



‘Creating a Transnational Rhine Economy, 1850-2000’

Kick-off meeting of a Transnational Rhine Network,
12-14 November 2009, World Museum Rotterdam

During the last one and a half century, the Rhine River became the foremost commercial inland waterway of Europe. The tonnage moved on the Rhine was greater than that on any other river in the world. Since the early 19th century, the waterway was made navigable from Rotterdam to Basel. This commercial highway from the North Sea to Switzerland went through the most highly developed industrial area of Europe, and had a larger population gathered in a greater number of big towns on its banks than any other European river. Geographical location and natural conditions enabled the development of Europe's most important economic region. However, it were entrepreneurs and firms that used the given possibilities and created the economic reality, while local and national authorities in some periods gave them the freedom to do so, and in other periods hindered them in their commercial interests. Small, medium sized and large international firms and (inter)national cartels shaped the Rhine economy. Dutch, German, French and Swiss governments, towns and district councils, as well as early international governmental organisations facilitated the interregional economy around the Rhine.

The development of the German Ruhr area into the most important industrial centre of Europe since the 1870s, would have been impossible without the Rhine, just as the development of Rotterdam (and the surrounding towns) as the most important deep sea port of Europe. These areas developed into a European cross-border centre of economic activity without a rival. The Rhine, however, crossed borders of several states, with various national institutions and conflicting interests, which was a source of co-operation as well as conflict. By viewing regional development as a historical process, considerable leeway is also opened up for the application of two key concepts from evolutionary economics, i.e. path dependence and adaptation. Economic choices are always to some extent depended on past institutional and technological developments and it is even so that historical decisions have major influence on decisions now and in the future. Regional economies inherit past developments with negative as well as positive effects. On the other hand, a region's lasting success depends on its adaptive capability: i.e. the capacity of firms, clusters, and state institutions to adapt to new market, technological and organizational opportunities.

This Transnational Rhine Conference explores these different aspects of long-term economic development of the Rhine clusters and focuses on two main actors in the Rhine economy, i.e. (trans)national firms and governments. It hypothesizes that both firms and markets are engaged with political institutions in a mutually dependent relationship. As a consequence, companies with important economic relations across the borders were interested in peaceful relations and open borders. Nevertheless, firms also had to support national targets, which could result in conflicts with the states and with their international interests. Central questions are: how and why did the Rhine economy become one of the most competitive economic regions in the world? What were the consequences of this long-lasting successful economic development for the political relations between the diverse Rhine States? How did cross-border economic relations influence the economic development within the diverse countries? What were the effects of shattered political surrounding for the development of firms and groups of firms?

In order to realize a research programme on these and related issues, the organisers of this historical Rhine conference endeavour to build a transnational network of economic and business historians, as well as historians of technology, in the first place from the countries along the Rhine and its delta, i.e. Switzerland, Germany, France, Belgium and the Netherlands. The aim of this first conference is to explore different aspects of long-term economic development of the Rhine clusters which will be looked into from five different perspectives, i.e. geographical, macro-economical, institutional, business historical, and technological. Although these perspectives sometimes overlap it is useful to analyze the Rhine economy from these different points of view, dependent on different academic fields. The organizers, based at the Erasmus University of Rotterdam and Goethe University in Frankfurt, aim to bring together scholars from various disciplines and make it a genuine multidisciplinary venture.

Preliminary Programme:

Thursday	19.30 opening
	20.00 key note speech: Patricia Clavin (Jesus College Oxford)
	<i>Routes through Transnational History</i>
	21.00 Drinks

Friday

9.00-11.00 First Session: Geographical Perspectives

Theo Notteboom (University of Antwerp): *A tale of maritime gateways and barge connectivity: container barge transport on the Rhine between 1968 and 2009*

Cornelis Disco (TU Enschede): *Domesticating a river. The Rhine as Transnational Commons 1815-1990*

Hugo van Driel and Ferry de Goey (Erasmus University Rotterdam): *Rotterdam Harbour and the German Hinterland*

Discussant: Mila Davids (TU Eindhoven)

11.00-11.30 Coffee and tea break

11.30-13.00 Second Session: Macro-economic Perspectives

Hein Klemann (Erasmus University Rotterdam): *The Nation, Nationalism and of Modern Macro economics.*

Niko Wolf (Warwick): *Was Germany Ever United?*

Michel Hau (University of Strasbourg): *The Rhine and the Economic Development of Strasbourg, XIXth-XXth Centuries*

Discussant: Jan Otmar Hesse (Georg-August-Universität Göttingen)

12.30-13.30 Lunch

13.30-14.00 Key Note Speech:

Johan Schot (TU Eindhoven)

Transnational Infra structures and the rise of modern Europe

14.00-15.30 Third Session: Institutional Perspectives

Jeffrey Fear (University Redlands): *The Role of Cartels in the Rhine Economy*

Harm Schröter (University of Bergen): *International Cartels and the Sovereignty of Rhine border States, 1919-1939*

Ben Wubs (Erasmus University Rotterdam): *The expansion of Dutch multinationals in Germany during the inter-war period, AKU, Shell, Unilever and Philips*

Discussant: Alfred Reckendrees (Copenhagen Business School)

15.30-16.00 Tea break

16.00-17.00 General discussion

19.00 Diner

Saturday

9.00-10.30 Fourth Session: Business History Perspectives

Ralf Banken and Werner Plumpe (University Frankfurt):
The Rhine as a structuring element of business development in Western Europe

Dieter Ziegler (University Bochum) and Thomas Jovovic
(Deutsches Bergbaumuseum Bochum) : *The organisation of the Ruhr coal trade in the early twentieth century*

Monica Dommann (University of Zürich): *Logistics and the Rhine*

Discussant: Christian Kleinschmidt (University of Marburg)

10.30-11.00 Coffee break

11.00-12.30 Fifth Session: Technological Perspectives

Hans Buiter (TU Eindhoven) and Andreas Kunz (Institute of European History): *Waterways and Railways*

Vincent Lagendijk (TU Eindhoven) *Constructing Electricity Networks in Europe*

Uwe Lübken (Rachel Carson Center, LMU Munich): *Risk Societies? Flooding and the Industrialisation of the Rhine and Ohio River Valleys*

Discussant: John Groenewegen (TU Delft, not confirmed yet)

12.30-13.00 Lunch

13.00-14.00 General discussion

14.00 End of Conference. For those interested a tour by boat through Rotterdam port.