

Otto Mattsson, student nr: k37139

Course: 23E21555 — Strategy and Marketing from a Business History Perspective D

Seminar Paper (first version presentation deadline Oct 26, 2021)

“Denna viktiga oljefråga har skötts med energi och omsorg.” A case study of how a coincidental document of Finnish business history is examined so as to understand the *historical embeddedness* of the managerial decision depicted in document.

In this seminar paper, I present a document that relates to the fuel and oil distribution industry in Finland in the early 1950's. The document is a piece of paper on which a regional manager of the Nobel-Standard Company jotted down notes for a speech he gave for local businessmen and other administrative dignitaries in the town of Gamlakarleby (Kokkola). The manager happens to be also my grandfather, so I have a personal, almost exclusive relation both to the document and its author. By examining the document my intention is, in this seminar paper, to show how the application of approaches of historical realism and interpretive history affects our understanding and the research scope of managerial or strategic business decisions of the past. Thus, this seminar paper aims to highlight the “historical embeddedness” of mundane business decisions of the past, as defined by Eero Vaara and Juha-Antti Lamberg (2016).

Introduction

On an unremarkable and unprecise day in the early 1950's, a group twelve middle-aged men gathered around a long, rectangular dining table at the local Rotary club meeting room in the small provincial town of Gamlakarleby (or Kokkola, as the town is known by its Finnish name) in Finland to enjoy lunch and to discuss current affairs. Almost uniform in their black and dark grey suits, impeccably knotted ties and a linen or silk handkerchief in the breast pocket, and casting a momentarily frozen glance at the camera, most of the one dozen of men remain anonymous. Turning the photograph, however, two of the men stand out and can be identified: a hand-written

scripture on the back of the photograph says (in Swedish): “*Rotary möts. Pappa och vännen, bankdirektören Erik “Kurre” Witting till vänster*” * (Mattsson 2017)



From the wording “Pappa” — and the fact that the photograph was found in a chest containing the family archives of my grandfather — we can self-evidently state that the man to the closest right is Mr. Allan Mattsson, and that the descriptive line most probably has been written either by his wife, his daughter or his son, before putting the photograph into the chest. In addition, we are inclined to declare other assumptions we already have made, just by looking at the photograph: the group is assumed to be having a light lunch, as the daylight is streaming in through the window and as the number of glasses and cutlery placed on the table is small, revoking any thoughts of a three-meal dinner taking place in the photograph. The cutlery also acts the circumstantial evidence of the presence of a twelfth member of the group — maybe he is holding the camera?

Anonymous and identifiable only through laborious detective work in the Rotary club archives — not in the scope of this seminar paper — these men give us little information. Yet, another piece of document sheds light on what the men may have been discussing at their meeting. Amongst the sporadic array of photographs, letters, pieces of paper, etc. that form the contents of the chest is a piece of paper that seems to be the notes for a speech. In it, the speaker, the

* In English: *The Rotary Club meeting. Daddy and his friend, the banker Erik “Kurre” Witting on the left.*

aforementioned Allan Mattsson, addresses his Rotary fellows and describes the process according to which the Nobel–Standard Company chose to locate a new fuel refinery facility in the natural harbour of Yxpila (Ykspihlaja in Finnish) near the town of Gamla Karleby, and presents his praise to the “guests”, as selectively translated into the English language:

[...] In proportion, the need for oil products has increased more in the northern part of Finland, and as all fuel products will have to be transported, with high costs, from Southern Finland, the idea of having an imports harbour in the Northern part of the Gulf of Bothnia became pressing. During the autumn of 1948 and winter of 1949, all possibilities regarding this issue were examined, all along from the town of Torneå [Tornio, in Finnish] in the North down to the town of Kaskö [Kaskinen, in Finnish] in the South. The right placement of an imports harbour for liquid fuels is not only a question to be looked at from the point of interests of a single company, but as part of the entire business world. Here, numerous factors are involved. Questions related to the building lot for a suitable harbour, costs related to facilities, freight costs incurring in relation to other local centres of consumption, the demand within the local periphery, etc. Having weighted extensively all possibilities for and against each of the harbours, by experts, the choice fell upon the Yxpila harbour in Gamlakarleby. But the question was still not resolved. Also, an area suitable for the planned warehouses was needed, and it was in this respect that the town officials and other agencies did a remarkable job. [...] An area suitable in all respects was made available after many if's and but's, and a contract of sale was duly signed on February 2, 1950. The construction works at Yxpila harbour commenced on March 8, and they have proceeded since according to plan. The first phase of construction consists of designated quays for seagoing tankers of 15 000 tons. Subsequently, facilities with a capacity up to 16 000 000 litres, the pipeworks, etc. These facilities will be expanded during the next few years until the capacity desired or imposed has been reached. Through this facility, the Nobel–Standard Company wishes to fulfil its share in securing the demand for fuel in Northern Finland. [...] The town of Gamlakarleby — and let me emphasise this to our guests — has not been asleep. This question of oil, of utmost importance, has been handled with energy and care. Perhaps the revenues the town estimates to generate with the inflow of oil imports will bring about benefits and joy to this town and to its now so heavily burdened taxpayers — generating greater welfare, such as better roads and equal opportunities for the motorised population

of the rural areas here as for those of Southern Finland. And eventually, make all transport inexpensive in the entire Northern part of Finland.[†] (Mattsson, 1950)

Now, what can we make out of this historical document? Why have these men come together — for luncheon, obviously yes, but also to hear about how the Nobel–Standard Company chose to locate an oil harbour in a remote provincial town by the Gulf of Bothnia? And most importantly, what does it mean to us, modern-day economics students and professors?

A traditional management research approach might entitle us to study the document from a purely managerial point of view. By merely transferring our current calculative approaches to a time point that happened in the past, in this case some 70 years ago, we examine the managerial decision at hand. In effect, the text contains several elements that give hints and even guide us to consider how the decision of locating an oil imports harbour may have been taken by the Nobel–Standard Company in Finland — a company better known then, and still nowadays, amongst the public by its retail service station brand *Esso*. (Esso, 2021) In addition to the legal and municipal aspects of being allowed to acquire, for any given sum of money, a piece of land for the designated purpose of building quays, an oil refinery, adjacent warehouses (i.e. oil and fuel tank facilities) and a set of extensive pipeworks, several quantitative parameters are mentioned in the document. The

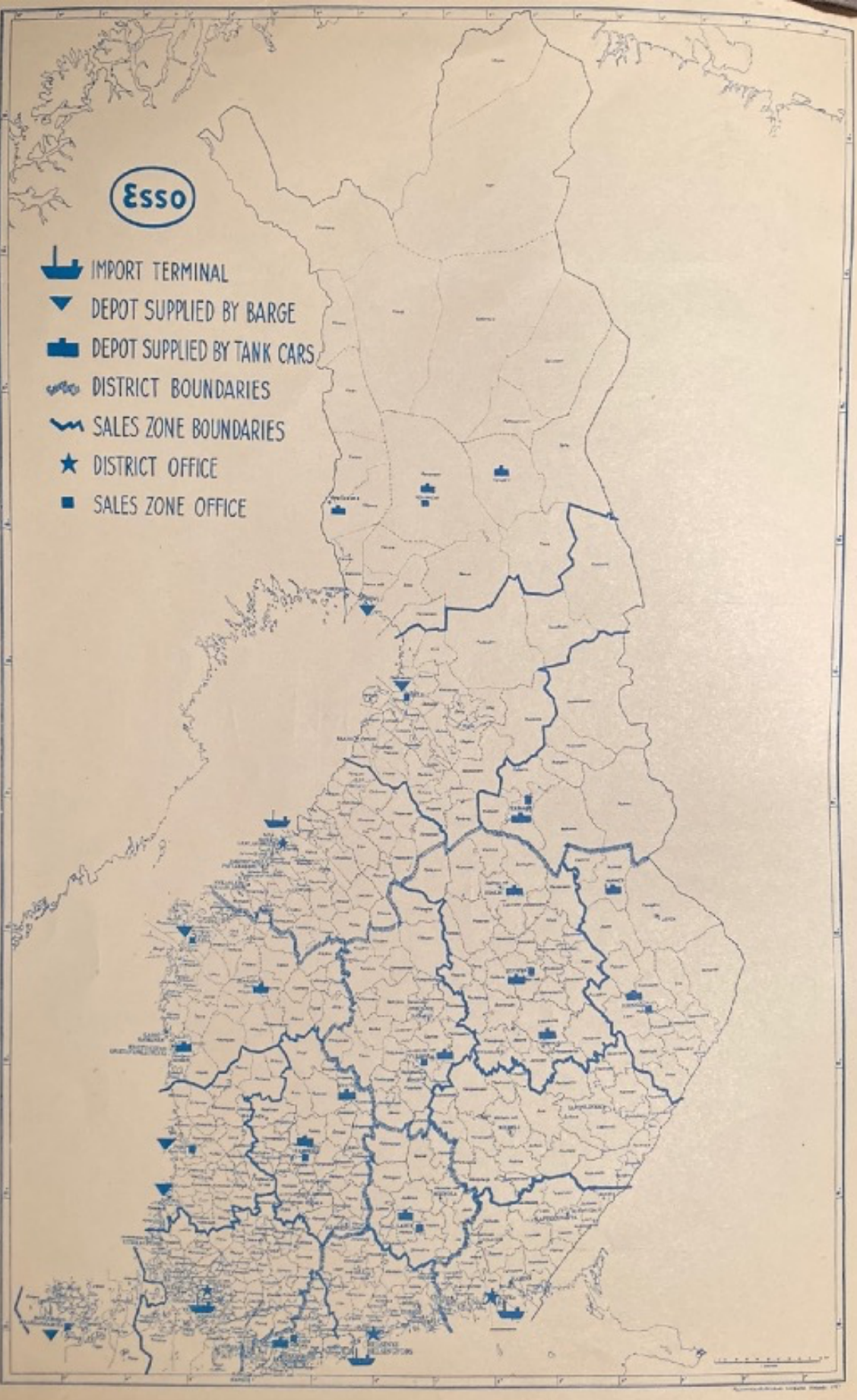
[†] The original text in Swedish: [...] *Norra Finlands behov av oljeprodukter har proportionsvis stigit mera — och då allt bränsle med dyrbara kostnader måste vidarebefordras från södra Finland — blev tanken på en importhamn vid norra delen av Bottenhavet aktuell. Hösten 1948 och vinter 1949 undersöktes ingående olika hamnars möjligheter i detta avseende från Torneå i norr till Kaskö i söder. Rätt placering av importhamnen för flytande bränsle är icke enbart en fråga ur ett enskilt bolags intresse utan det gäller hela näringslivet. Här spelar oerhört många faktorer sin roll. Tomtfrågor i lämplig hamn, anläggningskostnader, fraktkostnader till övriga konsumtionscentra, den egna periferins förbrukning o.s.v. Alla hamnars möjligheter för och emot ventilerades ingående av experter till valet föll på Gamlakarlebyns hamn Yxpila. Men därmed var ännu inte frågan löst. Det gällde att få ett lämpligt område för det tilltänkta lagret och det var nu stadens myndigheter och olika instanser gjorde ett utomordentligt gott arbete. [...] Ett i alla avseende lämpligt område kunde efter många om och men erbjudas, och den 2 februari 1950 undertecknades ett köpebrev. Den 8 mars påbörjades arbetena i Yxpila och de har framskridit programenligt. Första byggnadsskedet i Yxpila omfattar byggandet av egna kajer för oceangående tankfartyg om 15 000 ton. Vidare en volymkapacitet av 16 000 000 liter, rörledning osv. Anläggningarna utvidgas successivt de närmaste åren till önskad eller fodrad kapacitet uppnås. Genom denna anläggning hoppas Nobel–Standard för sin del kunna trygga sin andel i Norra Finlands bränslebehov. [...] Gamlakarleby — ja det är speciellt för våra gäster jag vill framhålla detta — sover inte. Denna viktiga olje fråga har skötts med energi och omsorg. Kanske även de inkomster staden beräknar inflyta genom oljeimporten kan lända till nytta och glädje för staden i denna nu högt ansträngda skattebetalare — skapa större välmåga, bl.a. bättre gator och för vår motoriserade landsbygds befolkning samma möjligheter som södra Finlands odlare har. Och till sist förbilliga alla transporter i hela Norra Finland.*

construction of a harbour itself must have been a huge investment for the company, and we may arguably assume that the cost base of hiring local construction workers, of transporting cement and steel to a building lot and of laying the infrastructure (electricity, drainage, etc.), was not immune to variance in logistics costs or local supply factors then, as it is not so now either. In fact, Mr. Mattsson — then an aspiring regional manager working for the Nobel–Standard Company — mentions this directly in his speech. Moreover, he takes up other quantitative considerations: in addition to evaluating a location site as such, the investor must consider how it is situated in relation to other locations and estimate the amounts of consumption thereof in addition to that of the immediate economic area, probably based on an equation that takes into account the level of industrialisation and motorisation in each. Although gravely simplified in this seminar paper, the heart of the matter seems to be that the distribution of oil, fuel and other refined end-products of petroleum, by train and/or tank cars, from the coast further into the inland parts of the country generates substantial volume-related transport costs of the variable kind, whereas a depot or terminal constitute a fixed cost element that eventually is covered, in time, by the rising volumes. According to the cited passage of the speech, this was, in effect, the initial motivation of building an import harbour in the first place: the rising demand for oil and fuels also in the Northern parts of Finland could no longer be met by costly land transport. Thus, the managerial problem that is depicted in the document is simple: where on the coastline of Northern Finland would it be optimal to build an oil harbour?

This research approach — that of Allan Mattsson's speech examined as a managerial case study on the optimization of logistics costs in the oil industry in the 1950's — can be supported by other sources of the time. In a 30th anniversary publication, dated August 27, 1950, for its personnel, the Nobel–Standard Company visualises the geographical challenge with a map:



-  IMPORT TERMINAL
-  DEPOT SUPPLIED BY BARGE
-  DEPOT SUPPLIED BY TANK CARS
-  DISTRICT BOUNDARIES
-  SALES ZONE BOUNDARIES
-  DISTRICT OFFICE
-  SALES ZONE OFFICE



As shown on the map, in the year of 1950 the coast of Finland is paled by barge-supplied depots with surprisingly even geographical distances of about 150 ± 25 kilometres from the city of Kotka in the east all the way up to the city of Pori in the west, with (only) three proper import terminals on the southernmost coast (those of Kotka, Helsinki and Turku). Now let us when the map was published — in August, 1950 — and go back in time a few months. In early 1950, before the Nobel–Standard company was able to acquire the real estate property for the harbour — which according to Allan Mattsson’s speech took place February 2, 1950[‡] — the map would have looked a bit different. Continuing northwards from Pori, there would have been only one barge-supplied depot in Vaasa along the entire Bothnic coastline of some 800 kilometres until the city of Oulu. In other words, a huge part of the country had limited or at least very costly access to the distribution of liquid fuels. In order to re-crack the managerial challenge, railway charts and road maps of the 1950’s could be emulated by modern GPS charts simply by excluding transport routes built post-1950. By inputting logistics cost variables of only two kinds — those of railway and those of road kilometres — into other geographical coastline alternatives (e.g. Kaskinen, Korsnäs, Vaasa, Vöyri, Uusikaarlepyy, Pietarsaari, Kalajoki, Pyhäjoki, Raahe, etc.) we could probably be able to simulate and show, with the sheer power of numbers, how Mr. Mattsson and his colleagues at the Nobel–Standard company picked Yxpila as the most suitable location for a new oil imports harbour.

But would this calculation give us the big picture of what was going on in the post-war Finland of the 1950’s — the atmosphere the decision was made in — and in the mind of Allan Mattsson — the person who embodied this decision in the eyes of the local dignitaries and Rotary fellows during that ordinary luncheon? As Vaara and Lamberg (2016) claim in their article that discusses how “historical embeddedness” is often forgotten or omitted in business and managerial studies, “management research more generally, has lacked historical comprehension and sensitivity” [...], and we tend to “know little about how historical conditions shape strategic processes or their causal effects, how strategic practices are linked to their sociohistorical contexts and enacted in situ”.

Let us elaborate on this a little. In order to avoid historical short-sightedness, we therefore should not limit our research to and settle with an approach that looks at the managerial problem “back in time” and try to seek a solution to it as a present-day manager would do with the means and thinking of our current times. In effect, we would be making a retrospective — or even *wisdom-after-the-events* based — evaluation of whether these stylish chaps of the 1950’s did their

[‡] To make further archive work easier, we can logically infer that the Rotary club meeting took place and the speech was probably given sometime between March 8, 1950 (as this date was mentioned as the starting point of construction works) and early August, 1950, when the anniversary publication was sent for printing.

logistics calculus right when locating the harbour where they did. Moreover, without knowledge of and access to the same data and parameters that they had at the time, our emulated answer would not, in fact, be able to tell such a thing, only that the answer we now end up with is different (or not) than that of the case time!

Historical realism approach

Following on Vaara’s and Lamberg’s advice, one of the approaches to “add and understand historical embeddedness of strategic processes” is historical realism. According to the authors, historical realism “is based on a realist ontoepistemological understanding of social reality that aims to reconstruct past events and to provide explanations of historical processes and mechanisms.” (Vaara&Lamberg, 2016) In other words, historical realism aims to provide us with *the* real historical context on what really happened, irrespective of the researchers work at hand — in this case, what really was going on in Finland and in Nobel–Standard Company before and during the early 1950’s. And in effect, a lot of leads to (try to) answer such questions arise from the very same documents that we have discussed earlier in this seminar paper. The company may even have been struggling to keep up with the rising demand. Another chart in the anniversary publication shows (Nobel–Standard, 1950), the demand of petroleum-based products in Finland was increasing on an accelerating pace:

Försålda kvantiteter	1929	1939	1949
Bensin	21.300 ton	51.900 ton	79.100 ton
Petroleum	18.900 „	25.600 „	21.200 „
Gas- och brännolja	7.300 „	14.100 „	43.500 „
Smörjoljor	2.900 „	6.100 „	4.300 „

Also in the same publication, a retrospective summary is given by the board of the company on how after the World War II, a huge wave of construction was initiated to (re-)build a distribution network for liquid fuels, as “the main depot of Eastern Finland, Viborg, had been lost [to the Soviet Union] and must be compensated for.” (Nobel–Standard, 1950)

[§] In English: Försålda kvantiteter = Quantities sold; Bensin = petrol; Petroleum = crude oil; Gas- och brännolja = gasoline and fuel oil; Smörjoljor = lubricant oils.

This passage opens a whole new avenue of research of historical realism and contextualisation. In 1950, Finland was still in a state of post-war reconstruction and under a real and heart-felt threat of becoming occupied by its eastern neighbour state. To begin with, most Finnish industries were mobilized to pay huge war reparation indemnities to the Soviet Union, in the form of not only paper and wood products that the country was accustomed to produce, but also ships, heavy vehicles and other products of technological high-end manufacturing. The war reparation indemnity contract had recently been signed in 1947, and its obligations were eventually fulfilled by Finland in 1952 (Jussila et al., 2000, pp. 219–221). Having lost the city of Viborg behind a new eastern border, Finland had surrendered not only a fourth of its oil import harbour capacity but also the critical waterway of the Saimaa channel that had been a major conduit for paper and wood exports — and for the inflow of Nobel–Standard’s fuel and oil tankers reaching this way a large part of north-eastern Finland, including such inland centres of population, industry and logistics as Mikkeli, Savonlinna, Joensuu, Varkaus and Kuopio, as openly mentioned also in the anniversary publication (Nobel–Standard, 1950). The question of distribution logistics becoming a part of military geopolitics must have been pressing and in recent memory amongst the company directors and managers. Only a few years earlier, during the war, the Finnish state had confiscated the facilities and ships of the Nobel–Standard Company and founded a mutually owned company Oy Petsamon Öljy Ab with Nobel–Standard (owning 40% of shares) and other oil companies to secure the oil and fuel imports via the Liinahamari harbour. (Nobel–Standard, 1950). When the war had broken out 1939, Finland still had had access to the North Sea as the “Lady of Finland” stretched her arm all the way to the sea via Petsamo. As Baltic seaways had been closed by military action, the only reliable route by which Finland had been able to import oil and fuel was by a combination of tank cars and trains via the Northern passage.

Moreover, there was new competition on home ground. In 1948, partly pressured by the Soviet supervision commission (Valvontakomissio in Finnish), the Finnish Ehrnrooth family had recently sold its oil company Oy Trustivapaa Bensiini Ab (more commonly known as Teboil) to the Soviets. Finland was now the battleground of Eastern and Western oil industries and of economic influence. (Teboil, 2021) It is hard to imagine that Nobel–Standard, essentially a joint venture co-owned by the American oil conglomerate Standard Oil and a group of Finnish–Swedish private persons — former oil industry professionals with a background in the Swedish Nobel company (Nobel–Standard, 1950) — could have operated in post-war Finland without considering the geopolitical situation at hand. Further research in the company archives might shed light on how decisions on refinery facilities and oil import harbours were made and what form of official or unofficial communication there was between the state and company, but a revealing footnote in the

anniversary publications gives a hint on the intimacy between the directors of Nobel–Standard and the Finnish state and the state officials’ encouragement to increase imports of oil and fuel immediately after the war: “By rule, the company and the authorities have enjoyed good relations, and by sharing a mutual understanding we have mastered the difficulties that so many times appeared invincible.” (Nobel–Standard, 1950) Now imagine how the Finnish reader, at the time, only a few years since the war and even a shorter time since the Soviet generals had left the “Tower” — i.e. the Tornio hotel in central Helsinki that accommodated the Soviet supervision commission — might have interpreted this! (For comparison: imagine how out-of-place such a text would seem in a present-day oil company annual report!)

By following the historical realism approach, we could and should go deeper into the socio-political context in which the company operated in those days. A longitudinal, industry-wide research on all relevant companies could present the big picture of the post-war oil industry in Finland. Unfortunately, within the limitations of a seminar paper, we cannot go deeper into the past. E.g. the company archives of Oy Nobel–Standard Ab or Oy Esso Ab are available for researchers at the Central Archives of Finnish Business Records (Elinkeinoelämän keskusarkisto).

Microhistoric approach

As a second approach to adding and understanding historical embeddedness, Vaara and Lamberg refer to interpretative history. As promoted by history-theorists Robin Collingwood and Hayden White, interpretive history “emphasizes the role of the historian-researcher in interpreting the importance of historical events in situ” (Vaara&Lamberg, 2016). “In particular,” the authors continue, “we focus on microhistory as a useful but largely ignored method in management research”, referring to Magnússon & Szijártó’s (2013) collated findings on the approach, and claim that “through the close analysis of specific events, actions, and practices, microhistorians seek to identify larger sociohistorical patterns and their characteristics”. The key microhistorical theorists and practitioners Carlo Ginzburg and Matti Peltonen are mentioned here — also Giovanni Levi might be named (Peltonen, 2001).

Subsequently, instead of starting from and concentrating on the larger geopolitical context of Finland in the late 1940’s and early 1950’s, the aforementioned document — my grandfather’s notes for his speech — referred to and quoted in this seminar paper take on a more dominant role as a vehicle of interpretation. As a microhistorical specimen, as important as the notes to his speech themselves, so is the person who gave the speech: Mr. Allan Mattsson — and the researcher’s relation to him. As Magnússon and Szijártó emphasize, the microhistorical

approach often introduces previously unseen and unnamed characters and makes them “agents” in their own history (Magnússon and Szijártó, 2013, pp. 5). With access to family archives and first- and second-hand interviews, we gain access to minute personal information. One piece of such information is the fact that Mr. Mattsson — my grandfather — had been employed by Nobel–Standard already before the war in 1931 (when he was just a young man of 17 of age!) and had worked his way up the corporate ladder despite a relatively humble background in downtown Helsingfors. Quite unsurprisingly, his work experience with the oil and fuel industry was made into use by the armed forces in Finland during the war 1939–45: he was commissioned to serve as an officer overseeing the critical fuel transport routes of the North to and from Liinahamari and the rest of the country. (Mattsson, 2017)

After the war, Allan Mattsson continued to work with oil and fuel distribution in the North, even though in personal terms, he had no civilian connection whatsoever to these areas that he may have seen as rural and remote to him. Having returned to Helsingfors after the war, Nobel–Standard made him regional manager of the Ostrobothnia region in 1946 with the intent of finding a suitable place for an import harbour in the vicinity. (Mattsson, 2017) As noted earlier, the demand for oil and fuel was on the increase in Northern Finland, and not only had the country lost the city of Viborg with its oil facilities and, with it, access to the Saimaa channel in the war, but also the Northern passage to Liinahamari. To commission an experienced former ex-officer to the North to establish a new oil imports harbour there before the competitor served the interests not only of the company but also of the nation, if one were a patriot and a former veteran. After Teboil’s ownership had been transferred to the Soviets in 1948, this geopolitical setting must have been even more apparent.

But unfortunately for Allan Mattsson, the move did not serve his interest, in personal terms. It seems that he was utterly home sick. In a letter written in January 1955, he referred to a promise, given by named former superiors in 1946, that “his ‘deportation’ would last about five years”, and in several other letters written to the headquarters earlier in the early 1950’s, he expressed again and again his wishes to return to Helsingfors. He stated several reasons for homecoming, only one but a substantial one of which was the speedy construction of the Yxpila oil harbour. Had he not proved his abilities and earned a return to the headquarters? The harbour was officially inaugurated in November 1953 (Nordberg, 1953) but he remained stuck. In 1955, the desperation reached tipping point: he was willing to accept any position in company as long as it was in in the capital. (Mattsson, 1955)

It is not known whether Allan Mattsson’s wish to return to his city of birth affected the company’s decision to have the harbour built in Yxpila. But from *his* point of view, Yxpila must

have been an easy choice, if not the easiest. Since having been commissioned to move to Gamlakarleby in 1946, he had sought to become integrated into the inner circles of the business and administrative realms of the local society. In addition to joining the local Rotary club, he became member of the local chamber of commerce, the local automobile society and the yachting club — a sport he had excelled in Helsingfors as a youth. (Mattsson, 2017) This was prudent from a practical point of view, which Allan Mattsson refers to in his speech: by 1950, he had personal relations with the local movers and shakers both in the municipality administration and in business. In effect, in his speech Allan Mattsson addresses, namely, his “guests” from the municipal administration. (Mattsson, 1950) In the meeting, he obviously wanted to present himself as having had influence or at least a personal interest in the matter — why else would he praise and thank his local dignitaries handling it and reaching the assumedly preferred choice with “energy and care”? But were such gentlemanly compliments, offered in connection with a lunch or a dinner, more a ceremonial or egotistical interlude on behalf of regional manager (and his representation budget) than actual evidence that such decisions were prepared and even made in local “hyvä veli” (“Dear brother”, in English) networks in Finland in the 1950’s? Occasionally, retired captains of industry reveal, in interviews, memoirs or biographies, that many even stupendously expensive strategic investments and acquisitions in the industrial post-war history of this country have relied on personal relations between drinking pals (Simon, 2009) and on amateurish analysis and valuations (Wahlroos, 2021).

It is likely that also language had played a role in his choices of location. Before the war, it had been quite normal and even technically possible for a young man to lead one’s life without having to speak or write much Finnish. As late as 1938, Allan Mattsson (i.e. at the age of 26) had had to take a course in “practical complementary Finnish” as part of corporate training at Nobel–Standard. (Mattsson, 2017) Gamlakarleby was a dominantly Swedish-speaking rural town in the 1950’s, and it is still considered the “northernmost bilingual town in Finland” (Kokkola, 2021). Based on the 30th anniversary publication by Nobel–Standard — written in Swedish only — and on what we know about Allan Mattsson’s poor command of the Finnish language, it is hard to imagine that he and the company would have had that easy to integrate to the inner circles of business life in the dominantly Finnish-speaking coastal towns of Kalajoki, Pyhäjoki or Raahe.

But all this is speculation. More importantly, it shows the dangers that arise if and when the microhistorical approach is applied without bearing in mind the realist historical context of a given time period in history. As Collingwood would put it, it is a “re-enactment” of the social and mental background developments and trains-of-thought this researcher — his grandson — *believes* might have been going about in Allan Mattsson’s life when he gave his speech; not scientifically proven, but not random imagination or guess work either (Andersen, 2004, p. 307–

308). It may well be that he was homesick and keen on having the harbour speedily located where he had already for some years been building his local connections in his mother tongue. But it is just as likely that he had had such thoughts irrespective of the fact that the logistics calculus proved the location of Yxpila most suitable for an oil imports harbour, and it is almost indisputable that there was an industrial and a geopolitical pressure, both from the company and the Finnish state, to have a Northern oil import harbour built as soon as possible. The linkage between the microhistorical document and macro-level of events and contexts is seldomly unproblematic, which also the Finnish microhistorical theorist, Matti Peltonen, has noted (Peltonen, 2001).

In effect, we simply cannot possibly know if Allan Mattsson and his personal wishes had any real influence on the decision in the first place. At the time, he was, after all, only a regional manager. Further research into the company archives might shed light on how, by whom and based what analysis and advice the decision was made — and if Mr. Mattsson's views on the attractiveness of the local business circles had any real effect on it, as he courteously implies in his speech. Being sent to Gamlakarleby already in 1946 may indicate that there might have been a premeditated or at least preliminary plan, by the Nobel–Standard Company, to locate the harbour in Yxpila anyway. Maybe my grandfather's primary mission as regional manager was not to evaluate different location alternatives but to frizz up the local community and its leaders and administrators to a hassle-free acquisition of land property with as good terms as possible for the company. We do not know. There are no historical sources to confirm or to denounce such speculations; no one involved is around anymore for interview.

Conclusion and future research paths

In this seminar paper, I presented and examined a coincidental historical document, notes made for a speech, given by my grandfather, to a group of Rotary fellows in the Finnish town of Gamlakarleby sometime in the spring of 1950. Encouraged by the article written by scholars Eero Vaara and Juha-Antti Lamberg, I first showed how historically myopic a merely managerial treatment of the business decision depicted in document — that of locating an oil imports harbour — would be, if we were to examine it as a purely logistical calculus problem. Subsequently, I discussed how a historical approach would expand our understanding of what the document and the business decision involved in it was about. Taking a historical realism approach, it is clear that the geopolitical context in which the aforementioned managerial decision eventually was made is much more complex and intricate than a mere logistics calculus. In effect, I opened future research paths that would paint the big picture of the Finnish post-war geopolitics and of the oil and fuel refining

and distribution industry therewithin. It seems the industry, although a prerequisite for a society based on automobiles, is somewhat unresearched, even though the “motorisation” in Finland has had an immense effect on the country since the 1950’s. Further research in this field would be of benefit to all.

On the other hand, taking an interpretive historical approach, I re-enacted some aspects of Allan Mattsson’s life that can be interpreted in and from the document and other letters and that may have had an impact in the decision-making process that eventually led to the construction of Yxpila oil harbour. He had a professional and personal interest in having the harbour built speedily and may have had a bias to promote the location of Yxpila near his offices in the Swedish-speaking town of Gamlakarleby. Bearing in mind the speculative nature of such historical “re-enactments”, however, I reciprocally raised the alarm for such paths of research, as there is nothing to cling to in terms of historical first-hand sources. As above, further research in the company archives would be of benefit, if not to all but to the writer of this seminar paper, and confirm or revoke whether Allan Mattsson had any personal influence in the matter. Only then could we be on the safe side when assessing how his personal biases might have played a part in the process.

Nonetheless, presenting such speculations may not be entirely worthless. To some degree, personal wishes and traits, as expressed by the historical subjects and statisticians themselves in the examined documents and interpreted by the present-day researcher in such seminar papers, may expand our view and understanding on what kind of factors may have had impacted this particular managerial decision and, therefore, should be considered when studying similar strategic and managerial decisions in the past — and in the present.

References:

Andersen, N. (2004): "Repetition and Re-enactment: Collingwood on the Relation between Natural Science and History", in *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* (2004) Vol. XLII, pp. 291–311.

Esso: 'Esso' (2021), Wikipedia. Available at: <https://fi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Esso> (Accessed: 17 October, 2021)

Jussila, O., Heinilä, S. & Nevakivi, J. (2000): *Suomen poliittinen historia 1809–1999*. Werner Söderström Osakeyhtiö, 2000 (Juva).

Kokkola: 'Kokkola', 2021, Wikipedia. Available at: <https://fi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kokkola> (Accessed, 17 October, 2021)

Magnússon, S. G. & Szijártó, I. M. (ed.) (2013): *What is microhistory? Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge.

Mattsson, J. A. (1955) Letter to Paul Larnola, January 31, 1955.

Mattsson, J. A. (1950) Notes to a speech, date unknown, 1950.

Mattsson, K-P. (2017): *Boken om JAM*. Helsinki.

Nobel–Standard (1950): *Nobel–Standard 30 år*. Painoteollisuus Oy (Helsinki).

Nordberg, B. (1953) Letter to Allan Mattsson, November 26, 1953.

Peltonen, M. (2001): "Clues, Margins and Monads: the Micro–Macro Link in Historical Research" in *History and Theory*, 40: p. 347–359.

Simon, J. (2009): *Koneen ruhtinas – Pekka Herlinin elämä*. Otava, 2009 (Helsinki).

Teboil: 'Teboil' (2021), Wikipedia. Available at: <https://fi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teboil> (Accessed: 17 October, 2021).

Vaara, E., & Lamberg, J.-A. (2016): "Taking Historical Embeddedness Seriously: Three Historical Approaches to Advance Strategy Process and Practice Research." in *Academy of Management Review*, 41(4): pp. 633–57.

Wahlroos, B. (2021): Interview in Helsingin Sanomat October 14, 2021. Available at: <https://www.hs.fi/visio/art-2000008293263.html> (Accessed: 17 October, 2021)