

“Engines of Change: Networks and Identity in the Second Industrial Revolution“

Anne Sofie Beck Knudsen (University of Copenhagen)

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This paper studies how large-scale economic transformations reshape social networks and identity. We examine this question in the context of the Second Industrial Revolution, using the centralized rollout of the railroad in nineteenth-century Sweden as a case of rapid economic integration. We use first names as markers of identity and study how naming patterns changed as local communities became connected to broader markets and social networks. Prior to railroad access, parents frequently chose locally common names, reflecting identities embedded in local and kin-based networks. After parishes became connected to the railroad, the share of locally common names declined sharply. At the same time, naming patterns across parishes became more homogeneous, indicating convergence toward broader, non-local identities. We show that these changes were linked to spatial network expansion through migration and broader marriage markets, and to occupational change through movement out of agriculture. The results highlight how identity adapts during rapid economic transformation.