

**Fourth Transnational Rhine Conference:
Crossing the Rhine. Globalisation and the
Impact of War on the Rhine Economy**

Veranstalter: Erasmus University Rotterdam;
Goethe University Frankfurt am Main
Datum, Ort: 21.03.2013-23.03.2013, Rotterdam
Bericht von: Christian Marx, Neuere und
Neueste Geschichte, Universität Trier

Since the 19th century the Rhine River has been essential for the economic development all over Western Europe. In the second half of the century, traffic and economic activity along the Rhine showed an explosive growth. As the Rhine region includes territories of different European national states the traditional ways of national historiography were insufficient to explain its historical continuity and change. As a consequence the research project of the Rhine economy analyses the long-term economic development from a transnational perspective and is looking for the region's competitive strength.¹

In his introductory remarks WERNER PLUMPE (Frankfurt) stressed the significance of the Rhine economy as a hotspot of economic development and as a place of modern capitalism. The division of labour along the river has been open to structural change at all times. After that JEAN-MARIE WOEHRLING (Strasbourg) summarised the history of the Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine (CCNR). During the Napoleonic period obstructing regulation and tolls were lifted, thenceforth the CCNR has been guaranteeing these liberties. The CCNR became responsible for freedom of navigation, navigability, regulation, and safety on the river. According to him the CCRN was a modern organisation with a common spirit that created a contiguous economic region.

In the first session the relevance of the Rhine in Napoleonic times was examined. ROBERT MARK SPAULDING (Wilmington) emphasised three major forces modifying the commercial life of the river between 1792 and 1814. First was the dislocation of warfare caused by active French forces along the Rhine (1793-1799). Second was the recasting of the river's commercial regime dismantling old rights and restrictions. In 1805, a

new administrative regime took control providing an organisational uniformity for the entire river; this new Octroi administration reformed nearly every element of commercial practice and had positive effects on the commerce. Third was Napoleon's Continental Blockade. Consequently the volume of imported overseas goods reduced greatly. As part of an institutional change the downstream traffic expanded, and some regions lost ground, whereas other commercial centres like Düsseldorf gained influence. In his comment HARM SCHRÖTER (Bergen) mentioned the significance of monopoly for transport and highlighted the relevance of networks in the commercial towns. The paper of TAKAFUMI KUROSAWA (Kyoto) focused on the currency chaos in Switzerland during the first half of the 19th century. It was the most upper part of the Rhine River where the French and the German currency system met. Before 1848, no central currency authority existed in Switzerland. A majority of the coins were brought from the neighbouring countries. In this way, Geneva adopted the French system, whereas the Italian speaking Ticino was orientated toward Milan's Lira, and the Eastern cantons remained loyal to the German Gulden. Kurosawa called this „currency parasitism“ and showed that the foundation of the federal state in 1848 did not create a national economy, but a more open transnational economy. The lack of a national currency system had no strong effects on the Swiss economic development, yet the currency chaos hindered the economic activity to some extent.

In the second session RALF BANKEN (Frankfurt) and BEN WUBS (Rotterdam) presented some fundamental thoughts about the future direction of the Transnational Rhine Project. The existing transnational network of economic and business historians, geographers and social scientists, as well as researchers of modern and recent history scraped together scholars from various disciplines. It will analyse the Rhine economy

¹ The conference was sponsored by the Erasmus School of History, Culture, and Communication (Rotterdam), the Erwin von Steinbach Stiftung (Frankfurt am Main), N.W. Posthumus Instituut, Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek (NWO), Port of Rotterdam and Erasmus Trustfonds.

from different perspectives, i.e. geographical, macro-economical, institutional, business historical, and technological. By this, it is also opened up for the application of concepts from evolutionary economics like path dependence or adaptation. Banken and Wubs emphasised the theoretical and methodological pluralism.

The third session was characterised by the first globalisation wave in the 19th century. HEIN KLEMMANN (Rotterdam) discussed the history of the CCNR between 1815 and 1914. Its foundation at the Vienna Congress in 1815 was a reaction to the collapse of the Napoleonic Empire. The CCNR got the authority to organise navigation without discrimination of flag and cargo, to keep tolls low, and to make sure that the Rhine states kept the channel of the river in good shape. In the first period a struggle for power became reality, while after the Mainz Convention of 1831 Prussia dominated the development, culminating in the Peace of Prague in 1866, in which its ideas of Rhine policy were dictated to the other German Rhine states. France and the Netherlands also had to accept these ideas in the Convention of Mannheim in 1868. Klemmann pointed out that by German dominance since 1871 the Rhine navigation has been completely liberated from juridical and fiscal obstacles. Enormous canalisation projects removed natural barriers. Thus, the Rhine got freely navigable from Mannheim to the sea, and the river became the highway for transports to the German industrial centres. Prussia used the CCNR to free the Rhine from restrictions, though Prussian dominance rested upon its increasing influence caused by military and economic power. In return Prussia had to accept CCNR's rules. ABE DE JONG (Rotterdam) adverted to the effects of the CCNR on the economic integration of the Rhine economy as well as on the economic development of Prussia and the Netherlands, and to the internal ways of organisational functioning. JOEP SCHENK and MARTEN BOON (Rotterdam) illustrated the importance of declining costs of transport by the emergence of steam powered ships and railways to the first globalisation. Ports in the North-west of Europe with an access to the continental railway network profited strongly from the

global trade in the second half of the 19th century. Although the Rotterdam port was connected to the railways, its principal hinterland connection remained the Rhine. In the 1870s, the Rhine traffic lost market shares to the railways and its main rivals in Antwerp and Hamburg, nevertheless Rotterdam evolved to Europe's leading bulk port. Schenk and Boon hypothesised that the competition between the ports urged port companies to invest in new technologies. In contrast to the Ruhr coal trade, which was characterised by late investments on Rhine shipping because of a focus on railways, the petroleum trade used the limited opportunities for Rhine shipping in the 1870s; in the case of petroleum trade followed the Rhine shipping.

The fourth session made the First World War a subject of discussion. EVA ROELEVINK (Bochum) analysed the organisation of the coal flows on the Dutch coal market between 1915 and 1932. The Ruhr coal syndicate („Rheinisch-Westfälisches Kohlen-Syndikat“ (RWKS)) was the great supplier for German coal on the Dutch market at this time. Roelevink pointed out that a quantitative view is not able to show the core transformation of coal flows, so she drew attention to producing and trading actors. The Dutch „Steenkolen-Handelsvereniging“ (SHV) had exclusive sales rights to the German Ruhr coal; after the First World War it enlarged its scope of action, and in the 1920s, it also sold British and Dutch (Limburg) coal. As a consequence, it was not the RWKS but the SHV taking part of a powerful cartel and installing a new competitive order. The second paper of the session of JEROEN EUWE (Brussels) concentrated on the German economic recovery after World War I. The German Ruhr area, which was central to the development of the Rhine economy, became more important to the German economy after war. For that reason Euwe took a look at both the trade within the Rhine economy and the transborder trade. He reached the conclusion that the Rhine economy recovered faster from war than German economy and that it retained its integration until 1925. After having heard a lot of facts and processes, RICHARD COOPEY (Aberystwyth) particularly inquired about the people, who

organised the coal market and the recovery of the Rhine economy after war. The further discussion also turned on the price policy of the syndicates and other coal producers.

The fifth session was opened by MARTIJN LAK (Rotterdam) with a presentation about the Rhine traffic after the Second World War. As Germany has been the most important trading partner of the Netherlands since the late 19th century, the Dutch economy also had enormous difficulties to recover. The autarkic policy of the Allies towards Germany was harmful to the surrounding countries. The British and the Americans wanted to hold down the costs of occupation, so Dutch sea ports and Dutch Rhine shipping were discriminated in favour of their German competitors. Although it was a violation of the Convention of Mannheim, Dutch Rhine ships were not allowed to enter Germany. The German Government continued this policy after 1949; not until May 1956 Bonn suddenly changed its policy, because the resurgence of the Ruhr area in the 1950s necessitated the service of the Rhine fleet; the recovery of the Ruhr district could not succeed without a functioning Rhine economy. Afterwards UTE ENGELN (Mainz) presented some aspects concerning the historical development of some medium-sized chemical, pharmaceutical, and varnish companies in Mainz and Wiesbaden after 1945. The business contact between the enterprises on the left and the right bank of the river increased after 1949, and the companies specialised their production without competing too much with each other. The chemical industry benefited of the reestablishment of the University of Mainz with faculties in chemistry and pharmacy as well as the relocation of the Max Planck Institute for Chemistry at Mainz. In this way, Engeln called it a cluster in the sense of Michael Porter, which lost its significance since the 1980s. The third paper by MARGRIT MÜLLER (Zurich) dealt with the development of the Swiss chemical industry. According to her the export specialisation in chemicals was a result of the interplay between the strategies of the Swiss firms and the institutional context of the Rhine economy. With regard to exports and foreign direct investments the importance of geograph-

ical proximity to the Rhine economy declined, but multinational chemical companies continued to perform within the Switzerland and local advantages shifted from lower to higher stages of production.

In the last session KLARA PAARDENKOOPEL (Rotterdam) referred to the connection between utilisation and military. Though technical innovations were important for utilisation, it was the major transport volumes that made shipping container feasible. Using the example of the US troops in Germany (1945-1970), the Vietnam War (1965-1975), and the Iraq War (2003-2008) Paardenkooper presented the influence of military on containerised transports on the Rhine. Afterwards SUSANNE HILGER (Düsseldorf) reflected about the economic character of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) within the Rhine economy in times of globalisation, and referred to the foreign trade as driving force of growth. After a short standstill in 1945 the demand for raw materials and semi-finished products raised again, and NRW got reintegrated into the Rhine economy by its exports, which mostly had a European destination. By this, NRW became Germany's export champion and managed the structural change after the crises of coal and steel. The last presentation of ANTOINE BEYER (Paris) focused on the restructuring of the Rhine river ports between 1990 and 2010. Most German ports developed impressive urban waterfront projects adopting models of sea ports of the 1970s. The urban authorities claimed to urbanise river banks, because they had to compensate for the decline of the manufacturing industry and shaped an urban image that fitted to the service economy. In order to attract high skilled people, new urban settlements along the Rhine showed great architectural ambitions, contradictory to the global economy needs of unprecedented transport capacities. Finally, Beyer demanded a new city management to integrate these controversial positions.

In the 19th century a transnational Rhine economy emerged. The Rhine was border and crossed borders of several states regulated by different institutions. National interests could entail cooperation as well as conflicts. Despite several wars and waves of globalisation, the

Rhine economy persisted as a set of different economic regions, which were heavily intertwined with each other. Since the 19th century freedom of navigation and safety on the river has been guaranteed. Neither the First World War nor the Second World War could substantially disintegrate this economic territory. Although there has been a lot of tension and conflict in the last two hundred years, the conference showed that strong transborder interdependences ensured the solid cohesion of the Rhine economy. Further research in this transnational perspective would be desirable.

Conference Overview

Introduction

Werner Plumpe (Goethe University Frankfurt): Welcome and Introduction

Jean-Marie Woehrling (Former Secretary General of the Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine): The Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine in the service of the Rhine economy: permanence and change

First Session: The Rhine in Napoleonic Times
Chair: Neil Forbes (Coventry University)

Robert Mark Spaulding (University of North Carolina Wilmington): Reshaping Rhine Commerce in the Era of the French Revolution

Takafumi Kurosawa (Kyoto University): Swinging currency border in the Upper Rhine: Pre-National Rhine Economy as a Border Zone of German and French Currency Systems

Discussant: Harm Schröter (University of Bergen)

Second Session: Transnational Rhine Project

Ralf Banken (Goethe University Frankfurt) and Ben Wubs (Erasmus University Rotterdam): Project Discussion: Network, Applications, Methods, Approaches and Topics

Steven van de Walle (Erasmus University Rotterdam): Experiences in Applying for European Funding

Launch Website Erasmus Centre for the History of the Rhine: <http://www.historyoftherhine.com>

Behind the Scenes Tour in the Maritime Museum Rotterdam

Excursion Rotterdam Port Authority: Future Land Maasvlakte 2

Third Session: The First Globalisation Wave and its Conflicts

Chair: Ben Wubs

Hein Klemann (Erasmus University Rotterdam): The Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine, 1815-1914

Joep Schenk and Marten Boon (Erasmus University Rotterdam): Trading Places. How Merchants shaped the Rotterdam-Ruhr Axis in the First Global Economy, 1870-1914

Discussant: Abe de Jong (Erasmus University Rotterdam)

Fourth Session: Great War and the Rhine

Chair: Ben Wubs

Eva Roelevink (Ruhr University Bochum): The German Coal on the Dutch Market, or: Why it is interesting to have a Look on the Business History of the German Coal Syndicate and its Dutch Trading Association, 1915-1932

Jeroen Euwe (Université Libre Bruxelles): The Rhine Economy and German Economic Recovery after World War I

Discussant: Richard Coopey (Aberystwyth University)

Fifth Session: The Second World War, its Aftermath, and the Rhine

Chair: Mark Jacob (Philipps University Marburg)

Martijn Lak (Erasmus University Rotterdam): The Rhine in Ruins. The Consequences of World War II: Rhine Traffic between the Netherlands and Germany, 1945-1957

Ute Engelen (University of Mainz): Chemical and Pharmaceutical Companies at the Rhine in Mainz and Wiesbaden after 1945

Margrit Müller (University of Zurich): The „Rhine Economy“ and the Development of the Swiss Chemical Industry

Sixth Session: The Second Globalisation Wave and the Rhine Economy

Chair: Mark Jacob (Philipps University Marburg)

Klara Paardenkooper (Erasmus University Rotterdam): Containerization, the Rhine and the Military (1945-2010)

Susanne Hilger (Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf): „From the Rhine to the World“ - North Rhine Westphalia's Economy in Times of Globalisation

Antoine Beyer (IFSTTAR, Paris): The Urban Restructuration of the Rhine River Ports. Transport Function vs. Post Industrial Identities (1990-2010)

Discussant: Christian Kleinschmidt (Philipps University Marburg)

Tagungsbericht *Fourth Transnational Rhine Conference: Crossing the Rhine. Globalisation and the Impact of War on the Rhine Economy*. 21.03.2013-23.03.2013, Rotterdam, in: H-Soz-u-Kult 27.05.2013.