

Thematic sessions

‘Economization takes command’.

Towards an epistemic history of building economy since the French Revolution

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Since the late 18th century, the economy of construction went through a structural change – an economization – as a result of the emergence of modern territorial states and the up-rise of capitalistic, market-driven economic structures. The structural change was triggered by a no longer unrestricted right of access of the state on labour and materials as well as new possibilities for architects and engineers to work on the free market. And, it can also closely be linked to the ever more important process of European urbanisation at the time. The session wants to focus on this structural change by looking at the discourses on the economy of construction and its related methods and practices since the Ancien Régime. Papers may relate to three thematic areas: discourses, institutions of knowledge dissemination and finally tender and awarding processes.

Discourses: In the 18th century, the economy of construction starts to be an independent and self-contained domain of construction. The related discourse, though essentially European, is characterized by significant national difference – in content, terms and target-group. Papers may focus on those differences, either to explain national characteristics or to illustrate supra-national transfers. Reference should be made to the interaction between the described discourses and the (beginning to be industrialised) practices of construction.

Institutions of knowledge dissemination: Since the late 18th century, construction as an academic discipline was decisively shaped by the foundation of polytechnic schools for architects and engineers as well as by the foundation of technical schools for skilled workers. The role of the economy of construction in the new academic syllabus of construction is up-to-now a desideratum of research. However, it seems that, at least with the focus on German-speaking countries, the role has to be differentiated in regards to the type of institutions. Papers may focus on this topic taking into account the European situations or a more global perspective. Furthermore, they might compare the content of concerned subjects or/and approaches to impart knowledge.

Tender and awarding processes: One main result of the economization of construction was a growing importance and formalisation of tender and awarding processes. This development was one reason for professionalised public administrations and it was also mirrored in new textbooks, standardised forms and a respective academic discourse. Papers may focus on the different formal requirements in the tender processes and/or the institutional practices in the awarding processes. Hereby, they can help to understand decision-making processes in public administrations and the role of academic knowledge for such procedures.