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Parcel Flows: Collaboration of medium-sized logistic firms in Germany

Today, parcel services play a major role in the internet economy and are perceived as large corporations (DHL, Federal Express). Nothing is known about the flow of parcels through parcel services in historical transportation research. This paper aims to show that parcel services in Germany were not founded by large corporations, but by medium-sized logistics companies. Around 20 of these companies joined forces to found parcel services in Germany. They developed new forms of cooperation for this purpose. The organizational structure of these cooperations is shown. In addition to the new form of cooperation, they have used new technologies such as barcodes and networks based on personal computers, which became inexpensive in the 1980s, to monitor and control the flow of parcels in the network. In Germany, two of these medium-sized cooperations in the field of parcel services can be identified, Deutscher Paketdienst (DPD), founded in 1976, and German Parcel (GP), founded in 1989. German Parcel was also the first to use the innovative concept of hub-and-spoke sorting (star-shaped sorting) of parcels in ground-based transport by truck - a sorting concept previously only known from aviation. GP and DPD were acquired by the large corporations Royal Mail resp. La Poste in 2000.