When early modern society of the Baltic area is studied, towns and urban life are often overlooked since only a minority of the population lived in towns. Although conditions varied widely between the sparsely populated areas in the northern part of Scandinavia and the more urbanised areas on the south and southeast borders of the Baltic sea, towns and their inhabitants were nevertheless of great importance in the Swedish empire and other states contiguous to the Baltic Sea. Thus, in researching the state-building processes taking place in early modern Europe, towns and activities relating to towns are important cornerstones.

The relation between the state and the towns during the 16th and 17th centuries is a lively and much-discussed question. As the state grew stronger the former independence of the towns was threatened. "The oppressed town" is a concept introduced by Fernand Braudel to characterise the towns in the strong early modern state.¹ The weakened political position of towns has been related to strong nation-states striving for control. But what happened when towns in conquered areas were to be integrated into an empire which included several nations and countries? Was their position also weakened, were they even more suppressed than towns in the core area or was it possible for the newly acquired towns to retain their independence?

In his study The State and the Integration of the Towns of the Provinces of the Swedish Baltic Empire, Robert Sandberg discusses how the towns in different parts of the Baltic region conquered by Sweden were treated, and how they related to the Swedish state. By using the concept "conglomerate state",² Sandberg discusses different options for regulating the positions of the towns in different parts

¹ Braudel, Fernand: Civilisationer och kapitalism 1400–1800, Stockholm 1982-1986
² For a presentation of the concept conglomerate state, see Böhme, Klaus-Richard: Building a Baltic Empire.
of the empire. Except for the old Swedish and Finnish towns, he finds four different ways to connect these towns.

The towns were made administrative centres of the central government; many institutions central in the state-building process were located to towns. Not only the governors’ residences were placed in the more important towns, but other representatives of the central government were situated in towns as well. In addition, within the Swedish realm, the combined town councils and courts were placed under stronger control from the central government. New towns were founded in rural parts of the realm in order to gain a stronger economic and administrative control over the area.

The towns were administrative centres from where the state could strengthen its control of old core areas as well as new provinces. The towns in the conquered areas on the south and southeast border of the Baltic Sea, however, maintained their traditional German laws. By placing appeal courts in Åbo and Dorpat, the ambition to co-ordinate the legislative system in the Livonian and Estonian provinces with that of Sweden-Finland was clearly demonstrated. Susanna Sjödin presents in her essay how the legislative system was re-organised in the first half of the 17th century, and how the court of appeal in Dorpat was especially meant to be an integrating instrument of the Swedish state.

The courts and other administrative institutions serving the strong centralised state created a strong demand for lawyers and other civil servants. In order to procure skilled civil servants who would be true to the Swedish crown, universities began to be established. In the 1620s the old university of Uppsala was reorganised; the priest-seminar was transformed to a university where men in the service of the state and the church could receive their education. In 1632 the university of Dorpat was established to supply priests and civil servants to the Livonian and Estonian areas, while the Finnish part of the realm received its own higher education capability when the university of Åbo was established in 1640. Later, the universities of Greifswald on German soil and Lund in the southern part of Scandinavia, conquered from Denmark, were given the same task of educating future civil servants.

In Lars Geschwind’s study Unruly Students, a very specific group of town inhabitants are in focus; the students in the university towns Uppsala, Åbo and

Dorpat. Here the young men were brought up to be truly civil servants and priests, but in the same time they were forming their own identity as students. In the article social control and identification and the relation between these two aspects on social integration is discussed.

The expanding international economy is another central aspect of the early modern integration process in Europe. Commerce and other economic activities were important in this process, particularly since it tended to tie regions together. In the Baltic region towns, all since the Middle Ages had been centres for trade and economic development. Trade between Danzig, Lübeck, Riga, Åbo, Stockholm and other ports linked the region around the Baltic Sea closer to each other. At the same time the political struggle for the areas southeast and south of the Baltic Sea was to a high extent a struggle for the domination of trade. From the beginning of the 17th century this became an important goal for the expansionist policy of the Swedish empire. Inside the Swedish and Finnish realm, town policy and trade were made topical questions. A range of regulations were established in order to develop trade and industry.

The Baltic Sea was central in the trade of northern Europe. Commerce cut straight through national boundaries, and personal relations built up the trade as well. The merchants often had business relations throughout north and northwest Europe. But who were the trading merchants and what was needed to succeed in this trade? In my own essay *17th century Baltic merchants*, I discuss some preliminary results of a study concerning these matters. Some characteristic traits of the merchants trading the across Baltic sea from a Swedish-Finnish perspective are presented.

The creation of the bourgeoisie class has been a central topic in the studies of early modern European society. The role of women in this process is less studied, and if one looks carefully, it can be observed that very little has been done in this area. In the article *Women as Wholesalers*, *Christine Bladh* studies the women’s and, above all, the widows’ role in the wholesale trade in Stockholm in the second part of the eighteenth century. What happened to the business and the family fortune when it was taken over by a woman?

The early modern town was considered an unhealthy and risky place in which to live. The crowded milieu not only made way for the fast spread of diseases, but

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the water supply and sanitation often was insufficient, although improvements had been made after the Black Death. Altogether an urban life environment was threatening to public health. The expression ”the urban graveyard” has been used to highlight the high mortality rates in early modern towns. In his article Urban death – Perceptions and Realities Sven Lilja studies urban mortality in the Baltic region in the second half of the 18th century. By a study of a number of towns of different size Lilja can shade off the conventional picture that towns suffered from an endemic mortality surplus.

Towns have been described as turning points in human history. Growth in society is always, stated Fernand Braudel, expressed in a strong urbanisation.\(^4\) What happens to towns, and in towns, could be seen as indicators of radical changes in society. Early modern state formation is one of these changes that very well could be analysed by studies of towns, their institutions and inhabitants. In the project ”State, towns and integration of society. The Swedish Baltic Empire and the Baltic area”\(^5\) state formation is studied as an integration process in three interacting levels.\(^6\) The articles in this volume all focus on Baltic towns and how different aspects of the integration process affected these towns and their inhabitants. The towns were involved in the state-building process in many ways; in this volume we will discuss some of them.

\(^4\) Braudel 1982 p 432
\(^5\) Project at Södertörns högskola (University College)
References


