

Popularizing abstract

Transport of people and carriage of goods are undoubtedly the elements of human activity which are one of the foundations of culture and civilization. This phenomenon affects not only the economic aspects of life, especially trade, but also a number of other aspects, such as the mobility of people, the transfer of thoughts and ideas related to it, and political activities. In the pre-modern era – a time without the Internet, telephone or even telegraph – information exchange depended entirely on transport. Thus, research on transport and carriage should be classified as research relating to “basic” (and yet, foundational) aspects of culture.

The aim of the project “Costs of land and inland transport and carriage in the Baltic zone in the 14th and 16th centuries” is a study of source materials from the south-eastern shores of the Baltic zone. It will provide the data necessary for the analysis of three basic issues. It first considers the questions: What was the cost of land and inland transport of goods and people in the 14th and 16th centuries and how did it change? What were the changes in the cost of carriages, sleighs, boats, and river boats due to? How did the land transport costs compare to the inland transport costs between the same origins and destinations?

Another issue examined in the project will be the ratio of the amount of transport costs to the value of transported goods. In this respect, the project seeks to determine what kind of dependencies occurred in this field, and what formed these dependencies. An equally important spectrum of research will, finally, be the search for an answer to the question about the dependence of the prices of carriage of particular types of goods and transport of people on the type of transport and various circumstances in which it took place. This group of factors will include: the duration of the transport/carriage, the distance in which the transport/carriage takes place, the climate of transport/carriage, the providers of transport/carriage, and, finally, the person or persons and institutions ordering the transport/carriage.

The research is designed based on written sources, created as utility records by various institutions and people. The most important category of sources are various types of accounting entries, often collected later into separate books of accounts which were created in the period under analysis because of the daily activities of municipal authorities and merchants acting as private persons. Source records of this type contain a large amount of repetitive information on various types of expenditure, including land and inland transport and carriage. A thorough analysis of these types of sources enables the collection of data, which can then be analyzed using quantitative methods (including statistical ones).

As a result of this project, a fairly comprehensive and, above all, reliable picture of the cost of land and inland transport and carriage in the Baltic zone between the 14th and 16th centuries, and their various conditions, should be obtained. The expected outcomes will be a significant contribution to the development of historical research on the economy of the Hanseatic zone. Finally, the expected results will also provide a valuable body of comparative material in relation to similar data in relation to other European regions in the mentioned period, on the one hand, and on the other, in relation to maritime transport, both in the Baltic zone and in other areas.