The quest for publicness: political conflict about the organisation of tramways and telecommunication in Sweden, c. 1900–1920

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ABSTRACT
This article explores political conflicts about the organisation of public services in Sweden c. 1900–1920. The authors argue that political decisions play a vital role in shaping the political economy of public services. The case studies analysed are the political debates about the communalisation of the tramway system in Stockholm, and the nationalisation of Sweden’s last private telephone company. In both cases, the transfer of the service to public organisation was a lengthy process, ending in the late 1910s. This is explained using the concept of publicness. Drawing on three discursive chains, the argument is that the political development was affected by the politicians conception of the political community, the form of organisation and by perceptions of values such as equal access and modernity. In the case of the tramways, public organisation was seen as the best option to defend the public against corruption and self-interest. In the case of the telephones, free market competition was seen as a guarantee for an efficient and cost-effective service. The reason for this difference, is argued, was that the debate on the tramways articulated a clearer notion of publicness, where equal access and public opinion carried larger weight.

1. Introduction
This article addresses political conflict over the organisation of public services in Sweden at the turn of the century, c. 1900. It is part of a research project where we analyse similar discussions from the mid-seventeenth to the late twentieth century (Hallenberg & Linnarsson, 2016). Our starting point is that the organisation of public services is a political as well as an economical problem. The following analysis argues that political decisions play a vital role in shaping the management of public services. We also argue that the history of privatisation, communalisation and nationalisation must be studied from a long time perspective. Discussions over who has the right to organise the common good has remained a leading trope in European history to this day, which makes it all the more important to see how political discourse on this subject has developed and changed over time.

The late twentieth century saw great changes in the organisation of public services in the western world. Many services, previously organised as governmental agencies, became subject to competition on the free market, and several others were privatised and separated from the state. Beginning in the 1980s, buzzwords like ‘de-regulation’, ‘privatisation’ and the so-called ‘public–private partnerships’ led the development towards an organisation form of the public sector, mimicking those used in the private corporate sector (e.g. Nevalainen, 2016). This development is perhaps most epitomised in...
Margaret Thatcher’s Great Britain, where these radical changes led to major political conflicts, converging on the question whether private or public organisations ought to be the providers of public services and public goods (Marquand, 2004, pp. 88–89). Nonetheless, it was an all-western process, transforming the organisation of public services all over the world, and in some respects, it is still in progress.

The political upheavals of the late twentieth century are usually explained by neo-liberal economics gaining influence and popularity during the time period (Boréus, 1994, pp. 62ff.; Marquand, 2004). Nevertheless, the development must also be understood as a reaction against the past. Conflicts about the organisation of public services, and tasks identified as belonging to the public, have a long political history. For example, late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe experienced an opposite development, compared to the changes in the 1980s. Many services that were organised by private companies, or by corporative associations, were then taken over by municipal and state authorities. This latter development is the subject for the present study.

This article analyses political debates about two important public services in the early twentieth century: tramways and telecommunications. Our case is Sweden, and the subject of investigation the organisation of those two businesses in Stockholm, c. 1900–1920. The expansion of infrastructure in the beginning of the 1900s represented a major challenge for state and municipal authorities, the construction of water and wastewater facilities, establishing new communication networks, erecting public buildings and more (Nilsson & Forsell, 2013, p. 18). The debates about tramways and telecommunications have been chosen as they represent public services under fierce scrutiny at the turn of the century, and in both cases generated widespread political debates. The study thus contributes to the research fields of historical political economy and public organisation.

Both the tramways and the telephones were introduced in Sweden in the 1870s, and in both cases, the public authorities showed little interest in the beginning. Private operators therefore initiated the development, and following a period of unregulated establishment, tramways and telephones became a matter for public concern in the beginning of the new century. This development coincides with an all-European trajectory: in the field of economic history, both businesses have been described as having natural monopoly characteristics (e.g. Millward, 2009, p. 546). However, given the development in the period 1900–1920, the Swedish case must also be discussed from a political perspective.

Hence, the objective of the following study is to account for the political discussions about organisation form regarding the tramways and the telecommunications, and to explain the shift towards public/communal organisation. Our premise is that these debates are part in the construction of a larger perception of publicness. However, we are not interested in the actual organisation form, per se. Rather, the focus is on the debates and the discussions about public or private organisation. To us, this is a political conflict, and we presuppose that an analysis of this conflict may contribute to an explanation of why certain forms of organisation were preferred. The decisions were made at the political arenas – in our case, the city council of Stockholm and the Swedish parliament.

The source material comprises the minutes and documents, such as government bills and committee reports, from the city council and the parliament. For this study Mats Hallenberg has analysed the discussion in the Stockholm city council regarding a possible communalisation of the tramway system in 1902–1903, while Magnus Linnarsson has focused on the telephone debate in the Swedish parliament of 1902. In the sources, we primarily look for arguments and concepts that have been used to articulate the ‘public interest’, or the ‘public good’: for example, good order, justice, lowest cost and individual freedom. We also look for arguments and concepts that have been used to favour a private organisation: efficiency, lowest cost and the advantage of competition. We seek to answer the following questions:

1. What concepts and arguments were used by political agents to advocate or criticise public or private organisation?
2. What were the main lines of argument, and how do they relate to the construction of ‘publicness’?
1.1. Sweden 1900 – the heyday of public organisation?

Previous research has demonstrated how the period around 1900 marked a shift in the relations between political bodies and private enterprise. This saw the start of investment in great infrastructure systems: sanitation, public transport and electrification (Kaijser, van der Vleuten, & Högselius, 2016; Millward, 2005; Toninelli, 2000). Scholars have characterised this as a second wave of utility regulation, in which political bodies strengthened their role in the management and ownership of public services (Clifton, Lanthier, & Schröter, 2011). In general terms, this has been described as the end of classic laissez-faire capitalism and the dawn of an era where state and communal intervention into private business operations became the order of the day (e.g. Torstendahl, 1984, pp. 157–174).

On the national level, Swedish scholars have argued that the government was promoting public interest already in the mid-nineteenth century by actively regulating the affairs of private agents. According to this view, the state was always active in controlling and organising the conditions for private enterprise (Kaijser, 1986; Magnusson, 2009). In Sweden, the government not only invested in railway main lines from the mid-1800s but also intervened to protect natural resources as well as promoting commercial interest (Åmark, 1994; Klander, 1991; Nilsson, 1989; Nilsson, 1994).

The cases studied in this article, tramways and telecommunications, are examples on activities regulated by public authorities during the beginning of the 1900s. The trend was that the state intervened in private companies; what Lars Magnusson has called ‘the visible hand’ of the state (Magnusson, 2009). One explanation for this increase in state control, proposed by historians, has been the concept of path dependency (Andersson-Skog, 1997, pp. 152–153; Jacobsen, 2004, p. 13). Although the development in Sweden and in other Nordic countries followed different paths, the overall development showed similar traits. This demonstrates that different institutional settings can provide similar results, indicating that technological explanations are not enough to understand the development. Rather, this motivates a stronger emphasise on the political arena, the one investigated in this study. To explain the increased state intervention in the period, politics has to be studied.

On the municipal level, city councils and other political bodies in Western Europe gradually articulated their claims to represent the general public against the private companies supplying essential services like gas, electricity or public transport. This development was also prominent in the United States, but in the late twentieth century contracting out of public services assumed increased importance in many American cities. Some cities turned to private contractors, for handling waste collection, while others relied on city employees (Heim, 2015; Strach & Sullivan, 2015). A similar development took place in Italy, where for example street lighting was carried out both by private companies and by public management (Schisani & Caiazzo, 2016). By 1900, German towns had become something of a role model for urban planning, and municipal engineers played a vital role in transforming the city in favour of public organisation (Albers, 1997; Hård & Stippak, 2008). For Great Britain, Martin Daunton has demonstrated how local politicians acted to regulate the prize on public goods and later intervened by direct communalisation of private suppliers. City councils motivated this policy with the need to protect private consumers against private companies (Daunton & Hilton, 2001; cf. Millward & Ward, 1993).

In Sweden, Henrik Björck has demonstrated how municipal operations expanded in the same period. Civil servants and other experts articulated public solutions to address both technological and social problems (Björck, 2008). Scholars have also discussed this development using the concept of corporatism, focusing on the political exchange between organised interest and the government (e.g. Andersson & Pettersson, 2015; Eriksson, 2016; Rothstein, 1992). However, our perspective emphasises the importance of political debates, rather than organisational patterns and forms. Therefore, we will focus on the political and discursive forces propelling changes in the management of public services.
1.2. The construction of ‘publicness’

As stated above, the basis for the subsequent analysis is that the political conflicts studied not only represent economical or technological considerations. Rather, the debates articulate notions of the ‘public good’, and the ‘public interest’. In the analysis we make use of the concept of publicness to describe this. Publicness is the combination of ideas, people and practices, etc., which have been made public, comprising a process in which matters of connective concern have been made visible for the public. The concept has been developed by the British political scientists Newman and Clarke (2009) in their analysis of the changing organisation of public services in the late twentieth century.

In our analysis, the concept of publicness corresponds to the concept of ‘figure of thought’ (Denkfigur, tankefigur), among others, developed by the Swedish sociologist Johan Asplund (1979). A figure of thought is a basic pattern of thoughts, upon which all of our cognitive reasoning is based. A figure of thought, like publicness, includes several discourses, relating to various political issues, in this case the debates about the organisation of public services like tramways and telephones (e.g. Hallenberg & Linnarsson, 2016, pp. 34–36).

Previous research has shown that the design of public services has been of great importance for the internal cohesion of the community and for the creation of collective identities (Braddick, 2000; Epstein, 2006; He, 2015; Slack, 1999). Thus, the organisation of public services contributes to a society’s perception of the significance of the public, and it is this consciousness that makes up publicness. This implies that the citizens in a community take part in political discussions about the organisation of such services. Furthermore, possible changes in the organisation form create political conflicts about the purpose and goals of the contested service (Newman & Clarke, 2009, pp. 2–4). These conflicts constitute several discourses about publicness, generating interesting questions; who is part of it, what is it and how does it change?

On a theoretical level, the number of discourses is of course multiplied. Newman and Clarke have singled out three discursive chains that each of them constitutes important parts of the construction of publicness (Newman & Clarke, 2009, p. 13). The first of these chains defines the idea of the political community: the citizens, the people and the nation, which together form the public. The second discursive chain constructs the public, based on the organisation responsible for the public service: the state and the public sector. The third discursive chain links a consciousness of the public to values of political rights and freedom. It reinforces notions of independent public actors, ready to defend the public against corruption and other forms of self-interest (Newman & Clarke, 2009, pp. 11–15). Taken together, these discursive chains help us understand and explain what defines and constitutes publicness, why some services were regarded as vital to the public and who had a say in discussions concerning their organisation.

Our previous research has demonstrated that the notion of publicness from the mid-nineteenth century became increasingly linked to the idea of communal organisation, that is, operations run by communal or state bodies. In the debate on the Swedish national railway system, as well as in the discussions on sanitary services in Stockholm, references to freedom of enterprise were frequently pitted against arguments for equal access to public goods and notions of effective management by political bodies (Hallenberg & Linnarsson, 2016, pp. 60–62). In the following study we will look for similar conflicts in the debates on telephone infrastructure and public tramways.

2. Tramways in Stockholm

By the end of the nineteenth century Stockholm, like many other cities, was experiencing rapid population growth. In the wake of industrialisation, the capital’s population rose from c. 130,000 inhabitants in 1870 to more than 300,000 around 1900. Most of the new residents formed the core of a new urban working class, and social problems regarding housing, sanitation and welfare policy became urgent matters for the city fathers to solve. By the turn of the new century the problem of housing held a prominent position in local politics (Forsell, 2003; Sheiban, 2002). In order to
provide housing for the growing population, the city had to acquire land to prospect new urban districts outside of the old city limits. This in turn meant that public transport services had to be extended beyond the city centre, and the organisation of the Stockholm tramway system thus became a major bone of contention. The following study focuses on the debate of 1902–1903 when the city council discussed the electrification of the northern part of the tramway system. Since this project required large investment the matter soon turned into a political conflict between those who advocated a communalisation of the entire tram system, and those who insisted that the city tramways were more effectively run by a private company.

Public tramways had been introduced to Stockholm in the 1870s, by private initiative. In 1876, the city council granted a concession for The Stockholm New Tramway Company (sw: *Stockholms Nya Spårvägsaktiebolag*) to operate tramways in the northern part of the city for the next 40 years, up until the end of 1916. The service would be run by horse-drawn trams, which was the main reason for leaving out the southern parts of the town where the hills were deemed too steep for the horses to climb. In 1887 a competing organisation, the Stockholm Southern Tramway Company (sw: *Stockholms Södra Spårvägsaktiebolag*), was launched to provide transport by steam trams. The company soon reverted to using horse-drawn trams, but the Southern tramway system remained in operation.

The situation with two rivalling companies meant that travelling from south to north (and vice versa) posed major obstacles for the people of Stockholm. In 1898 a proposal was made for electrification of the Southern Company’s tramway lines, a plan implemented in 1901 thanks to funding by the private investment bank *Enskilda banken*. This prompted the Northern Company to apply for a similar arrangement (Holmberg, 1960, pp. 4–11).

In western countries like Britain, France and Germany the development of urban public transport had expanded in the late nineteenth century. The introduction of electric power from the 1890s provided municipal bodies with a strong incentive to place private transport services under public control. German cities in particular became role models for communal organisation and planning of public transport. Copenhagen had a tramway system run by private operators since 1863, but in 1895 a law was passed that granted the city right to take over the system when the company’s concession expired (Jensen, 1981). In Sweden, the city council of Gothenburg in 1900 decided to take over and run the tramway system as a public service, in order to ensure a swift transition to electric power. This course of events provided the backdrop to the debate on electrification and communalisation of the Stockholm tramways the following year.¹

The discussion in the Stockholm city council initiated from a proposal forwarded by G.E. Westermark in February 1900. Westermark argued that the Stockholm tramways were in a worse state than that of other cities, due to the lack of electrification. He suspected that the New Tramway Company would be reluctant to provide the necessary investment unless they were granted a new concession that stretched way beyond 1916. This, however, Westermark considered to be incompatible with ‘the interest of the city’. He demanded that the municipal bodies should enter into negotiations with the company, in order to secure a communal takeover of the northern tramway system by 1905.² The proposal started a chain of reactions from the city’s municipal bodies. In March 1901 A.O. Alkreutz from the City building office (sw: *byggnadskontoret*) stated that the tramway system was of vital importance for the city’s future development. He argued that private companies in general had little interest in providing less profitable services, and that the Stockholm tramway system would benefit from being run by public management. The Tramway Company, Alkreutz claimed, had made substantial profit on the operation, and the city therefore had no obligation to pay heed to its business interest. However, he also acknowledged that the company did have a valid concession to operate the system until 1916 and that it would cost the city a great deal to buy the company out. Therefore,

¹On the municipalisation of tramways see Hietala (1987, pp. 248–258) and Millward (2005, pp. 76–87). See also Hård and Stippak (2008) on the influence from German city planning. In 1915, Member of Parliament Karl Hildebrand published an extensive survey on contemporary urban tramway services in Europe, as an argument against communalisation (Hildebrand, 1914).

²Stockholms stadsarkiv (SSA), Stockholms Stadsfullmäktiges handlingar (SSF), Berednings-utskottets utfåtanden och memorial (BU) 1903, bihang 31, G.E. Westermarks proposal, 1 February 1900.
Alkreutz recommended that the city grant the Tramway Company right to electrify the existing lines under the explicit condition that the whole system may be redeemed by the city council when the concession period was over.  

Other municipal bodies followed suit, but there was little consensus. The Chamber office (sw: Kammarkontoret) suggested that a new offer from the Tramway Company, to organise the transition to electrically powered trams in return for a prolonged traffic concession, would be more favourable to the city. The first section of the Municipal finance board (sw: Drätselnämnden) was less enthusiastic, arguing that the city should not concede to any extension of the time period in question. The second section of the same body agreed that a conflict of interest was at hand: private companies will inevitably protect their business interests, while the city council must see to the public interest and make the necessary preparations for a municipal takeover of the tramway system. The proposal from the Advisory committee (sw: Beredningsutskottet) was inevitably something of a compromise. The committee suggested that the council should agree to the company’s plan for electrification, although the concession period must remain fixed until 31 December 1916. There were also detailed requests for construction of new tramway lines to make the transport system more effective. To appease the Tramway Company, the city would offer improved terms for the company’s operation. These included a lower price on the electric power provided by the City, and that the council would renounce all claims for a share in the company’s profit. The city would thus offer the company subsidised terms to continue the operation. The board also stated that the city must renounce all claims on company revenue to facilitate the necessary investment.

Such was the proposal that the city councillors of Stockholm started debating on 26 November 1902. The discussants can be roughly divided into three more or less distinctive camps: the proponents of public organisation argued that the time was ripe for a communal takeover; the city’s tramways were a matter of public interest and should therefore be managed directly by the municipal bodies. Their opponents maintained that private companies were far more effective than communal bodies when it came to running business operations, and that communalisation would result in financial demands on the city’s taxpayers. Therefore, the tramway system must continue to be run by the private company on an extended municipal concession. A third party recognised that the Tramway system should indeed be controlled by public interest, but that the timing might not yet be right; better let the company bear the full cost for electrifying the tramway lines, the city may then move in and take over the operations when the concession had expired. In the meantime, municipal control may be secured by introducing new regulations to the proposed contract.

2.1. The debate

Gustav Harald Lundbergh started the debate by declaring the advisory board’s proposal unsatisfactory, while the city must have full guarantee that new tramway lines would soon be extended to the city limits. He also insisted that prices must be kept low to guarantee that the less fortunate citizens may still use the tramways. Lundbergh set the tone for the following discussion by focusing on two important topics. The council must have full control over the planning and construction of new lines so that the city would be able to prosper and grow in the future. The council members must also see the concern of the working population, to ensure that public transport was available for everyone. The discussion thus had a clear bias from the beginning: many council members were sceptical of the Tramway Company’s motifs, and believed that the tramway system must be run by the city the council.

6 SSA, SSF, BU bihang 31:1902, Reports from Axel Ekwall, A.V. Feychting and E. Liljewalch.
7 SSA, SSF, Report no. 182 from the Advisory committee, 13 November 1902.
8 A general relation of the discussion is found in the official minutes, Stockholms Stadsfullmäktiges protokoll med tillhörande yttranden samt motioner (SSF minutes) 1902, P139 and following pages. This study mainly focuses on the statements from individual members, recorded in the same volume.
for benefit of the public good. There was also the widespread notion that the company had been able to make huge profit on running the tramways.

Emil Hammarlund expressed similar concerns in his first statement. Hammarlund argued that the city should convince the company to surrender all their claims and assign the tramway system with all equipment to the municipal bodies. He referred directly to the public opinion and the voices of the press: ‘The tramways are made for the greater public, and the greater public knows where the rub is.’ Count von Rosen likewise claimed that the transport system must be managed directly by the city, to make sure that the different parts of the city could be effectively connected to one another. Veteran member Sixten Gabriel von Friesen also supported the idea that the city must own the tramway system. Although von Friesen claimed himself ‘no friend of the idea that the city should unnecessarily run industrial operations’, he maintained that the tramway system must be considered as ‘a kind of monopoly’ and was therefore of exceptional importance. Von Friesen here referred directly to the contemporary discussion of ‘natural monopolies’, which must be run by public servants to avoid exploitation by private business interests.

All the speakers mentioned above insisted that the proposal must be sent back to the advisory committee, with the explicit instruction to make an inquiry of how the city could gain full control over the tramway system. Their opponents claimed that private management in general had proven more effective than municipal operations, and that a decision in favour of communalisation would only serve to delay the anticipated transition to electric power. Knut A. Wallenberg, director of the city’s most important investment bank, declared that he did not consider the city competent at handling industrial enterprise. He also rallied against the wave of ‘municipalisation’, which threatened to chase private industrialists away, turning the city into a home for ‘civil servants and pensioners’. Wallenberg advocated a prolongation of the company’s concession up to 1926, which he claimed would guarantee all citizens the benefit of modern transport without any further delay. However, he consented that public opinion seemed hostile to such a settlement. Wallenberg received some support from Gustaf Dyrssen, who argued that a communal takeover was too risky at this point. It was preferable to let the company experiment with the task of electrification; the municipal body might then benefit from this experience should the city realise their claim for the operation in 1917. Dyrssen thus agreed that the company must keep the concession and make the necessary preparations for introducing electrical operation according to the proposal.

Other legates voiced their support for the Tramway Company even more forcefully. Johan Östberg argued that the city council must refrain from managing industrial enterprise. Running the public tramway system by private management was clearly the best solution, since private enterprise ‘naturally’ ensured a more effective economy. Östberg claimed that the city’s previous attempts at doing business had proven inferior in every sense. Charles de Champs maintained that the council had to agree on a swift answer to the advisory board. Management by the municipality would entail increasing expenditure on the tramway staff: salaries, sickness compensations, vacations, etc. The objective must be to run the operation in the cheapest way, and it would surely not be harmful to the municipality if some of its members made a profit of industrial enterprise. De Champs’s view was therefore that the company must be allowed to carry out the necessary modernisation so that the city council might benefit from the experience. The city should also demand a larger share of

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8 SSA, SSF minutes 1902, Emil Hammarlund’s statement, p. Y480, ‘ty spårvägarna äro till för den stora allmänheten, och det är den stora allmänheten, som bäst vet var skön klämmer’.


10 SSA, SSF minutes 1902, von Friesen’s statement, p. Y515.


the private company’s profit when negotiating the new concession. Many councillors, even some conservatives, agreed that the city must secure a larger part of the revenue.

While these two camps were clearly at odds with each other, there were also members who argued for a compromise. Commissioner Clason saw it fit to remind his peers that the modernisation of the transport system was the main objective of the proposal, not the issue of private enterprise versus communalisation. Clason was one of several members who wanted a thorough investigation of the tramways’ future organisation before deciding on the matter of electrification. Lage Uddenberg, the city’s tax sheriff, supported the request for an investigation while maintaining that the timing for a municipal takeover was all wrong. If the city should try to acquire the assets of the Tramway Company immediately, this would surely mean paying an inflated prize for out-of-date equipment. Like Clason and others, Uddenberg wanted to send the proposal back to the advisory board rather than making a premature decision.

A key figure in the debate was the council’s vice-chairman, Carl Erik Ekgren. Ekgren recognised that there was considerable pressure from public opinion to modernise the tramways, while insisting that the company’s offer for extending the tramway system was of vital interest to the city. He did not regard Westermark’s original proposal for a communal takeover by 1905 realistic, and argued that an official arrangement with the private company was the cheapest and swiftest route for reforming the tramway system. Ekgren objected to the idea of starting a new investigation, as this would only serve to postpone the necessary investments. The vice-chairman instead suggested postponing the decision for 14 days to make the necessary adjustments in the proposed contract with the Tramway Company.

This suggestion provoked an intensive bickering between council members over the nature of the decision. Eventually, a vote was called for, and the council decided in favour of the last-named resort. The matter of electrifying the Stockholm tramway system was thus sent back to the advisory board, accompanied by a string of statements demanding clarification of specific articles in the agreement. These referred to the company’s priority on constructing new lines, as well as its commitment to buy electricity from the city’s power station. The problem of re-locating current tramway lines must also be addressed. To make matters even more complicated, Commissioner Alderin handed in an individual proposal, demanding an official inquiry on the future of the tramway system. Alderin’s move was motivated by the widespread notion ‘that the tramway company holds a monopoly which prevents the city from making any modification of the traction network without the company’s consent’.

2.2. The arguments

Our previous study on debates concerning private/public management has indicated that questions regarding effective organisation, a just distribution and equal access to public services, as well as low cost for the average taxpayer held prominence in political discourse from the mid-eighteenth century. There was also the important issue of personal honour and liberty, which might compel the leading burghers to insist that they would organise public services like street lightning and sanitation by themselves, without interference by communal bodies (Hallenberg & Linnarsson, 2016).

The survey above has demonstrated that the problem of finding the most effective organisation was central to the debate. However, there was little consensus on whether private management was better than public operation, or vice versa. The proponents of communalisation argued that full municipal control over the tramway system was fundamental to the planning and development of

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15SSA, SSF minutes 26 November 1902, de Champs’s statement, pp. Y510–Y512. A similar approach for ensuring the city a larger share of the company’s profit was advocated by Östberg, p. Y494.

16For example, statement by Johan Östberg, SSF minutes 1903, Y52.


18SSA, SSF minutes 26 November 1902, Uddenberg’s statement, p. Y490.

19SSA, SSF minutes 26 November 1902, Statement by the vice chairman, pp. Y504–Y505.

20SSA, SSF minutes 26 November 1902, P139.

the city’s future. Their antagonists retorted that municipal bodies were not competent of running industrial enterprise, an agreement with the New Tramway Company was therefore a superior alternative. It is interesting to note, however, that the spokesmen for municipal organisation successfully aligned their standpoint to notions of modernity and progress. From their point of view urban planning, sanitary housing and a modern system of public transport were problems of the future that must be solved by effective municipal control over all operations. The advocates of private enterprise could make no such claims; they argued instead that private enterprise offered a much cheaper alternative. Communal organisation was thus designated to be modern and rational, while private enterprise was pictured as a less optimal but financially sound solution to the same problem.\(^\text{22}\)

There were also arguments that appear as newcomers in the political discourse, compared with similar debates in the previous centuries. References to the public opinion – the writings of the press or plainly ‘the public’ – were often present in the debate on the tramways. For supporters of public organisation this was a clear advantage, and they explicitly connected references to public opinion with claims for a fair distribution of public goods. Robert Alderin thus combined the proposal of special tramway services for workers with a challenge that the city council must listen to ‘the legitimate claim of the general public’.\(^\text{23}\) For supporters of private enterprise on the other hand, public opinion posed something of a problem.

Even the national and international role models seemed to be in favour of a communal takeover. Many councillors were aware of a tidal wave of communalisation sweeping over Europe. In the discussions concerning public street lightning in the mid-1700s, as well as in the debate on public sanitation in the 1850s, Stockholm’s image as the modern, important-looking capital of Sweden and Europe had large impact. On both occasions the city sent their experts abroad to investigate how public services were organised in other towns. There were calls for a similar approach for the tramways, but this was refuted in favour of a swift decision. Vice-chairman Ekgren declared that the Stockholm tramways must be electrified as soon as possible, so that the town would not be placed behind ‘communities of far less importance’.\(^\text{24}\) Quite a few of the council members looked to the city of Gothenburg, who had communalised its tramway system two years before with the introduction of electric power. Charles de Champs did not believe that Stockholm had the means to follow the example, however. He stated that Gothenburg was a business community, where people knew how to manage money, labour and work time; ‘I regret that I cannot say the same of Stockholm.’\(^\text{25}\) Fellow commissioner Karl Herlitz immediately reproached him:

> Yes, gentlemen, that is precisely the point, that we must help the people of Stockholm […] to overcome all the defaults that Mr de Champs thinks they have, compared with the people of Gothenburg.\(^\text{26}\)

Herlitz’s statement points to a core argument for municipal organisation. The city council must organise the transport system in a way that would benefit all citizens and make this form of public good available to everyone. Most councillors tended to agree that public control over the tramways was the ultimate goal, but they differed on how and when the task could best be accomplished.

### 2.3. The outcome

Although several council members had demanded an investigation on the terms for a communal takeover, the advisory board chose to neglect this option. Instead they concentrated on negotiating a modified contract with the New Tramway Company, adding specific instructions for the extension

\(^{22}\)The proposal that private operation was a cheaper alternative did not go unchallenged, however. Karl Herlitz argued to the contrary by claiming that increased income from the electric tramways would soon make up for any deficit; statements, pp. Y498–500.

\(^{23}\)SSA, SSF minutes 26 November 1902, Robert Alderin’s statement, p. Y488.

\(^{24}\)SSA, SSF minutes 26 November 1902, Statement by the vice chairman, p. Y505.

\(^{25}\)SSA, SSF minutes 26 November 1902, de Champs, p. Y524.

\(^{26}\)SSA, SSF minutes 26 November 1902, Y526. ‘Ja, mine herrar, det vore just nu meningen, att man skulle försöka hjälpa Stockholmarne […] att öfvervinna de fel, som de enligt herr de Champs hafva, i jämförelse med Göteborgarne’.\[M. HALLENBERG AND M. LINNARSSON\]
of new tramway lines as well as traffic arrangements for special ‘workers’ trains’ operating at a reduced ticket fare. The problem of electrifying public transport had strengthened a political agenda: the city council must make plans for integrating the city centre with the suburbs, in social as well as in spatial terms. However, the preferred means would be private management under intensified control by the municipality. This updated proposal was discussed by the city council on 2 February 1903.²⁷ Although several commissioners complained that the demands for a new investigation had not been heard, the debate focused on the special amendments. While the statements will not be related in detail here, it is sufficient to say that the councillors focused on the terms for making the benefit of modern transport available to the general public. On 16 March the proposal was finally accepted. The Tramway Company had presented a detailed plan for the future extension of their tramway lines, as well as a tariff rate that allowed fixed prices for the working poor.²⁸

Electrification of the northern tramway lines was accomplished in the years 1903–1905 and the New Tramway Company remained in operation until December 1916. During this period several new suburban lines were constructed by the municipality, connecting Enskede, Hägersten, Bromma and Hagalund with the company services operating the city centre. A new debate opened in the city council in 1915. This time there were few councillors advocating a prolonged concession for the company, and the discussion resulted in the formation of a new public transport company: Stockholms Spårvägars Aktiebolag in 1916. Initially shares were split 50/50 between private shareholders and the municipality, but within a few years the city had acquired 100% of the shares. Jan Östlund, who has analysed these discussions, argues that the conservative majority in the council could no longer hold together against the widespread critique from liberal and socialist members. They consented to a 50/50 partnership, but this was only a temporary compromise (Östlund, 1995). By 1920 the public transport system was fully operated by the city, and the wave of communalisation had finally reached its northern shore.

3. Private or public telephones

When the telephone first was introduced in Sweden in the late 1870s, the Swedish government showed little interest in the new technical innovation. Since 1853 the telegraph had been established as a state monopoly, run by the Swedish Telegraph Agency (sw: Telegrafverket). Accordingly, the new device was seen as merely as a complement to the telegraph, and the government officials saw no great future for the novelty. The initial development of the Swedish telephone network therefore became a matter for private companies and local non-profit telephone associations. Shortly, however, the need for central planning, and utmost the need for interurban telephone lines, forced the state to take action.

The initial assessment of the future prospects for the telephone had proved incorrect, and from the 1890s the Swedish government, through the Telegraph Agency, started to purchase private telephone companies and acquire telephone associations all over the country. In 1900, more than 400 local telephone networks had been taken over by the Telegraph Agency and integrated with the national telephone system (Heimbürger, 1931, pp. 181–183). This was part of a deliberate strategy, implemented by the Swedish government, targeting the goal of one nationwide uniform telephone network, operated by the Swedish Telegraph Agency.

In 1902, except for a few smaller networks in the countryside, only one large company remained before this policy was fully implemented – the Stockholm General Telephone Company (sw: Stockholms allmänna telefonaktiebolag). Started in 1883, the Telephone Company had grown to the incomparably largest private telephone corporation in Sweden. Its operations in the Stockholm area covered no less than one-third of the total subscribers in the entire Swedish telephone network (Heimbürger, 1931, p. 182). Due to the considerable size of the company, the corporation could not

²⁷SSA, SSF Report no. U17 from the Advisory committee, 19 January 1903.
be bought by the Telegraph Agency without funding from the Swedish parliament (sw: Riksdagen). Therefore, the question of the acquisition became a political issue for the Swedish parliament, beginning in 1902, when the government presented a bill to the parliament to buy the company.

As it turned out, the proposal was rejected, and the question of whether the state should buy the Telephone Company or not became a recurring issue for the Swedish parliamentarians. The matter was not solved until 1918, when the parliament finally agreed to allocate funds for the acquisition of the Telephone Company, at that time renamed as Stockholm Telephone Company (sw: Aktiebolaget Stockholmstelefon). The decision in 1918 unified the Swedish telephone network under state control, operated by the Telegraph Agency. Up until the late 1900s this agency held a de facto monopoly on the telecom market in Sweden.

The development of the Swedish telephone market is similar to the development of telephone systems in the other Nordic countries. In Denmark, the telephone was also introduced in the 1870s, and the state authorities, like their Swedish counterparts, showed little interest in the beginning. As in Sweden, the Danish telephone network was therefore characterised by a rapid growth of regional private telephone companies and associations (Andersson-Skog, 1997, pp. 142–144).

Following the introduction of local telephone companies in the 1880s, the need for interurban connections also became evident in Denmark. The Danish authorities were forced to take action, and in 1883 the Danish parliament tried to enforce a law excluding private companies from operating any electrical communications at all. However, this attempt to nationalise the telephone market failed, and instead a regional restriction on the private companies was imposed (Thestrup, 1992, pp. 248–252). In 1887, though, the Danish parliament instituted the ‘Telephone and Telegraph act’. This legislation solved the regulation problems on the Danish telephone market, by establishing a state monopoly on telecommunications. Nevertheless, the law provided the opportunity to pass on this right to private companies through concessions. Consequently, the act resulted in a situation where the private companies, under concessions given by the state, could pursue their operations, even though the telephone was a state monopoly (Thestrup, 1992, pp. 256–258).

The structure of the Danish telephone market, therefore, became a hybrid between public monopoly and private service. In the period 1918–1920, Danish politicians considered whether to nationalise or re-negotiate the concessions for the private companies. The parliament decided in favour of the latter, arguing that the purchase of the companies would be too expensive (Andersson-Skog, 1997, p. 143).

The Finnish case shows similarities to Denmark inasmuch that the Finnish senate in the 1880s decided to keep the telephone operation in the hands of private enterprises. One reason for this was to avoid Russian control over the telephone network (Andersson-Skog, 2000, p. 42). Norway initially followed similar trajectories as in Denmark and Sweden, where private companies pursued the introduction. However, in the early 1920s a united national telephone network was established under the aegis of the state (Andersson-Skog, 1997, p. 146).

Accordingly, the development of telephone networks in the Nordic countries followed two trajectories. Denmark and Finland relied more heavily on private enterprise to run the service, while Sweden and Norway followed a process towards nationalisation (Andersson-Skog, 2000, pp. 38–43).

3.1. The parliamentary debate

Between 1902 and 1918 the question of an eventual state purchase of the private telephone company sparked several debates in the Swedish parliament, circling round the issue of private or public management of the telephone services in the country. The debates highlight arguments for and against private entrepreneurs in the field of services, defined as public goods, or public services. Henceforth, the telephone debate in the parliament in 1902 will be analysed and the lines of argument presented. Several of the arguments put forward in 1902 would be repeated in the following debates up until 1918.

The parliamentary processing of the telephone matter in 1902 was preceded by negotiations between the Telegraph Agency and the Telephone Company. The two parties had reached an
agreement on a purchase contract where the Swedish state should pay the private telephone company almost 11 million Swedish kronor. Drawing on the agreement, the government presented a bill to the parliament, asking for an approval for the necessary funding to implement the transaction. The Minister for Public administration (sw: civilminister), Edvard von Krusenstjerna, argued in the proposal that the state, the Telegraph Agency, was responsible for the arrangement of the telephone network in the country. He added that it was in the public interest that the state took over the private telephone company, and that the future development of the national telephone system was dependent on the purchase. 29 Krusenstjerna and the government outlined three principle arguments to why the state should buy the company: administrative efficiency, state economic grounds and personal financial reasons. First, if the Telegraph Agency was in charge of the telephone system, the bureaucracy involved would be simplified, and second, in turn that would save money for the state. Third, the unification of the telephone system would mean cheaper prices for the individual consumers. Consequently, it was in the ‘natural interest’ of the public that the state took control of the company, according to the government. 30

The last argument was related to the fact that a state overtaking of the Telephone Company in practice would eliminate all competition on the telephone market. This had been criticised in the press, where the risk of a state monopoly was discussed (Heimbürger, 1931, pp. 242–243). Krusenstjerna and the government responded that there was no need for competition on the telephone market – indeed the competition was harmful for the development of the telephone system. 31

The government bill was referred to the State Committee (sw: Statsutskottet), the parliamentary committee that preparers proposals on funding, grants, etc. The committee considered the proposal to buy the ‘Telephone Company and concluded that there were no reasons for the state to take over the private company. According to the committee, the present organisation of the Swedish telephone system was fully satisfactory to the public. In opposition to the government, the committee believed that the competition on the market was crucial, when it came to pricing policy and customer service. 32 Since the Telegraph Agency was in control of the interurban telephone lines, the agency already held a strong position on the market. A unification of the entire telephone system under state control would, according to the committee, not ‘satisfy the public interest’. 33

When the parliamentary debate started in May 1902, in the bicameral Swedish parliament, the government proposal to buy the private Telephone Company stood against the rejection from the State Committee. The debate was most extensive in the second chamber, where the opposition to the proposed deal was massive. Edvard von Krusenstjerna spoke for the government, and objected against the committees’ conclusion, that the purchase of the Telephone Company would not be beneficial to the public, or to the state. He argued that it indeed was in the interest of the public to unify the telephone system of the country:

For it must surely be that the public should become cheaper and better served under a unified telephone system, a one that when it belongs to the state, do not like the private companies, have to take into account what is for these companies a quite natural and often necessary precaution, namely to increase economic profit. 34

29 The sources from the Swedish parliament are published in the printed series of parliamentary documents (sw: Riksdagens protokoll med bihang). References are given to the standardised volume and collection numbers; Government bill regarding the purchase of private telephone networks, 1902, No. 64, p. 7.
30 Government bill regarding the purchase of private phone networks, 1902, No. 64, p. 9.
31 Government bill regarding the purchase of private phone networks, 1902, No. 64, p. 23.
32 Formal report by the State Committee, No. 66, 1902, 4 saml. 1 avd., p. 6.
33 Formal report by the State Committee, No. 66, 1902, 4 saml. 1 avd., p. 6, ‘tillgodoseende af allmänhetens intresse’.
34 Minutes second chamber (AK) 3 May 1902, IV:41, p. 44.
This market economy, described and criticised by Krusenstjerna, would be negative for the consumers; alas the state would not need to take these economic considerations in the operation of the telephone system. Krusenstjerna and the government saw the telephone system as a ‘natural’ part of the public services, managed by the state. Therefore, public interest must have precedence before market competition.

Several parliamentarians in the second chamber opposed the proposal from the government. One of them, Paul Waldenström forcefully defended the private telephone company. According to him, a state-run telephone network would successively lead to worsening conditions for the subscribers. Waldenström argued that a purchase eventually would lead to ‘the establishment of state communism, something that can’t be healthy for the economic development of our country’.35 Parliamentarian Per Pehrson put similar argument forward. He meant that the acquiring of the Telephone Company would be expensive for the state and the Telegraph Agency, and that the extra cost most certainly would be paid by the subscribers of the telephone system. This was something he could not agree with, therefore he pleaded for a rejection of the government bill.36

Waldenström and Pehrson stand as representatives for the opposition to the proposed acquisition of the private telephone company in Stockholm. Other parliamentarians joined in the criticism. Their arguments focus on two themes; the distrust of a state bureaucracy as the director of the telephone system, something described as overall negative for the consumers, and the fear that the proposed purchase would be a bad deal for the state.

In the parliamentary debate, the government stood alone, arguing for the benefits with a state-controlled telephone network. However, some of the parliamentarians advocated the principle of a unified Swedish telephone network under state control, operated by the Telegraph Agency. One of them was Hjalmar Branting, the future prime minister in Sweden in the 1920s. Branting held that acquisition of the Telephone Company was ‘fundamentally sound’.37 However, he meant that the timing for the deal was bad, and that there was an obvious risk that the state paid too much money for the private company. Adolf Hedin agreed that the government was right in principle, since a state monopoly would be better than a private monopoly on the telephone market.38 Hedin was further worried that the Telephone Company would make too much money on the deal with the Telegraph Agency.

Branting and Hedin represent a group of parliamentarians who believed that the question of an acquisition of the private telephone company would return to the parliament in the near future. They expected that the terms for the deal would then be better for the state, that is, cheaper. The argument relates to the contemporary value of the company shares. The value had risen immediately after the proposed deal was made public. This led several of the parliamentarians to conclude that the state would have to pay an inflated price for the company. Hence, they argued that the purchase was unprofitable for the public. Eventually, the shares of the Telephone Company became subject for speculation every time the parliament discussed an acquisition of the company (Beckman, 1995, p. 41).

The debate in the first chamber was less extensive than in the second chamber. Furthermore, it was the advocates of the acquisition that was most heard. Baron Knut Sparre defended the government proposal, arguing, like Krusenstjerna, that the telephone system was a ‘natural’ part of the state administration.39 Even more passionate was Baron Fredrik von Essen, a veteran politician who had been Minister of Finance in several governments in the late 1800s. He supported the purchase and argued that the telephone system should be unified under one agency, and that the competition that now prevailed on the market was negative for the development of the

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35 Minutes AK 3 May 1902, IV:41, p. 49; ‘etablerar en dylik stats-kommunism, hvilket icke kan vara helsosamt för vårt lands ekonomiska utveckling’.
36 Minutes AK 3 May 1902, IV:41, p. 46.
37 Minutes AK 3 May 1902, IV:41, s. 52, ‘principiellt rigtigt’.
38 Minutes AK 3 May 1902, IV:41, s. 53.
39 Minutes first chamber (FK) 3 May 1902, III:29, p. 41.
telephone system in the country. Fredrik von Essen was critical against private companies, executing what he considered to be public services. He argued that the private companies’ only goal was to make as much profit as possible, at the expense of the customers. According to von Essen, public services should be organised by the state, to ensure that the prices for the consumers would be held down.

Other parliamentarians opposed Sparres and von Essens arguments. One of them, Hugo Tamm, expressed a common position; the public was fully satisfied with the present arrangement on the telephone market. There was no need for change and the proposal from the government would only cost the state a lot of money, he said.

3.2. The arguments

The debate in the parliament in 1902 was the first time that the acquisition of the Stockholm General Telephone Company was discussed by the parliamentarians. Even though the government obtained some support in the first chamber for its proposal, the parliament rejected the bill to buy the Telephone Company. Both chambers dismissed the proposal – without a vote. The debate in 1902 reveals several lines of arguments, favouring or protesting against the state overtaking the private telephone company. Many of the arguments were to persist among the parliamentarians until 1918, when the acquisition was finally accomplished.

One distinguishable argument in 1902 concerned market competition. The Swedish telephone market was basically divided between the Telegraph Agency and the Telephone Company. According to several parliamentarians this meant healthy competition between the two parties. In the end, this was a prerequisite for low prices and technical development of the telephone system in the country, they believed. Their counterparts argued that the competition on the market was obsolete, and that it did not matter if there were any competition whatsoever. From their point of view, competition had been important in the beginning of the telephone era, but had eventually lost its significance. Instead, the competition was now seen as a threat to the uniformity of the telephone system in the country.

A second line of argument was the argument that the telephone system was a ‘natural’ part of the state administration. This was put forward to justify a state acquisition of the Telephone Company, articulated by the government, and minister Krusenstjerna. The purchase of the private company was presented as the final piece in a national telephone system. According to the government, this was the ‘natural’ development (cf. Helgesson, 1998, pp. 252–254). In a European context, security worries were often prominent in debates on telecommunications (e.g. the Finnish case: Andersson-Skog, 2000, p. 42), but in the Swedish parliamentary debate no such issues were raised.

The third line of argument in the debate in 1902, and also the most significant, was the argument about the cost for the public. The government bill was rejected foremost due to the cost for the acquisition of the Telephone Company. The parliamentarians regarded the 11 million kronor as too much money to pay for the organisation of a national telephone system. This is particularly clear, since some of the parliamentarians agreed in principle that the state should buy the private company, and enforce uniformity on the telephone market. Their objection to the proposal concerned the price to pay for the business.

The immediate result of the decision in the parliament in 1902 was that the competitive situation on the Stockholm market continued. However, already in 1904, the government put forward a new bill, trying to regulate the telephone market. Likewise, the parliament rejected it, and the debate continued until 1918.

40 Minutes FK 3 May 1902, III:29, p. 43.
41 Minutes FK 3 May 1902, III:29, p. 53.
4. Conclusion: private enterprise and publicness

This article has analysed the political discussions regarding private or public organisation of tramways and telecommunications in Sweden c. 1900. When the Stockholm city council debated the issue of public tramways, the advocates of private enterprise felt compelled to defend themselves against accusations of promoting their own profit before the common good. Such accusations were not new, but the voices proposing communal or state intervention could now also refer to public opinion, concern for the working poor as well as efficient planning for the future when staking their claim. The political voices defending the private companies were left with the argument that private management was cheaper for the taxpayers.

Ylva Waldemarsson and Kjell Östberg have named Stockholm politics of the early twentieth century the period of ‘municipal socialism, liberalism and husbandry’ (Waldemarsson & Östberg, 2002). During this period of what Swedish historian Rolf Torstendahl termed as ‘organised capitalism’, the city council enforced several new measures to restrict private enterprise in the name of the common good. Sweden was a part of a more general development in urban centres, where local politicians took an explicit stand against private exploitation of the citizenry. The urban population were increasingly seen as consumers of public goods, and the role of the municipal bodies was to protect the interest of the people against the private companies. This required detailed regulation and restriction of private enterprise, and – eventually – communalisation of sanitation, energy and transport systems (Heim, 2015).

This study has focused on the discursive mechanisms promoting the changes described above. The debate on the nationalisation of the Stockholm General Telephone Company in the parliament 1902 shows similar traits, but also clear divergences. There were strong proponents for buying out the last major private operator, but these were directly connected to the government who had proposed the deal. The prime argument for nationalisation was efficiency: the telephone system must be treated as a natural monopoly, and should therefore be run by public management. The opponents retorted that private competition meant lower cost for consumers, and this line of argument turned support of private enterprise into a stand for the common good.

The development of the Swedish telephone market from the 1890s coincided with a rapid growth of the Swedish economy. The period from the 1890s saw the rise of several successful engineering companies, such as ASEA and SKF. In this period of positive economic development, the state sought to finally establish a sector-specific institution for the telecommunications (Andersson-Skog, 1997, p. 140; Schön, 2007, pp. 220–224). The argument in the parliament followed this trend, as the proponents of public management alluded to ‘natural’ reasons for the state to take control, as well as to – as they saw it – the obsolete argument about the competition in the market. The advocates of private organisation responded with reference to public opinion to promote their cause. They argued that the interest of the people had to be protected against the state, not against the private companies, as was the case in the debate about tramways in Stockholm. The opponents of a state purchase also won the vote, and the nationalisation of the telephone network was not accomplished until 1918.

The debate on the tramway system 1902–1903 demonstrates how arguments for a more effective operation of public services, a fair distribution of common goods, and concern for the urban poor were tied together into a strong voice for municipal operation of the tramway system. The discursive chains, thus, firmly linked organisation by public management and a political community of male citizens, to ideals of equality, modernity and progress. The general idea of publicness was one of promoting public organisation against private business entrepreneurs. Nonetheless, there were defenders of private enterprise who argued that the present arrangement was more cost-effective, and that the public interest might well be accommodated by the private company. This line of reasoning was clearly on the defensive, as several council members recognised that a municipal takeover was inevitable. In spite of this discursive movement, these reforms took decades to complete.
The discussions in the Stockholm city council demonstrated strong confidence that municipal reform and public control was only a matter of time. However, in the telephone debate nationalisation was described as a threat, because free competition was considered an asset, promoting lower prices and better service for the customers. This contraposition in arguments can be explained by reference to the discursive chains. In the case of the telephones, the political community was conceptualised as being less extensive, compared to the tramways. The latter were crucial to a larger public, meaning that the politicians had to recognise responsibility for a larger group of consumers. When it came to the telephones, the service was less obviously a matter for the whole society but more restricted to a smaller segment of the urban population; therefore free market competition was seen as the best solution.

Regarding the values of political rights and freedom, the analysed debates show both similarities and divergences. Equal access, as well as notions of modernity carried great weight in both debates. The telephones, however, did not spark clear-cut political slogans, as did the tramways; in the telephone debate the emphasis was on lower cost for the consumers collectively and better services for the individual consumer. The debate circled on the well-being of the subscribers in the telephone network, whereas the tramway debate focused on a larger segment of the urban population, namely the working class.

Accordingly, Sweden is an example of a more general development in Europe. Most of the Nordic countries witnessed the same shift towards public organisation at the turn of the century 1900. Municipalisation of tramways is a good example of this. In the Nordic capitals, Copenhagen, Oslo, Helsinki and Stockholm, the community took over the operation of the tramway systems in the first decades of the 1900s (Herranen, 1988; Jensen, 1981; Langholm & Kjeldstadli, 1990; Östlund, 1995). However, the case of the Swedish telephone network stands out as an exception. Whereas private telephone companies continued to manage the network in Denmark and Finland – albeit under state concession – the Swedish telephone network was (de facto) nationalised in 1918. As a consequence, the Swedish Telegraph Agency became a most powerful state agency, making the telephone system largely independent, compared to their counterparts in the other Nordic countries (Andersson-Skog, 2000, p. 40). In Denmark, for example, the private companies were locked in to a market, controlled by political interest groups (Andersson-Skog, 1997, pp. 152–153). In this respect, the link between publicness and public organisation was stronger in Sweden than in their neighbouring countries, even though both Denmark and Norway had formally monopolised the telephone market.

In conclusion, the analysed debates about tramways and telecommunications demonstrate that communalisation and nationalisation was a long process, triggering political debates on a number of occasions. A fully public transport system was not realised in Stockholm until the 1920s. In the case of the telephones a state-controlled network was established in 1918. The lengthy process can be attributed to economic reasons; both the communalisation of the tramways and the acquisition of the telephone network were connected to large expenses for the taxpayers. If anything, this proves that political discourse was not the exclusive motor of political change. Economical and judicial factors also had the power to slow down the process, although they could not stop or turn the drift towards public organisation.

Acknowledgements

The authors are grateful for comments on earlier drafts of this paper, presented at the research seminar in Economic History at Umeå University, and at the seminar for Modern History at Stockholm University.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.
Funding

This work was supported by Forskningsrådet för hälsa, arbetsliv och välfärd [grant Number 2012-0764].

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