

How and why it all began: the story of NOFOMA and its academic impact

Roland Hellberg

Department of War Studies, Swedish Defence University, Stockholm, Sweden, and

Nils G. Storhagen

Linköping University, Linköping, Sweden

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Abstract

Purpose – This account was undertaken in response to repeated requests to recount the origins of NOFOMA (the Nordic Logistics Research Network) and to explain how and why it was established. The second part demonstrates the significance of NOFOMA for the theoretical development of logistics and supply chain management (SCM), as well as its collaboration with IJPDLM.

Design/methodology/approach – The account draws primarily on the authors' archival notes, interviews with participants involved in the founding process, commemorative summaries presented by Jahre at the 20th- and 30th-anniversary celebrations, as well as personal recollections. Since conference materials prior to 2020 are largely unavailable online, personal archives have been indispensable. The narrative has been verified and supplemented by Professor Nils G. Storhagen.

Findings – The establishment of NOFOMA is subsequently described in detail, outlining both the motivations for its creation and the trajectory of its early development. The narrative concludes with reflections on NOFOMA's lasting importance, its contributions to the discipline and perspectives on its future.

Research limitations/implications – Several of those who founded NOFOMA are no longer with us; so, it is important for the future that the true background to NOFOMA's creation and development is preserved for the future.

Practical implications – For the future development of NOFOMA and the academic development of logistics/SCM as a research discipline, this compilation is a useful tool.

Originality/value – This compilation has never been done before and is therefore unique.

Keywords Nordic logistics research network, The history of NOFOMA, Academic network formation, Logistics as a discipline, The academic contribution from NOFOMA

Paper type Viewpoint

Introduction

This account was undertaken in response to repeated requests to recount the origins of NOFOMA (the Nordic Logistics Research Network) and to explain how and why it was established. What follows is the original narrative of its inception, a story that has likely never been fully documented before.

As individuals directly involved in the founding of NOFOMA in 1988, we are frequently asked about the background of the conference: its origins, underlying motivations and the circumstances of its earliest events. Some of the original initiators have since passed away, while others remain active, making it even more important to preserve this history in written form for future reference.

The account draws primarily on the authors' archival notes, interviews with participants involved in the founding process, commemorative summaries presented by Marianne Jahre at the 20th- and 30th-anniversary celebrations, as well as personal recollections. Since conference materials prior to 2020 are largely unavailable online, personal archives have been indispensable. The narrative has been verified and enriched through collaboration with Professor Nils G. Storhagen, one of the founding members of NOFOMA.



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To contextualize the need for a dedicated forum for academic exchange in logistics research and doctoral education, the account begins with reflections on the experience of being a doctoral student in a newly emerging applied discipline within a young and rapidly expanding academic institution with a strong focus on economics. It then examines the institution's internal efforts to structure its doctoral education and research agenda in response to the introduction of logistics as a new academic subject. The establishment of NOFOMA is subsequently described in detail, outlining both the motivations for its creation and the trajectory of its early development.

The second part of this article demonstrates the significance of NOFOMA for the theoretical development of logistics and supply chain management (SCM), as well as its collaboration with *IJPDLM*. The narrative concludes with reflections on NOFOMA's lasting importance, its contributions to the discipline and perspectives on its future.

The motivation for this study extends beyond documenting the historical development of NOFOMA. By tracing how Nordic scholars collaboratively built an enduring research community in logistics and SCM, the study offers broader insights into how regional academic ecosystems can evolve under conditions of limited resources, disciplinary ambiguity and growing industry relevance. The Nordic experience provides a valuable example of how academic collaboration, collegial exchange and engagement with practice can foster both scientific legitimacy and societal impact. For emerging research communities elsewhere, the NOFOMA model illustrates a pathway for cultivating sustainable, collaborative platforms that bridge academia and industry in applied fields.

The doctoral student's quest in logistics

In 1984, more than 4 decades ago, I began my postgraduate studies in logistics at the Institute of Technology at Linköping University (Sweden), within the Department of Management and Economics. My supervisor was Professor Sten Wandel, while the neighbouring Department of Production Economics was headed by Professor Robert Grubbström.

At that time, the Japanese Production Philosophy was attracting significant international attention, and I developed a strong interest in its principles [1]. Working closely with Professors Wandel and Grubbström gave me valuable insights into this philosophy, particularly because of their differing academic perspectives. However, an important challenge soon emerged: the contrast in academic traditions between the two departments. The Department of Management and Economics primarily emphasized the social sciences, valuing qualitative inquiry, interpretive methods and organizational perspectives. In contrast, the Department of Production Economics was firmly rooted in operations research, privileging quantitative modelling, optimization and analytical precision. Bridging these epistemological divides required not only methodological negotiation but also the cultivation of a shared understanding of what constituted legitimate logistics research.

As the first doctoral candidate in logistics within the Department of Management and Economics, I found myself pursuing a subject with limited academic precedent. Considerable uncertainty surrounded the expected demand, content and structure of my doctoral studies. Universities and faculties typically prescribe a balance between courses in scientific methodology, subject-specific coursework and dissertation research. Yet, because the department had limited experience with applied fields such as quality management, project management, innovation management and logistics, there was no clear framework for defining the academic requirements of my research.

To address this uncertainty, the department undertook a review of earlier PhD dissertations related to logistics. At that time, only four individuals in Sweden had earned doctoral degrees related to business logistics: my supervisor, Wandel (Stanford University, USA, *Transport Systems*, 1973); Sarv (Chalmers University of Technology, *Industrial and Logistical Organization*, 1977); Storhagen (Lund University, *Material Management for the Process Industry*, 1984); and Lars-Olof Rask (Lund University, later Linnaeus University, *The*

[Structural Poverty – Trucking-Company Organization, 1984](#)). In addition, some doctoral dissertations had been completed in production economy (operations management), which often emphasized advanced mathematics and optimization methods, but these did not correspond directly to the focus of my own research.

The evolution of logistics as a discipline

The term *logistics* is generally traced to the Greek word *logistikos*, meaning “the art of practical calculation” ([Leighton and Coakley, 1955](#); [Tepić et al., 2011](#)). In the context of the ancient Greek army, it referred to the planning and calculation of operations required for military campaigns ([Rouquet, 2024](#)). The modern usage of the term emerged much later. In the 19th century, Antoine Henri de Jomini introduced the concept, deriving it from the French military role of *Maréchal Général des Logis* ([Rouquet, 2021](#)). [Jomini et al. \(2007\)](#) reframed logistics as a practical and general science concerned with the organization of military operations.

In the English-speaking world, *logistics* began to gain broader recognition only after World War I. In *Pure Logistics: The Science of War Preparation* (1917), Thorpe introduced a term that was neither widely understood nor commonly used at the time. He was among the few military thinkers globally to employ logistics prominently, and likely the first to define it systematically as a science. His perceptive analysis stands as a milestone between Jomini’s nineteenth-century treatise and the resurgence of logistics scholarship around World War II. More than a theoretical exercise, Thorpe’s definition underscored the strategic significance of logistics in ensuring comprehensive preparation and ultimate success in warfare ([Eccles, 1954](#)). [Perjés \(1970\)](#) later broadened the definition, describing logistics as encompassing material supply and the quantitative calculations involved in movements, equipment, organization and combat operations.

Over time, the discipline expanded from its military origins into the business sector, shaped by seminal works and key scholarly contributions. Early studies by [Heskett et al. \(1964\)](#), along with [Sarv \(1973\)](#), introduced influential frameworks for understanding integrated material flows. [La Londe and Zinszer \(1977\)](#) define the supply chain as a network of firms, not just a single company’s process. [Ballou \(1978\)](#) played a pivotal role in formalizing business logistics as a structured academic field. Building on this foundation, [Lambert and Stock \(1982\)](#) and [Bowersox et al. \(1986\)](#) advanced the discipline by elaborating principles of strategic physical distribution and logistical management, many of which remain influential today. [Shapiro and Heskett \(1985\)](#) further underscored the importance of strategic decision-making in logistics, and their work on logistical strategies continues to serve as a cornerstone of the field.

Defining business logistics in the mid-1980s

What did business logistics encompass in the mid-1980s? My research into Nordic logistics education at the time reveals that the field was defined by a broad spectrum of perspectives and doctoral course content. Different universities adhered to distinct academic traditions, which shaped how they structured their research agendas. There was a clear structural and disciplinary divide depending on whether the primary focus was on operations research, logistics or transport and shipping studies. While much of the emerging knowledge in logistics centred on systems thinking and interdependencies, emphases varied across institutions, with some prioritizing functional and technical dimensions. (e.g. Institute of Technology at Lund University), others focused on industrial processes and production systems (e.g. Chalmers University of Technology), while still others adopted organizational or behavioural perspectives at the firm or individual level (e.g. Institute of Technology at Linköping University and BI Norwegian Business School).

Within the Nordic academic community, logistics was primarily associated with the *physical movement of goods* and the accompanying *information flows* required to transform

raw materials into finished products, with particular emphasis on the trade-offs between customer service levels, expressed in terms of time and place utility, and the costs incurred in achieving these outcomes, including capital tied up in inventory. Passenger transport and macroeconomic issues were typically excluded from logistics discussions. Instead, logistics was understood as *a set of interrelated activities involving the movement and storage of goods and information* across the supply chain, from raw material sources to final consumers, and increasingly, back into the system through recycling and disposal (Council of Logistics Management, 1991). Operations research evolved in parallel, often referred to today as *production logistics*, reflecting its strong analytical and quantitative orientation.

By the mid-1980s, logistics as an academic subject encompassed a broad range of areas, often overlapping with operations management, including topics such as;

- (1) Forecasting
- (2) Sourcing, procurement and purchasing
- (3) Operations and inventory management
- (4) Production planning (e.g. EOQ, MRP, JIT and OPT)
- (5) Material-handling technology
- (6) Transportation
- (7) Location decisions
- (8) Delivery service and distribution
- (9) Third-party logistics (3PL)
- (10) Organizational dilemmas and structures
- (11) Performance management, optimization and cost allocation
- (12) Supply chain management

Despite its growing industrial and academic relevance, there was still no clear consensus on what constituted logistics theory, nor on the most appropriate research methods to apply. As an academic discipline, logistics was very much in its formative years, requiring further refinement, conceptual clarification and theoretical development.

The growing importance of logistics in Sweden

By the mid-1980s, logistics had gained considerable prominence within Swedish industry. Leading companies such as ASEA (later ABB), Atlas Copco, Electrolux, Ericsson, IKEA, LKAB, Saab, Sandvik, SCA, Scania, SKF, Televerket (later Telia), Tetra Pak and Volvo increasingly recognized its strategic importance. The primary emphasis was placed on reducing transportation costs, minimizing capital tied up in inventory and improving customer delivery service, all of which were regarded as essential for enhancing profitability and competitiveness. At the time, high interest rates further underscored the importance of cost efficiency and cash-flow management, placing logistics firmly on the corporate agenda.

In the Nordic context, logistics was at that time commonly referred to as *Materialadministration* (MA). Two influential works by Ericsson and Persson, *Materialadministration i praktiken* (1982) and *Materialadministration: Ett företagsledaransvar* (1981), played a pivotal role in shaping managerial understanding of the field. These works emphasized that logistics was not merely a technical or operational function but a core responsibility of business leadership. As a result, *Materialadministration* came to be viewed increasingly from a management rather than an operations perspective. Over time, the concept of

Materialadministration gradually evolved into what is now widely recognized as logistics or SCM.

Other early contributions further enriched the field. [Rask \(1984\)](#) examined organizational theory in the context of transport companies, while [Storhagen's *Materialadministration – grunder och möjligheter* \(1987\)](#) offered foundational insights that achieved wide influence in both Sweden and Norway. The book has since been updated and reissued under the title [Logistik – grunder och möjligheter \(2024\)](#). In addition, [Hellberg's \(1992\)](#) doctoral dissertation at Linköping University analysed synchronized material supply, highlighting the challenges and opportunities of applying Japanese production philosophy to improve efficiency. Among several later influential authors, it is also worth noting the publication of *Logistikens grunder* by [Lumsden in 1998](#), a textbook that achieved significant reach and impact across both academia and industry.

Together, these contributions significantly shaped the development of logistics research and education in Sweden, providing the intellectual and practical foundations upon which NOFOMA would later build its academic and professional relevance.

From divergent traditions to disciplinary definition: Technical Universities, Business Schools and the Shaping of Logistics as an Academic Discipline.

In the Nordic countries, academic institutions offering logistics could broadly be categorized into two types:

- (1) *Technical universities*, where logistics was typically integrated into Industrial Engineering and Management programs, e.g. Linköping, Chalmers (Gothenburg), Lund and Luleå.
- (2) Business schools, where logistics was connected to organization, strategy and marketing, e.g. BI Norwegian Business School (BI) and Copenhagen Business School (CBS).

These distinctions reflected differing academic traditions and research orientations, which in turn shaped how logistics was taught and developed as a field of study.

As part of my postgraduate research, I conducted a survey of logistics-related education at Sweden's six universities, including the Royal Institute of Technology and Stockholm School of Economics, as they existed at the time. The findings revealed considerable variation in institutional focus.

- (1) *Chalmers University of Technology*: Material-handling technology and cargo logistics.
- (2) *Institute of Technology at Linköping University (LiTH)*: Management-oriented business logistics and production planning and control.
- (3) *Institute of Technology at Luleå University (LuTH)*: Production planning and control.
- (4) *Institute of Technology at Lund University (LTH)*: Packaging.
 - *University College of Växjö* (then subordinate to Lund University): Truck transportation.
- (5) *Stockholm University*: Had not yet introduced logistics as a subject.
- (6) *Uppsala University*: Purchasing and business networking.
- (7) *Royal Institute of Technology (KTH)*: Had not yet introduced logistics as a subject.
- (8) *Stockholm School of Economics (HHS)*: Had not yet introduced logistics as a subject.

At the time, among these institutions, Institute of Technology at Linköping University distinguished itself by offering the most comprehensive program in logistics education.

Expanding the perspective: nordic insights

In 1986, I moved to BI Norwegian Business School where Professor Göran Persson was active. At BI, logistics was primarily approached from a business-oriented perspective, like the approach at Institute of Technology at Linköping University.

My interest in comparing logistics education and doctoral programs soon expanded to the broader Nordic context. Research at that time revealed distinctive national emphases.

Norway: BI concentrated on business logistics, NTNU (then Norwegian Institute of Technology, NTH, Trondheim) specialized in production operations and quality, Norwegian School of Economics, NHH, Bergen focused on shipping economics and University College of Molde included some logistics-related activities.

Denmark: CBS, under the leadership of Professor Tage Skjøtt-Larsen, emphasized distribution, while the technical universities were more oriented toward operations management as the Technical University of Denmark (DTU) and Aalborg University Center (AUC).

Finland: Research largely cantered on icebreakers, sea transport and harbour logistics (e.g. Helsinki University of Technology, Turku School of Economics and Business Administration). An exception was Lappeenranta University of Technology, which placed greater emphasis on production economy and logistics.

Iceland: Logistics had not yet been established as an academic discipline.

This comparative perspective underscored the diversity of approaches across the Nordic countries, reflecting different industrial priorities, institutional traditions and stages of disciplinary development.

The academic need for defining logistics as a discipline

The question of how to position logistics within the academic landscape has been a recurring theme over the years. At one of the early NOFOMA conferences (1991), the issue was debated and summarized as the pursuit of a “total holistic perspective”. An illustrative example of the challenge comes from an anecdote involving Nils G. Storhagen, who succeeded Professor Sten Wandel as head of logistics at Institute of Technology at Linköping University. Upon assuming his role, he was invited to the office of Professor Robert Grubbström, who carefully held a small booklet between his fingertips. The document, he explained, was an official university directive delineating the academic domains of each department. While the exchange may have seemed trivial, the underlying message was unmistakable: *do not encroach upon my field*.

At the time, scepticism toward logistics as an academic subject was widespread, largely because of its novelty. Many perceived it as a competitor to established disciplines. Nevertheless, over time logistics and production economics developed a strong collaborative relationship, particularly through figures such as Jan Olhager, then affiliated with the Department of Production Economics at Institute of Technology at Linköping University.

Storhagen had also encountered such scepticism earlier during his doctoral research in Lund. It was not uncommon for colleagues to dismiss logistics as “non-academic”, regarding it as applied science, a category which, at the time, was not seen as a legitimate field of scholarly inquiry within universities. This resistance reflected the broader uncertainty within academia and contributed to the slow process of establishing logistics as a distinct and recognized discipline.

By the late 1980s, when NOFOMA was founded, logistics research environments at Nordic universities remained small and fragmented. No single institution possessed the critical mass

to sustain strong scientific output or to provide comprehensive doctoral education in logistics. Researchers and doctoral students alike lacked a cohesive academic setting in which to advance their work.

It soon became clear that closer collaboration was essential. What was needed was a common platform for exchanging knowledge, coordinating research and fostering an academic community. Cross-border cooperation emerged as a strategic necessity, both to strengthen the legitimacy of logistics as a field and to expand opportunities for doctoral students and researchers.

This realization provided the foundation for the establishment of NOFOMA. Conceived as a platform for networking, scholarly exchange, and community-building, NOFOMA created an arena in which logistics research could develop dynamically. By bringing together scholars from across the Nordic countries, the network offered an environment where new ideas could be tested, debated and refined within an international context, thereby advancing both the discipline and its academic standing.

The establishment of NOFOMA

In 1988, I, together with colleagues at Institute of Technology at Linköping University and BI Norwegian Business School, took the initiative to create a forum for the exchange of experiences in logistics research and education. The idea quickly gained the support of key figures, including Professor Göran Persson (BI), Associate Professor Nils G. Storhagen (Linköping) and Professor Tage Skjøtt-Larsen (CBS). Storhagen and Persson already knew each other, as Persson had served as the opponent for Storhagen's doctoral dissertation in Lund in 1984.

Before NOFOMA, national logistics conferences had been arranged in Sweden by various organizations, most notably SILF (Sveriges Inköps-och Logistikförbund), founded in 1956. However, since SILF focused primarily on procurement, SMAF (Sveriges Materialadministrativa Förening) was later established to promote *Materialadministration*. SMAF organized several conferences in Linköping, which, although significant, were primarily industry-oriented rather than research-driven. During one such SMAF conference in the summer of 1988 in Linköping, Göran Persson participated as a guest speaker.

Following the conference, Persson and Storhagen gathered at Stora Hotellet in Linköping. Seated in red armchairs around a round table in the bar, they reflected on the day's discussions over a beer. Their conversation soon turned to the fragmented nature of logistics as an academic discipline. At that time, research in *Materialadministration* and logistics was scattered across several academic domains, leaving the field too small and too fragmented to generate the level of high-quality research they considered essential. Storhagen later recalled that it was in this very moment that the idea of NOFOMA was conceived: a Nordic collaboration aimed at fostering stronger academic exchange and establishing a more stable research platform.

Thus, the concept of NOFOMA was effectively formalized during this informal meeting at Stora Hotellet in Linköping in the summer of 1988.

On June 1–2, 1989, the first *Nordic Research Seminar in Materials Administration (NoFoMa [2])* was organized under the title *Seminar for Exchange of Experience Related to Research and Teaching within Material Administration*. The event, hosted at BI in Sandvika, Norway, was conducted primarily in a mix of Norwegian and Swedish. The seminar addressed five central themes:

- (1) Logistics institutions in the Nordic countries
- (2) Logistics research in the Nordic countries
- (3) Exchange of experiences
- (4) Current state and future directions
- (5) Nordic cooperation

A total of fourteen institutions participated in the first NOFOMA seminar.

Norway: BI, University College of Molde, Institute of Transport Economics (TØI), Norwegian Institute of Technology (NTH) and The Foundation for Industrial and Technical Research (SINTEF)

Sweden: Institute of Technology at Lund University, University College of Växjö, Chalmers University of Technology and Institute of Technology at Linköping University

Denmark: CBS, Aalborg University Centre and the Technical University of Denmark

Finland: Turku School of Business and Lappeenranta University of Technology

Reflections on the first NOFOMA seminar

Marianne Jahre, who has been a leading force in the development of NOFOMA, then at BI, offered a vivid recollection of its formative days:

As a newly employed research assistant at BI, I was part of the first organizing committee when a small group gathered at the first NOFOMA conference at BI in 1989. At that time, there were 30 participants, who presented their projects and institutions in their native languages, the primary goal was simply to get to know each other. I remember the effort it took to identify institutions and researchers, both PhD students and professors, in logistics across the Nordic countries. And this was before the internet and email; we relied on faxes and letters. But of course, the network of logistics researchers and lecturers had existed long before this event. I still recall a comment from one of the initiators, Nils Storhagen, who began his presentation with the word “äntligen” (Swedish for “finally”), signifying those discussions about establishing a Nordic network had been ongoing for years, and now, at last, it had materialized. (Jahre, 2008)

The first seminar was widely regarded as a success and was warmly received by its participants. Encouraged by this outcome, NOFOMA seminars became an annual tradition, rotating among Nordic institutions.

1990: Copenhagen Business School, Denmark

1991: Institute of Technology at Linköping University, Sweden

1992: Helsinki School of Economics, Finland

This cycle marked the completion of the first round of hosting responsibilities across the Nordic countries. That same year (1992), I successfully defended my PhD, and by then, my department had fully recognized the academic rigor of my postgraduate education.

The expansion of NOFOMA

As the research community continued to evolve, the foundational studies of the early years served as reminders of how far the field had progressed and how much potential remained. Reflecting on this development, Jahre (2008) observed:

By 2008, NOFOMA had developed into one of the largest academic conferences in logistics!

The initiative has indeed had a lasting impact. NOFOMA has played a central role in shaping logistics as an academic discipline, providing a forum where researchers can meet, collaborate and advance both theory and practice.

Jahre (2008) highlighted several key milestones in NOFOMA’s development.

1995: English became the official language of NOFOMA.

1998: The first *Nordlog conference* was held, alongside the first joint Nordic PhD course in Tisvildeleje, Denmark. From this point onward, all papers underwent blind peer review.

2004: The first *Educators' Forum* was introduced.

2004: The *International Journal of Physical Distribution and Logistics Management (IJPDLM)* published its first special issue featuring NOFOMA papers.

2006: The first collaborative book project, *The Nordic Case Reader (Arlbjørn et al., 2006)*, was published [3]. This year also marked the formal acceptance of both full papers and work-in-progress submissions.

By the mid-2000s, NOFOMA had gained recognition well beyond the Nordic region, attracting between 100 and 150 participants annually. The 2016 conference exemplified this international reach, bringing together participants from approximately 45 universities and research institutions across some 30 countries. In addition to representatives from all five Nordic nations (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden), attendees came from Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Lithuania, Namibia, the Netherlands, Poland, South Africa, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the US. NOFOMA's early transition to English, together with its partnership with *IJPDLM* and the extensive international research networks of the major Nordic institutions, were key factors contributing to its expansion beyond the region, enabling the conference to attract high-quality international contributions and to establish itself as a globally recognized scholarly forum.

Over time, NOFOMA has provided a forum for exploring the diversity of perspectives within logistics research. Debates have often centred on the contrasts between management-oriented business logistics and operations management approaches rooted in optimization models. This ongoing dialogue has enriched the field, reflecting the distinct academic traditions of technical universities, such as Chalmers, and management schools, such as BI and CBS.

Logistics and SCM research has always been inherently interdisciplinary, drawing upon theories from marketing, distribution channels, organizational studies, strategy, finance and microeconomics. Scholars in the field represent varied backgrounds, including engineering, economics and other disciplines, which have contributed to methodological diversity and intellectual breadth. The complexity of logistics research is further reflected in the wide variety of research designs employed.

Reflections on NOFOMA's unique characteristics

Jahre (2018) reflected on what makes NOFOMA distinctive:

In 2008, I spoke about the multilingual nature of NOFOMA, not just in terms of language, but also in our research strategies, contexts, and theories. Logistics is fascinating because it bridges engineering and management, requiring both quantitative and qualitative skills and tools.

She continued:

What we observe today is an increasing number of publications in esteemed international journals, using diverse research designs and structured literature reviews, often combining qualitative and quantitative approaches, demonstrating that we, as scholars, can both read and count. I believe NOFOMA has had, and continues to have, a profound influence on the quality of case study research globally. In short, NOFOMA has evolved in terms of quality, quantity, and methodological approaches.

Jahre (2018) also emphasized how the field of logistics has expanded:

We often illustrate the evolution of logistics and SCM in our introductory lectures, explaining how it started with optimizing individual functions like transport and warehousing, then expanded to cross-functional integration within firms, followed by supply chain integration and inter-organizational relationships aimed at reducing costs and improving service. Networks became the focus in the early 2000s, and today, the boundaries of logistics research extend even further. The field now addresses broader challenges such as crisis management, sustainable development, and the resilience of critical

infrastructures, including health, energy, water, and communication. Logistics research has moved beyond traditional reverse flows and environmental concerns to encompass sustainability in its fullest sense, integrating social, environmental, and economic dimensions.

Since its inception in 1989, NOFOMA has been held annually, and by 2025, the conference convened for the 37th time. Hosting responsibilities have rotated among Nordic academic institutions, except for the COVID-19 pandemic years (2020 and 2021), when the University of Iceland, under the leadership of Gunnar Stefánsson, organized the event online. The 2023 conference, which returned to the standard in-person format, was also hosted in Iceland.

One of NOFOMA's most distinctive features lies in its informally organized and characteristically Scandinavian mode of governance. For many years, the conference operated without a formal organizational structure or elected leadership. Responsibility for hosting was transferred in a rotating manner among the Nordic countries, with the next university in line informally understood rather than officially appointed, though occasionally new venues would emerge. This consensus-based, trust-oriented approach reflects broader elements of Nordic organizational culture, as described by Hofstede, emphasizing collaboration, equality and mutual understanding. In recent years, a small advisory or senior group has formed to provide continuity, yet NOFOMA remains a network rather than a formal membership organization. This informality has been central to its collegial atmosphere and enduring success.

At times, NOFOMA has maintained a dedicated website, though continuity has not always been assured. Information on conferences from 2020 onward is available at: <https://nofoma.hi.is/>.

While it is difficult, and perhaps problematic, to single out specific individuals who have contributed to NOFOMA's development beyond its formative years, since doing so risks overlooking many others, some key figures merit mention. In addition to the founders, the members of the NOFOMA Strategic Committee have played central roles: Marianne Jahre, Gunnar Stefánsson, Jan Stentoft, Gyöngyi Kovács and Heidi Dreyer. Other individuals who have made significant contributions to NOFOMA over the past 2 decades include (in alphabetical order): Mats Abrahamsson, Håkan Aronsson, Maria Hüge-Brodin, Bente Flygansvær, Britta Gammelgaard, Árni Halldórsson, Trond Hammervoll, Susanne Herz, Mats Johansson, Patrik Jonsson, Tore Listou, Harri Lorentz, Kent Lumsden, Andreas Norrman, Lauri Ojala, Henrik Pålsson, Karen Spens, Fredrik Stahre and Juuso Töyli.

NOFOMA's role in advancing logistics research

Today, NOFOMA is a well-recognized international forum for the development of logistics theory and methodology, as well as a vital platform for knowledge exchange in logistics research and education. Through scholarly presentations, critical discussions and dedicated doctoral and educational forums, NOFOMA has made a decisive contribution to establishing logistics as a recognized academic discipline.

Over the years, NOFOMA has evolved into a structured and rigorous scientific forum. Its current features include:

- (1) Double-blind peer review (except for 2025, which employed a double peer review process without anonymization)
- (2) Structured submission templates
- (3) Multiple parallel sessions
- (4) Keynote addresses by leading scholars
- (5) Best paper awards
- (6) Special issues in high-impact journals

While NOFOMA has firmly established itself as a leading academic platform in logistics, continued efforts are required to further strengthen its scholarly standing and to ensure its ongoing relevance in an increasingly competitive international research landscape.

The steadily increasing interest in participation at NOFOMA, together with the growing number of PhD students enrolled in Scandinavian research environments focusing on logistics and SCM, bears witness to a clear intensification of scholarly activity in the field. According to Gubi *et al.* (2003), 75 doctoral dissertations were published between 1990 and 2001. Between 2002 and 2008, a further 70 dissertations were completed (Zachariassen and Stentoft Arlbjørn, 2010), followed by an additional 158 dissertations during the period 2009–2014 in the Nordic countries (Rajkumar *et al.*, 2016).

The substantial number of doctoral dissertations completed in Scandinavia has contributed significantly to the expansion and diversification of knowledge related to logistics and SCM phenomena. NOFOMA's central mission continues to be the advancement of Nordic logistics research and the development of its researchers. This mission is pursued through rigorous academic exchange, high-quality scholarly discussions, and, importantly, a strong sense of collegiality and shared enjoyment in the collective pursuit of academic progress.

Part 2: the scholarly impact of NOFOMA

A central question concerns how NOFOMA and logistics/SCM theory have co-evolved. Historically, logistics and SCM have been relatively applied disciplines, shaped by external developments, practical applications and theoretical advancement in a mutually reinforcing manner.

The origins of logistics lie in military practice, where time and place were foundational concepts. Early conceptualizations largely excluded economic considerations. For example, in early discussions of logistics, such as those within the Society of Logistics Engineers (SOLE), now the International Society of Logistics, in the United States, financial dimensions such as revenue generation were notably absent. A decisive turning point in the academic development of logistics theory came with Heskett's (1964) seminal work, which introduced business-oriented perspectives into logistics thinking.

Shifts in global economic conditions have consistently redirected logistics research priorities. During the 1980s, concerns about capital tied up in inventories highlighted the importance of turnover rates and lead times. In more recent years, geopolitical and humanitarian crises have driven attention to emergency logistics, resilience and supply chain disruption management.

From its inception, NOFOMA has both reflected and shaped these shifts. Early contributions focused on logistics functions, but by the 1990s, supply SCM and globalization had become central themes. Japanese industrial success and its association with Just-in-Time (JIT) and later Lean principles also inspired extensive research, including within NOFOMA.

Global shifts and their influence on logistics research

From its inception, many of the contributions presented at NOFOMA have reflected global developments and their impact on logistics and supply chain systems. During the 1980s, logistics research was shaped by deregulation, globalization, the diffusion of Japanese production philosophy (including JIT and quality management practices), advances in computing (such as optimization, simulation and electronic data interchange) and the growing recognition of integrated logistics as a source of strategic advantage. Over time, the evolution of research themes has closely mirrored broader societal, technological and geopolitical transformations.

1990s: The breakthrough of the Internet and the globalization of trade.

2000s: The rise of e-commerce (e.g. Amazon, Alibaba and eBay).

2010s: The expansion of mobile commerce and digital payment systems (e.g. Apple Pay and Alipay).

2020s: The growing influence of artificial intelligence, automation, and blockchain on logistics and supply chains.

Major natural disasters have also stimulated the growth of humanitarian logistics research, including the 1995 Kobe earthquake in Japan, the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, the 2010 Haiti earthquake, and

the 2023 earthquake in Türkiye and Syria. In addition, other global events have exerted direct and profound effects on supply chains (see, e.g. Alexander *et al.*, 2022; Ashok, 2023), frequently serving as catalysts for new research directions (see Table 1). Many of these developments have subsequently emerged as themes in papers presented at NOFOMA conferences.

These examples highlight the applied nature of logistics research and illustrate how external shocks, crises and technological transformations continually reshape research priorities. Importantly, NOFOMA has served as a key forum for presenting and debating such work, offering critical feedback, advancing theoretical development and fostering the creation of new knowledge in logistics and SCM.

NOFOMA's theoretical developments in logistics

Throughout NOFOMA's history, certain topics have remained central to its scholarly agenda. These include transportation, infrastructure, inventory and production control, procurement, lot sizing, packaging, distribution, logistics as a competitive factor, SCM and the methodology of logistics research, though the terminology has evolved over time.

Table 1. Geopolitical, economic and environmental events impacting logistics research (1990–2023)

Period	Event and research implications
1990–1991	<i>Gulf War</i> → Brought renewed attention to large-scale operational and military logistics, emphasizing lessons transferable to business logistics
1997	<i>Asian Financial Crisis</i> → Highlighted rising transportation costs, currency risks and the vulnerabilities associated with outsourcing
1997	<i>Kyoto Protocol</i> → Stimulated research on the environmental impacts of transportation, international trade agreements and their implications for global supply chains
2001	<i>September 11 Terrorist Attacks</i> → Led to studies on the effects of terrorism on transportation costs, security measures and increased supply chain risks
2003	<i>Iraq War</i> → Renewed focus on large-scale military logistics, military–private cooperation and logistical support for international relief operations
2005–2010	<i>Major Natural Disasters (Kashmir and Hurricane Katrina, 2005; Cyclone Nargis, 2008; Haiti Earthquake, 2010)</i> → Marked the emergence of theory development in humanitarian logistics and non-profit organizational supply chains readiness
2007–2008	<i>Global Financial Crisis and Recession</i> → Generated research on the impacts of declining international trade on service providers, transport volumes and freight costs
2008–2012	<i>Piracy off the Somali Coast (Gulf of Aden)</i> → Disrupted international shipping routes, increased freight costs and extended transit times
2010	<i>Escalation of International Trade Disputes over Rare Earth Elements</i> → Exposed vulnerabilities in global supply chains dependent on critical raw materials
2011	<i>Earthquake and Tsunami in Japan (Fukushima)</i> → Caused severe disruptions in automotive and electronics industries; intensified focus on dual and multiple sourcing strategies
2014	<i>Russian Annexation of Crimea</i> → Heightened uncertainty in grain supply, increased food and transport costs, and renewed attention to reshoring strategies
2015	<i>Paris Agreement</i> → Reinforced the importance of sustainability, encouraging the development of green logistics solutions and discussions on mechanisms such as carbon taxation
2016	<i>Brexit Referendum</i> → Triggered structural changes in international logistics networks and sourcing strategies within and beyond Europe
2020–2022	<i>COVID-19 Pandemic</i> → Exposed vulnerabilities in global supply chains due to lockdowns and border restrictions, highlighting the risks of zero-inventory strategies
2021	<i>Suez Canal Blockage (Ever Given Incident)</i> → Halted approximately 12% of world trade for several days, emphasizing supply chain fragility and the strategic relevance of nearshoring
2022	<i>Russian Invasion of Ukraine</i> → Intensified geopolitical tensions, causing disruptions in supply chains and spare parts availability across multiple material systems. Increased focus on self-sufficiency, autonomy
2023	<i>Advances in Artificial Intelligence Adoption</i> → Opened new avenues for logistics research concerning AI-driven transport monitoring, sourcing optimization, and SCM

1989–2004: defining logistics as an academic discipline and organizing supply chains. The early years were marked by efforts to map the Nordic academic environments in which logistics had begun to take root, while simultaneously legitimizing logistics as a distinct research discipline and establishing its theoretical foundations and methodological approaches. In the late 1980s to early 1990s, humanitarian and reverse logistics emerged as new areas of inquiry, expanding the field's scope beyond traditional industrial and commercial contexts. By the mid-1990s, themes such as organizational change and sustainability began to influence discussions on supply chains and transportation. Toward the end of this period, research interests diversified further to include buyer–seller relationships and integration, electronic commerce, globalization, outsourcing and third-party logistics, risk management, track-and-trace technologies and the organization of logistics functions.

2005–2013: broadening the domain and building conceptual foundations. The mid-2000s marked a turning point in NOFOMA scholarship. Methodological reflection became prominent, most notably through Kovács and Spens' (2005) legitimization of abductive reasoning as a distinctive mode of inference in logistics research. This intervention opened the way for theoretically generative, case-based studies that iteratively moved between empirical puzzles and emerging conceptual insights. At the same time, contributions at the 2006–2007 conferences introduced early digitalization themes (e.g. RFID) and design-oriented approaches (e.g. vendor-managed inventory frameworks), signalling a shift toward technology-enabled coordination across firm boundaries. Corporate social responsibility (CSR), ethics and Lean principles also gained increasing attention.

The “Beyond Business Logistics” debates (2008–2009) crystallized this outward turn by advocating an expanded scope that encompassed networks, services, humanitarian operations and broader societal interfaces. This broadened agenda encouraged theoretical development that explicitly linked logistics to public policy, crisis management and the provision of societal value. As Listou (2008) concluded, the scientific rigor of NOFOMA research has improved over the years. There is now greater coherence between research questions, methodological choices, theoretical framing and research outcomes. Nevertheless, a substantial proportion of the papers presented at NOFOMA remain primarily descriptive in orientation.

Between 2009 and 2013, NOFOMA research consolidated around inter-organizational and networked supply chains. Governance structures, extended coordination and the interplay of relational competencies with performance outcomes became prominent. Sustainability emerged as a strategic and theoretical domain, with studies on green logistics, packaging logistics, reverse logistics, stakeholder pressures and competitive advantage blending institutional and operations perspectives. Humanitarian and city logistics also entered the mainstream, often approached through process theories of innovation and multi-actor governance. By the early 2010s, resilience had moved from an emergent concern to a theorized construct, typically framed relationally in terms of competencies, inter-firm ties and adaptive capacity, signalling the maturation of risk and continuity theory in logistics.

2014–2025: mainstreaming sustainability, digitalization and resilience. From 2014 onward, sustainability shifted from a thematic concern to a mainstream axis of theorizing. The 2014 NOFOMA featured studies of packaging logistics and emissions mechanisms, extending environmental theory beyond facility-level optimization toward system-level design and policy interfaces. At the same time, research on inter-firm coordination, power and dependence, and capability development reinforced governance- and capability-based perspectives.

By 2016–2018, digitalization and omnichannel complexity had become defining themes. Research highlighted data-enabled planning, analytics-driven decision support, last-mile design and customer service quality. This period also reflected methodological diversification, with expectations of clear theoretical contributions and the refinement of constructs around integration, information sharing and process design. Scholarship increasingly shifted from describing technology adoption to theorizing digitally mediated coordination and customer experience.

The period 2019–2021, shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic, re-centred resilience and introduced human-centric perspectives. Conceptualizations of resilience broadened from shock absorption to adaptive reconfiguration under uncertainty. At the same time, issues such as workforce safety, employee well-being, service recovery, information handling and blockchain technology gained prominence, alongside continued interest in urban logistics.

Between 2022 and 2025, NOFOMA research has emphasized customer experience and crisis-responsive logistics. Frameworks for last-mile and omnichannel distribution have been formalized, grounded in service-dominant and experience-centric logics. The 2023 conference explicitly foregrounded logistics “during global crises”, integrating humanitarian, commercial and geopolitical logics into cohesive theoretical narratives. Advanced methodologies, including experimental, computational and mixed-method designs, have become increasingly visible, evidencing a field-wide deepening of methodological sophistication in support of stronger causal inference and mid-range theory building.

Synthesis: shifts in logistics theory, 2005–2025. Across the past 2 decades, NOFOMA has facilitated major shifts in logistics theory.

- (1) *Domain Expansion:* From firm-internal cost and flow optimization to inter-organizational, service-oriented and societal challenges.
- (2) *Risk, Resilience and Continuity:* From early interest in vulnerabilities to theorized constructs linking relational competencies, governance, visibility and adaptive capacity, stress-tested by systemic crises.
- (3) *Sustainability as a Core Lens:* Environmental and social sustainability moved from peripheral to constitutive, reframing logistics as a design science balancing efficiency, emissions, reverse and circularity logistics, and policy mechanisms.
- (4) *Digitalization and Customer Experience:* Progressing from IT implementation (e.g. RFID, APS) to theorizing digitally mediated coordination, visibility and customer experience in last-mile/omnichannel settings.
- (5) *Methodological Pluralism:* Moving beyond deduction to abductive reasoning, and more recently to multi-method, computational, and experimental designs, while retaining rich qualitative traditions.

Taken together, NOFOMA contributions have (1) diversified methods, (2) shifted the unit of analysis from firms to networks, markets and societies, and (3) blended operations and economic lenses with behavioural, institutional and capability-based perspectives. The emerging agenda emphasizes theorizing viability under uncertainty, integrating human experience with system design, and sustaining methodological openness in logistics research.

Embracing the unknown: reconnecting rigor, relevance and renewal in supply chain scholarship. Considering the growing intersections between the unknowns of industry practice and academic inquiry, there is a renewed opportunity to revisit the foundational principles of the logistics and supply chain field, principles grounded in industry collaboration, practical relevance, and methodological rigor rather than academic exclusivity (van Hoek and Wong, 2025). As van Hoek and Wong suggest in their exploration of “the unknown”, the future of supply chain research depends not only on addressing well-defined problems but on engaging with *epistemic uncertainty*, the ambiguity that arises when knowledge boundaries are fluid and evolving. Embracing such uncertainty transforms the *unknown* from a constraint into a generative space for innovation, theory-building and methodological pluralism.

Within this applied science context, NOFOMA offers an exemplary arena for *engaged scholarship*, a place where researchers and practitioners co-create knowledge, bridging theory and practice to advance the field and its societal relevance. This collaborative ethos exemplifies how boundary-spanning dialogue can anchor rigor in real-world complexity without sacrificing academic depth. For emerging scholars and PhD researchers, this moment

represents an exciting intellectual frontier: one where uncertainty is not a barrier but a stimulus for discovery, and where methodological diversity, collaboration and societal impact converge to redefine the purpose and promise of supply chain scholarship.

The NOFOMA-IJPDLM nexus: a platform for scholarly advancement. NOFOMA has sustained a long-standing and productive collaboration with the *International Journal of Physical Distribution and Logistics Management (IJPDLM)*, most visibly through the publication of annual special issues featuring the conference's most significant contributions. This partnership has not only enhanced the visibility of logistics research but has also made a substantive contribution to the theoretical and methodological development of the field. Collectively, these special issues consolidate the strongest outputs from NOFOMA and taken together, trace the evolution of logistics theory within, and often beyond, the Nordic tradition: from firm-internal "business logistics" to inter-organizational, societal and crisis-responsive perspectives; and from largely qualitative case approaches to increasingly pluralistic and mixed-method designs. As such, they provide a defensible evidentiary basis for periodizing theoretical development in logistics and SCM.

Beyond serving as a publication outlet, NOFOMA has played a formative role in shaping the trajectory of logistics and SCM scholarship. The conference functions as a crucible for intellectual exchange, enabling scholars at all career stages to present their work, receive constructive critique and refine their arguments in a collegial yet rigorous environment. Many of these contributions have subsequently appeared in leading academic journals, with *IJPDLM* serving as the principal venue.

Through this nexus, NOFOMA's scholarly output has helped to shape conceptual frameworks, foster methodological diversity and deepen understanding of logistics and SCM phenomena. Recurring themes, including strategic logistics, integration, sustainability and digitalization, were often introduced and debated within NOFOMA long before they gained wider academic recognition, underscoring the network's role as both a driver and reflector of theoretical innovation.

The importance of IJPDLM as a collaborative partner for NOFOMA. Since its establishment in 1970, the *IJPDLM* has played a pivotal role in shaping the theoretical landscape of logistics and SCM. Originally focused on physical distribution, the journal gradually broadened its scope to encompass strategic supply chain integration, sustainability, digital transformation and human-centric perspectives.

Throughout its history, *IJPDLM* has contributed significantly to the development of theoretical foundations in SCM (e.g. Houlihan, 1985; La Londe and Masters, 1994; Gripsrud *et al.*, 2006; Durach *et al.*, 2021; van Hoek, 2021). The journal has advanced the application of organizational theories, such as the resource-based view and transaction cost economics, to explain inter-organizational relationships within supply chains. It has also underscored the importance of human factors in logistics, as reflected in a dedicated virtual issue on the role of people in enhancing supply chain performance and resilience.

In line with global concerns, *IJPDLM* has actively shaped sustainability discourses, particularly in relation to green SCM and the circular economy (e.g. Jahre, 1995). More recently, it has been at the forefront of exploring the implications of digital transformation, addressing topics such as the structural effects of additive manufacturing (Durach *et al.*, 2017) and the potential of blockchain to enhance transparency and traceability.

Acknowledging the growing complexity of global supply chains, the journal has consistently promoted methodological diversification (e.g. Durach *et al.*, 2015). Recent contributions (e.g. Russo *et al.*, 2024) illustrate the adoption of innovative approaches, including qualitative comparative analysis, ethnography and machine learning, to address multifaceted challenges.

Through its enduring commitment to theoretical rigor, methodological innovation and engagement with emerging societal issues, *IJPDLM* continues to serve as a leading platform for disseminating cutting-edge research in logistics and SCM (Russo and Rao, 2025).

During the 2000s, the scope of research broadened to include e-commerce, environmental logistics and reverse logistics. New concepts and research domains emerged, such as logistics outsourcing, third-party logistics (3PL), humanitarian logistics and defence logistics. Several influential NOFOMA papers published in IJPDLM during this period are presented in [Table 2](#).

During the 2010s, research advanced into new frontiers, including omnichannel logistics, blockchain, resilience, additive manufacturing (3D printing), service-dominant logic, logistics innovation and SCM 4.0. Representative and influential publications from this period are presented in [Table 3](#).

In the 2020s, scholarly attention has turned toward the effects of major disruptions such as COVID-19 and the transformative potential of artificial intelligence in SCM. The resilience of supply chains has become a dominant research theme.

A notable feature of *IJPDLM*'s NOFOMA special issues has been the inclusion of editorial introductions that contextualize each year's conference and highlight its thematic focus. [Appendix 1](#) lists all *IJPDLM–NOFOMA special issues published up to 2023*, providing a valuable resource for tracing the evolution of logistics and SCM research through this long-standing and distinctive collaboration.

This enduring partnership underscores the significant scholarly impact of the NOFOMA–IJPDLM nexus in advancing logistics and SCM. Through a shared commitment to theoretical rigor, methodological innovation and topical relevance, *IJPDLM* has provided a leading platform for the dissemination of pioneering research, while NOFOMA has fostered academic dialogue and intellectual community-building through its annual conferences. Together, they have co-evolved with the discipline itself, addressing emerging challenges, from sustainability and digital transformation to resilience and artificial intelligence, and in doing so, have shaped both academic inquiry and practical applications in logistics and SCM.

NOFOMA network academics' influence on logistics publishing. An interesting aspect of the Nordic academic logistics community is that Scandinavian researchers founded their own scholarly journal, the Scandinavian Journal of Materials Administration, around 1975, which ceased publication in the late 1980s. This early initiative reflects an institutional commitment

Table 2. Influential research themes in logistics and supply chain management (2004–2009)

Year	Topic/Focus	Citations
2004	<i>Abductive reasoning in logistics research</i>	1,409
2005	<i>Collaborative logistics management and the role of third-party service providers</i>	400
2006	<i>Humanitarian logistics in disaster relief operations</i>	1,762
2008	<i>Negotiation strategies in supply chain management</i>	97
2009	<i>Linking corporate strategy and supply chain management</i>	134

Note(s): Citation counts are based on Google Scholar data as of April 24, 2025

Table 3. Influential NOFOMA-related papers published in IJPDLM (2011–2021)

Year	Topic/Focus	Citations
2011	<i>Dynamic capabilities and sustainable supply chain management</i>	597
2012	<i>The influence of relational competencies on supply chain resilience</i>	1,310
2013	<i>Packaging logistics: promoting sustainable efficiency</i>	164
2015	<i>Enhancing supply chain visibility in a pharmaceutical supply chain</i>	143
2019	<i>Which future path to pick? A contingency approach to omnichannel warehouse configuration</i>	41
2021	<i>Customer experience dimensions in last-mile delivery</i>	66

Note(s): Citation counts are based on Google Scholar data as of April 24, 2025

to advancing logistics research in parallel with the emergence of international journals such as *IJPDLM* (est. 1970) and *JBL* (est. 1979).

The academic influence of the NOFOMA network extends well beyond the annual conference itself. Analyses of publication patterns, particularly in *IJPDLM*, indicate that Nordic scholars associated with NOFOMA are prominently represented among the journal's productive and highly cited authors. This presence extends beyond the NOFOMA special issues, reflecting an ongoing engagement with *IJPDLM* as a preferred outlet for high-quality research. The network's broader impact is also evident in tri-annual reviews of research productivity and topic trends, such as the recent study by [Maloni et al. \(2024\)](#), which lists several NOFOMA institutions among the global top twenty in logistics and SCM research output. Collectively, these observations underscore the enduring influence of the NOFOMA community in shaping international logistics and SCM scholarship.

NOFOMA in the broader academic landscape

Today, NOFOMA operates within a competitive field of logistics and SCM conferences, alongside well-established forums such as.

- (1) *IPSERA* (International Purchasing and Supply Education and Research Association)
- (2) *ICL* (International Conference on Logistics)
- (3) *EurOMA* (European Operations Management Association)
- (4) *ERS* (European Research Seminar on Logistics and SCM)

Some academic environments have chosen not to participate in NOFOMA because its conference proceedings are not formally recognized as academically qualifying publications (with an ISBN), although this has been the case in certain years. The underlying idea, however, is that papers presented at NOFOMA can be further developed based on feedback received during the conference and later published in traditional peer-reviewed journals without being considered previously published. *NOFOMA, therefore, remains an outstanding platform for developing research ideas and advancing academic work.* Its format fosters meaningful networking opportunities and provides a collegial setting for the exchange of scholarly insights. As a result, many researchers have subsequently published their NOFOMA contributions in leading international journals, both through standard submission processes and in special issue volumes.

The establishment of NOFOMA in 1989 was motivated by the need for collaboration among relatively small and fragmented academic institutions in the Nordic region. At the time, logistics research lacked a clearly defined academic community, and individual institutions were often unable to sustain strong research environments independently. By uniting logistics scholars across national and institutional boundaries, NOFOMA created a much-needed platform for academic exchange, collaboration and professional development.

Since then, NOFOMA has played a pivotal role in shaping logistics research in the Nordic countries. Through its annual conferences, doctoral workshops and linked publications, the network has contributed significantly to the consolidation of logistics as a rigorous academic discipline. While challenges remain in further strengthening its scholarly visibility, NOFOMA continues to function as a vital hub for logistics researchers, fostering collaboration, innovation and intellectual community within the broader field of SCM.

Reflections

Over the years, our collective understanding of logistics as an academic field has matured and expanded. As recent conference programs demonstrate, logistics research now encompasses a wide range of topics and contexts, often mirroring broader societal developments. Digitalization and sustainability have emerged as defining influences, reshaping both theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches.

NOFOMA has contributed to the academic development of logistics and SCM theory by legitimizing the field, broadening its conceptual horizons, embedding sustainability and resilience at its core, fostering methodological pluralism and building a vibrant community of scholars. Through its sustained engagement with real-world disruptions and societal challenges, NOFOMA has not only reflected but also actively shaped the theoretical trajectory of logistics and SCM, ensuring the field's continuing relevance for both academia and practice. A summary of NOFOMA's academic contributions is provided in [Appendix 2](#).

This evolution has consolidated logistics as a recognized academic discipline, one that is increasingly valued by the business community. Furthermore, the academic requirements for doctoral education in logistics are now far more standardized and harmonized across institutions than they were 37 years ago.

As authors of this account, we take pride in having contributed to the founding of NOFOMA, and we are gratified that so many scholars have enriched the community over the years by sharing their expertise and advancing the field. Over the past 3 decades, numerous colleagues have played central roles in NOFOMA's development, while new generations of researchers continue to bring fresh perspectives and energy. If the community remains committed to NOFOMA's mission and maintains rigorous scientific standards that attract leading researchers, we are confident that NOFOMA will continue to flourish.

The purpose of NOFOMA has never been to showcase individual achievement or assert the superiority of research agendas. Rather, its mission is to foster the exchange of insights and to promote collaboration, thereby enabling all participants to contribute meaningfully to the advancement of logistics scholarship. The true spirit of NOFOMA lies in this collective endeavour, the sharing of knowledge and the mutual support of fellow scholars in their academic pursuits.

While this study focuses on the Nordic context, its implications are far-reaching. Many regions today face challenges similar to those encountered by Nordic institutions in the 1980s, establishing legitimacy for an applied field, nurturing collaboration across universities and connecting research with societal needs. The NOFOMA experience demonstrates how a shared regional vision, combined with academic openness and industry engagement, can sustain a vibrant scholarly community over decades. These lessons may serve as inspiration for building comparable collaborative networks in other regions seeking to strengthen their logistics and SCM research capacity.

Future perspective of NOFOMA

Predicting the future of NOFOMA is, of course, challenging. In an academic landscape characterized by limited resources and increasing pressure for publication in high-ranking journals, NOFOMA, like other research forums, will need to compete for participants. Our belief, however, is that if NOFOMA continues to capture emerging trends in logistics, currently centred on supply security, resilience, preparedness, dual-use, innovation and digitalization, and maintains its tradition of collegial exchange and social interaction, the major Nordic logistics and SCM research communities will remain committed to organizing and contributing to the conference.

To enhance its value for PhD students, NOFOMA could consider appointing senior professors as dedicated reviewers and mentors to support early-career researchers in developing their work toward publication. Such an initiative would further strengthen NOFOMA's role as a nurturing environment for scholarly growth and make the conference even more distinctive within the international logistics research community.

We extend our sincere gratitude to all participants, keynote speakers, journal representatives, organizers and members of the scientific committee who have contributed to the enduring success of NOFOMA. We look forward with anticipation to celebrating its 40th and 50th anniversaries and to witnessing its continued role as a vital forum for logistics and SCM research.

Future research

Future research could further explore the evolving strength and dynamics of the NOFOMA network. Important questions remain about how collaborative academic communities sustain themselves over time, how they adapt to changing research funding structures and publication pressures, and how digitalization and globalization reshape interaction and knowledge exchange.

It would also be valuable to reflect on whether, and how, academic conferences like NOFOMA will continue to thrive in the future. Such forums, often local in origin but aspiring to attract regional and global audiences, now face growing competition from new conference formats, alternative publication channels and digital platforms for scholarly exchange. Future studies might examine the role of conferences as foundations for networking, collaboration and community-building in an increasingly digital and resource-constrained academic environment. Questions related to their environmental sustainability, vulnerability to geopolitical developments and the evolving perception of conference proceedings as scholarly outputs in logistics and SCM research merit particular attention.

AI generative

The authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI) to improve the English language quality of this paper.

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Appendix 1

Lists all IJPDLM–NOFOMA special issues published up to 2023

Special issues of IJPDLM featuring papers from NOFOMA conferences, up to and including 2023. Each entry indicates the publication year, volume and issue number, the corresponding NOFOMA conference year, and a direct link to the issue.

- (1) Vol. 54 Issue 6 2024 *NOFOMA 2023 Special Issue*
- (2) Vol. 54 Issue 2 2024 *NOFOMA 2022 Special Issue*
- (3) Vol. 53 Issue 2 2023 *NOFOMA 2021 Special Issue*
- (4) Vol. 51 Issue 9 2021 *NOFOMA 2020 Special Issue*
- (5) Vol. 51 Issue 1 2021 *NOFOMA 2019 Special Issue*
- (6) Vol. 50 Issue 1 2020 *NOFOMA 2018 Special Issue*
- (7) Vol. 48 Issue 5 2018 *NOFOMA 2017 Special Issue*
- (8) Vol. 47 Issue 7 2017 *NOFOMA 2016 Special Issue*
- (9) Vol. 46 Issue 9 2016 *NOFOMA 2015 Special issue*
- (10) Vol. 45 Issue 4 2015 *NOFOMA 2014 Special Issue*
- (11) Vol. 44 Issue 4 2014 *NOFOMA 2013 Special Issue*
- (12) Vol. 43 Issue 4 2013 *NOFOMA 2012 Special Issue*
- (13) Vol. 42 Issue 4 2012 *NOFOMA 2011 Special Issue*
- (14) Vol. 41 Issue 4 2011 *NOFOMA 2010 Special Issue*
- (15) Vol. 40 Issue 4 2010 *Selected papers from the 21st NOFOMA Conference 2009*

- (16) Vol. 39 Issue 1 2009 *Beyond Business Logistics NOFOMA 2008 special issue part 2*
- (17) Vol. 38 Issue 10 2008 *Beyond Business Logistics NOFOMA 2008 special issue part 1*
- (18) Vol. 38 Issue 1 2008 *Papers from the 19th NOFOMA Conference held in Reykjavik, Iceland 2007 Part 2*
- (19) Vol. 37 Issue 10 2007 *Papers from the 19th NOFOMA Conference held in Reykjavik, Iceland 2007 Part 1*
- (20) Vol. 37 Issue 2 2007 *Papers from the 18th NOFOMA conference held in Oslo, Norway, 2006*
- (21) Vol. 36 Issue 2 2006 *Papers from the 17th NOFOMA Conference held in Copenhagen, Denmark, 2005*
- (22) Vol. 35 Issue 2 2005 *Papers from the 16th NOFOMA Conference held in Linköping, Sweden, 2004*

<https://www.emerald.com/insight/publication/issn/0960-0035>

Appendix 2

A summary of NOFOMA's academic contributions

NOFOMA's contributions to the development of logistics and SCM Theory

Over nearly 4 decades, NOFOMA has played a decisive role in advancing logistics and SCM as legitimate and theoretically grounded academic fields. Its contributions can be summarized in several interrelated dimensions.

- (1) **Legitimization and Disciplinary Foundation**
In its formative years (late 1980–1990s), NOFOMA provided a platform for legitimizing logistics as an academic discipline within Nordic universities. By consolidating fragmented research efforts, it contributed to establishing a theoretical foundation and methodological repertoire for the field, thereby enabling logistics to move beyond its applied and practice-oriented origins.
- (2) **Responsiveness to Global Developments**
NOFOMA scholarship has consistently mirrored and interpreted global economic, technological and societal transformations. From globalization and e-commerce to humanitarian crises, financial shocks, sustainability agendas and digital transformation, the network has demonstrated the applied and adaptive nature of logistics theory, while simultaneously shaping its conceptual frameworks.
- (3) **Domain Expansion and Theoretical Diversification**
NOFOMA has facilitated the shift from firm-internal cost and flow optimization to inter-organizational, service-oriented and societal perspectives. Its conferences and publications have introduced and critically debated themes such as Japanese production philosophy and Lean practices, buyer–supplier integration, outsourcing and third-party logistics (3PL), humanitarian logistics, resilience and customer experience. Through these developments, NOFOMA has significantly contributed to broadening the field of logistics and SCM theory beyond the narrow confines of “business logistics.”
- (4) **Sustainability as a Core Lens**
From the mid-1990s onwards, NOFOMA helped integrate environmental, and later social, sustainability into logistics research, reframing the field as a design science concerned not only with efficiency, but also with emissions, circularity and societal responsibility. This mainstreaming of sustainability significantly reshaped theoretical development in logistics and SCM.
- (5) **Methodological Innovation and Pluralism**
NOFOMA has encouraged methodological reflection and diversification. From legitimizing abductive reasoning and case-based research to advancing computational, experimental and mixed-method approaches, it has strengthened the coherence between research questions, theoretical framing and empirical outcomes. This methodological pluralism has enhanced the scientific rigor and credibility of logistics research.

(6) Community Building and Scholarly Exchange

Perhaps most importantly, NOFOMA has served as a crucible for intellectual exchange. Its conferences, doctoral workshops and collaboration with *IJPDLM* have created an academic community where ideas are tested, theories refined and methodological innovations debated. The NOFOMA–IJPDLM nexus has elevated the visibility and impact of Nordic logistics research in the global academic arena.

Notes

1. See [Storhagen and Hellberg \(1987\)](#), “Just-in-time from a business logistics perspective,” *Engineering Costs and Production Economics*, Vol. 12, No. 1–4, pp. 117–121. Furthermore, Hellberg and Storhagen were among the first researchers in the Nordic countries to undertake a two-week study trip to Japan in 1988, which included visits to various sites, such as Toyota’s automobile manufacturing plant. Also, [Storhagen \(1995\)](#), “The human aspects of JIT implementation.” *International Journal of Physical Distribution and Logistics Management*, Vol. 25, No. 3, pp. 4–23.
2. NoFoMa = [Nordisk Forskningsseminar i Material Administration](#).
3. Followed by [Arlbjørn et al. \(2008\)](#).

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Corresponding author

Roland Hellberg can be contacted at: roland.hellberg@fhs.se