News agency Ritzaus. The headlines then were "Telegrams to Öresunds-Posten. (From Ritzaus Bureau.)[39] That things really changed is demonstrated by the following chart (p. 60), showing the number of dated news items in the paper for January and July.

Obviously, the infrastructure of news reporting had several levels of urgency. In day-to-day reporting, economical channels were used, also by a paper like *Öresunds-Posten*, and a delay of around 4 days was considered acceptable for news from the major European capitals. When extraordinary things like took place, like war, another previously latent level was activated, providing faster transfer of news, and a more resource-demanding use of that news on the part of the papers, which published extra issues presenting headlines from the scene of war.

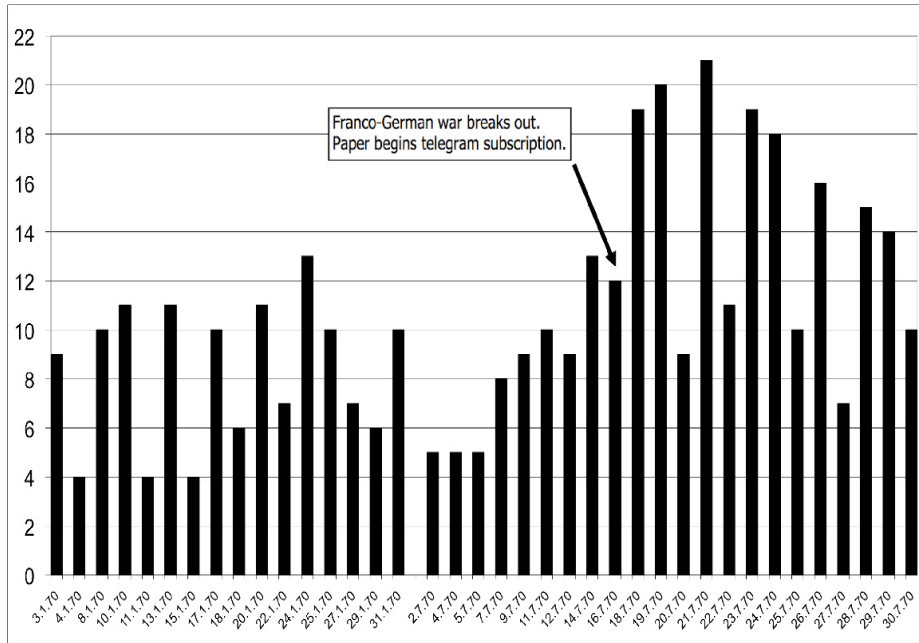39   See for example Öresunds-Posten, August 18 and 19, 1870.

Figure 1. The number of dated news items in Öresunds-Posten January and July 1870.

Again the contrast with the situation up north is clear, as private citizens there created an arrangement where they jointly subscribed to telegrams which were posted in public. Both the economy of the arrangement and the fact that the paper still was published only once a week probably were contributory causes to the initiative. When the editor of *Norrbottens-Posten* mentioned the outbreak of war he told his readers where the information came from: from private telegrams:

> From the telegrams arrived here during the last week by means of private individuals further information has become available about what is known from the theatre of war.[40]

Here it must be mentioned though, that although *Norrbottens-Posten* was slower to react to the war, it too started to publish more telegrams, but this did not begin until the last issue of July. Had the table been based on the month of August instead of July, the figures probably would have contained both more dated news from Stockholm and more dated news from the scene of war, although not as fast as the news published in *Öresunds-Posten*.[41] Also during the 1860s, choosing to measure a different month might

40   Norrbottens-Posten July 28, 1870.
41   For example, on July 21 it was known in Piteå that war had broken out. This news had arrived in the form of private intelligence which was mentioned in an editorial comment in Norrbottens-Posten, but not published in the form of a regular telegram. Norrbottens-Posten July 21, 1870. The same news had reached Helsingborg on the 16th.

have yielded slightly different results for *Norrbottens-Posten*, which during the Danish-German war conflict in 1863-1864 contained both more dated news and than otherwise and a number of telegrams from Stockholm.[42]

How the temporal and spatial horizons in the two papers developed during the period can be summarised by the following charts. They are based on the statistics presented in the three preceding tables and clearly show the difference between Helsingborg and Piteå. It should be noted that they illustrate the development of the *fastest* news. Not all news, as the discussion has made clear, was forwarded in the fastest possible manner. It rather seems that a certain time-delay was seen as quite acceptable for everyday reporting. Nevertheless, the *possibility* of instant communication meant that in periods of international crisis, immediate news was indeed possible. In Helsingborg that is.
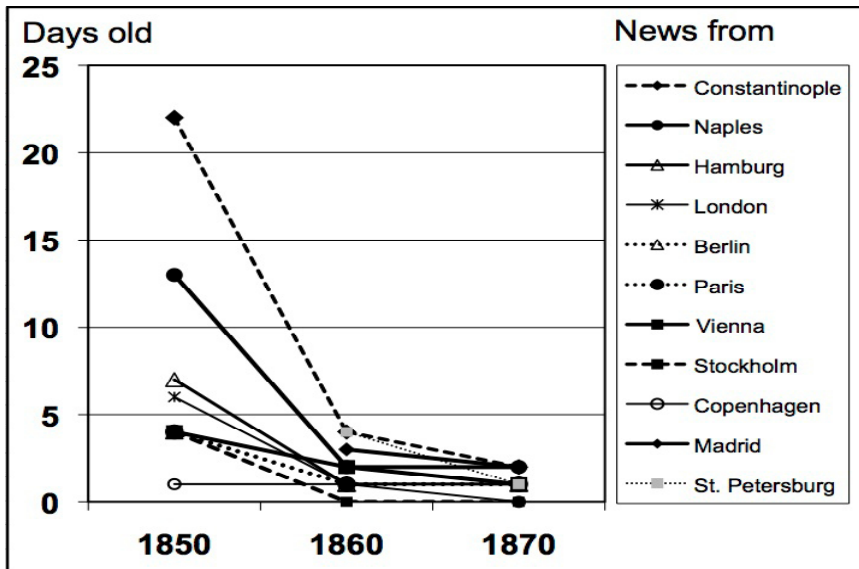

Figure 2. The development of news reporting in Helsingborg, 1850–1870.

As the chart shows, 15 years after the arrival of the telegraph, most foreign news reached Helsingborg practically without any time delay. The world had become compressed into a short "now". In the northern town Piteå, no similar development occurred. Still in 1870, news in most cases was just as old as twenty years before, as the following chart makes clear:

---

42   Combining the measurements of the temporal horizons at 10 year intervals presented here, with a longitudinal study of how the number of telegrams published in the papers varied over time, might provide a fuller image of the impact of the telegraph.
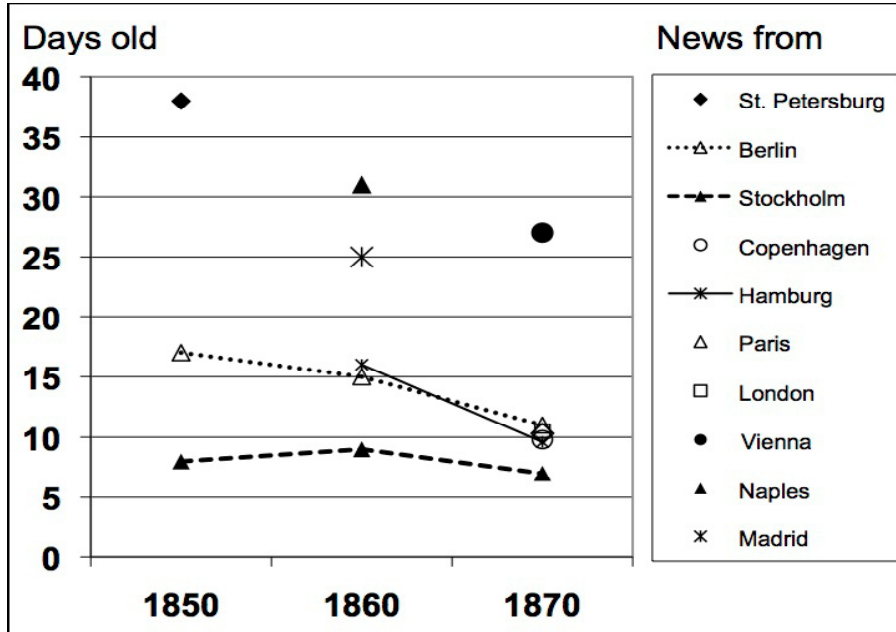
Figure 3. The development of news reporting in Piteå, 1850–1870.

Despite some small improvements, on a general level, Piteå does not seem to have benefited from the technical development. Rather, the difference relative Helsingborg had grown rather remarkably. Thus, the failure of the telegraph to even out the conditions for information dissemination created by geography, actually increased the differences, making the northern town seem even more backward.

Economy of the papers

A factor which highly influenced the ability of the papers to use the telegraph was their financial situation. That *Norrbottens-Posten* was not in a position to spend as large resources on covering foreign news as *Öresunds-Posten*, can be partly explained by the difference in circulation between the papers. The paper in Helsingborg, due to expanding advertising volume, soon ventured from bi-weekly to tri-weekly publication and its circulation increased. The paper in Piteå, with meandering circulation, showed no similar development. Hence, due to a lack of financial possibilities, it continued to quote telegrams from the newspapers of Stockholm, arriving by mail, or from papers down the coast such as *Sundsvalls-Posten*. That economy was an effective barrier becomes evident from a comparison of the circulation of the two papers.
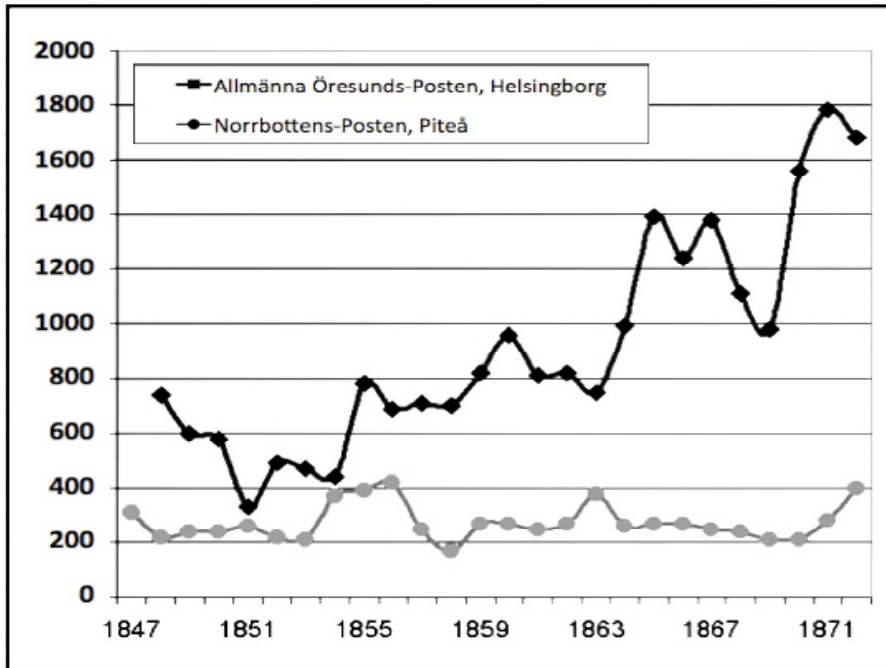
Figure 4. Circulation of Öresunds-Posten and Norrbottens-Posten 1847–1871.
Source: S. Waller, Den svenska pressens upplagor 1824–1872, Gothenburg 2001.

Income from subscriptions and advertising revenue simply did not cover the costs associated with the telegram business. A single national telegram could cost several kronor, equivalent of the income from a full yearly subscription. A single telegram to Paris, in 1860 cost 20 kronor or more. So for every foreign telegram, just to cover the costs, *Norrbottens-Posten* would have had to sell several new subscriptions.[43] That the northern paper was struggling became obvious already in the yearly presentation for 1851. The editorial promised that the format would be extended at no extra cost, if only more subscriptions were sold. Specifically, between 50 and 60 more subscriptions were needed, and those considering signing up were asked to do so in the fastest possible manner.[44] Again in 1861, the editor asked those considering a subscription to enter their order as soon as possible.[45] Collecting the subscription fees also seemed difficult. In 1862 the

43   The pricing of transatlantic telegrams was also noted in Norrbottens-Posten, which under the headline "Expensive correspondence" informed its readers that the cost of transmitting a single telegram of 100 letters or less, approximately 10–20 words, across the Atlantic, was no less than 20 Pounds Sterling. Norrbottens-Posten, August 25, 1866.
44   Norrbottens-Posten, December 14, 1850.
45   Norrbottens-Posten, January 5, 1861.

editor urged the readers to pay their subscription at the time they entered their order.[46] In March the following year, a reminder was published requesting those with remaining fees to pay those "in a hurry".[47]

An important precondition for the financial success of a newspaper was the size of the public it served. For a local paper, the size of the population within its area of distribution determined the number of potential readers. Also in this respect, the northern paper was worse off. The population figures show that the development of the two cities followed different trajectories. During the second half of 19th century the potential public of Öresunds-Posten increased many times over. In 1870 the population in the province Malmöhus amounted to more than 300 000 persons, of which about 8 000 were living in Helsingborg. The population in Piteå and its province Norrbotten developed more slowly, and in 1870 consisted of about 75 000 persons, of which circa 2000 lived in Piteå.
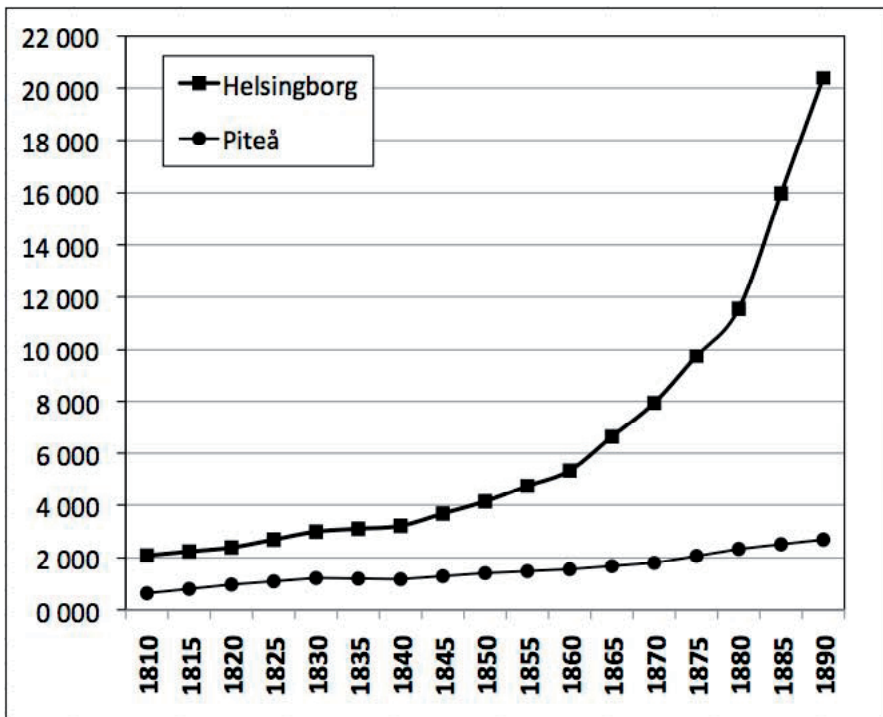

Figure 5. Population 1810–1890 in the cities Hälsingborg and Piteå. Source: Historical Statistics of Sweden, Part 1. Population, Second edition. 1720–1967, National Central Bureau of Statistics, Stockholm 1969.

---

46   Norrbottens-Posten, December 27, 1862.
47   Norrbottens-Posten, March 7, 1863.

Of course, it could be said that it was not the absolute number of potential readers, but, for example, the relative number of businessmen among the population which determined if publishing frequent telegrams would have led to more subscriptions. Such analysis of the two towns will not be performed here, but suffice it to say, that trade was more lively in Helsingborg.

Redefining the sphere of interaction

Before the telegraph, the primary areas for interaction for the papers were almost entirely determined by geography. The sphere of interaction for Öresunds-Posten encompassed Stockholm, in the north and stretched south to Denmark and Copenhagen. This was reflected in the presentation of foreign news, as news from Denmark was presented under a special headline. With the telegraph, this arrangement initially survived, and Copenhagen became the major source for foreign news, serving as the gateway to Europe and the world. Later, the area of interaction was further expanded and Hamburg became the main supplier of foreign news. Even later, for a period, news received from Paris and the French papers took centre stage. The sphere of interaction for Norrbottens-Posten initially was its own province, but it also published news from Finland under a separate headline and it received personal communication and letters from Russia and Petersburg.[48] The gateway providing access to foreign news however, was Stockholm, and to a lesser extent the smaller coastal town Sundsvall. This did not change with the telegraph, as the only "proper" telegrams published, although they contained foreign news, were sent from Stockholm. In fact, not a single telegram sent directly from a foreign location seems to have been published in Norrbottens-Posten during this period.

What the telegraph meant, although it was not entirely realised during the period, and most certainly not in the north, was that the variable defining the temporal aspect of interaction through the news changed from geography to communications technology. With the advent of the telegraph and later the expansion of the railway network, the distribution of foreign news started to follow the main communicative channels. In theory the new communication technology created a system where the sphere of interaction consisted of a number of nodes, representing the main European cities, and all existing on the same temporal plane. The emergence of regular news reports from those nodes soon formed a category of its own, and the news travelling along those privileged channels soon became faster than news from nearby locations transported by ordinary mail. Where the telegraph really made an impact, it not only annihilated the temporal distances to these nodes, but actually reversed the relationship between time and space. When the telegraph worked as it should, in the 1870:s Öresunds-Posten could get news faster from cities far away than from nearby locations in the province. The telegraph

---

48   Norrbottens-Posten, April 22, 1848 quoted a private letter from Petersburg dated March 10.

placed news from Berlin, Paris, London and Vienna on a single temporal scale, and regional news was left behind.

The telegraph and political news from Europe

What then, was the image of the foreign world that was created through the telegrams? Emerging from the published telegraph dispatches was the image of the world as an arena for a strategic game of politics, with the great powers as the players. Ever since the agreement between the major European states in 1815, Europe had been characterized by a delicate diplomatic balance. During the Crimean war, 1854–1856, a new framework for diplomacy emerged, and new strategic alliances were formed. The conflicts in the following years, especially over the role of Russia in European politics, materialised in a number of European wars. As the previous analysis has shown, the telegraph was used selectively, but apart from financial information, war was one thing that motivated its use. To the extent that the telegraph aided in establishing a "contemporal" world in the news, it was a world characterized by of politics and finance.

Especially in times of war, like during the crisis of 1870–1871, the telegraphic dispatches carried a never ending list of battles, deaths and surrenders. Was this an inviting image of Europe? The deeds of Bismarck and the fate of France stirred emotions but also created anxiety. Two of the great powers – at war! What would Russia do? Which were the interests of Britain? And how did this affect Sweden? The telegraph became the bearer of bad tidings and the Europe which drew closer was frightening. Europe had become a "house of sorrow".[49] Despite the great interest readers presumably had in the developments on the scene of war, sometimes the never ending sequence of war news became too much. In a short anecdote, *Norrbottens-Posten* 1870 told about a distant island, which seemed like a paradise for all those becoming "Europe-tired" from all the war reports. There, it was promised, news from the outer world would arrive once a year, at the most.[50]

The fact that the telegraph in the papers due to its selective use became associated with the politics of power, probably made the Enlightenment visions of universal communication and understanding seem pretty distant.

Conclusion: A new sense of time but increased asymmetry

A primary result of the comparison between the two papers and their respective uses of the telegraph is the magnification of relative distance. The study shows that both papers were optimistic about the telegraph as a medium for instant communication.

---

49   Norrbottens-Posten, January 26, 1871.
50   Norrbottens-Posten, September 28, 1871.

It is also noteworthy that both papers regarded the telegraph as a global phenomenon rather than something national or European. This image was further strengthened by the detailed reporting about the completion of new lines around the world, progressively "filling the gaps" on the map. In this way the telegraph changed how the world was represented in both papers – not through the actual annihilation of time and space, but through the fact that the new technology related their respective cities to a scale of global development.

The new technology also gave rise to new ideas about time and time-keeping among those who came in contact with it. For employees of the telegraph stations the technology was readily available. The newspapers, on the other hand, did not have such privileged access. When telegraph stations opened in their respective cities, the consequences for the two newspapers thus differed. The paper in the north essentially continued to quote telegrams printed in national or foreign papers arriving by regular mail. Apart from occasional "real" telegrams, this remained the norm for some years to comes, most probably due to economic reasons. The telegraph was mainly used in cases of extraordinary events. The southern paper, which even before the arrival of the telegraph had ready access to news from the continent, used the telegraph actively, and frequently published rapid dispatches received from major European cities. As the analysis of temporal horizons in the news shows, for the southern paper in many cases the limitations of time and space were indeed on many occasions 'annihilated'. Thus in this case, the telegraph did not level the temporal playing field, but rather reinforced the conditions established by geography.

Situating the papers' usage of the telegraph in the local contexts of economy and technology has provided possible explanations to this differentiation. Since news was disseminated through a chain of carriers, the telegraph alone was not enough to bridge distance. Furthermore, the telegraph was ill fitted to the traditional mode of gathering news through the cheap system of exchange-papers. The steep fees contrasted to the small amount of information contained in the telegrams. We could therefore speculate, that when it comes to levelling the communicative playing field, the development of cost-effective regular transports such as railways and sea-routes were more important to newspapers than the theoretical possibilities of the telegraph. Once European capitals could be reached by train in little time, all papers got speedy access to the wealth of information contained in foreign papers at little cost.