

CALL for PAPERS

Methods of State Assessment from the Late 19th Century to Today, Central Europe, Eastern Europe and Beyond

Marburg, 3-5 July 2019

The way we view states has changed considerably over the past one and a half centuries. Imperial power is no longer seen as a criterion for successful statehood, while political experts of 19th century Europe would not have focused on economic growth and contemporary standards of good governance to determine whether a state will prosper or not.

A critical, historical perspective thus challenges the objectivity of today's methods of state assessment and sharpens our understanding of how markers of statehood have changed as part of broader historical developments. Further developing this historical perspective is the objective of a three-day interdisciplinary conference hosted in Marburg by the Herder Institute for Historical Research on East Central Europe and the University of Birmingham on 3-5 July 2019. The conference will bring historians and political scientists together to critically scrutinise modern frameworks of state assessment by bringing them into connection with their historical roots. Thus, the conference will provide an alternative approach to the history of international relations as well as of the modern social sciences.

A main aim of the conference is to discuss when and how a "modern", discursive framework of state assessment emerged and how it developed over time. For this, we want to investigate how the circulation of knowledge and practices associated with state assessment functioned and changed. We will examine how claims to scientific objectivity contributed to a broader international science of statehood that influenced international politics, economies, and state building over the 20th century. We will put a focus on practitioners of state assessment, such as social scientists,

but also "laymen", such as businessmen, politicians, journalists, and their networks. Another focus will be on the development of institutions of state assessment, such as inquiry commissions and scientific institutions.

The chronological focus of the conference is on the late 19th to the early 21st century, with a focus on profound historical ruptures such as the World Wars and the end of the Cold War, but contributions that span a longer period of time are also highly welcome. Central and Eastern Europe, as regions that have undergone particularly profound transformations in this period, will receive particular attention, but we invite contributions on all parts of the world.

We welcome proposals both from doctoral students and early-career researchers as well as from established scholars. Apart from historians and political scientists, we also invite scholars to apply who work in disciplines that concern themselves with the critical inquiry into state assessment, such as (but not restricted to) economics, geography, and sociology. We also aim to organise a section particularly dedicated to doctoral students and early post-doctoral researchers, a second one for established experts on the topic, and a third designed to bring academics and active practitioners of state assessment into a conversation.

The conference language is English.

The deadline for proposals is the 15th of November 2018. We aim to give feedback to applicants no later than February 2019.

The conference will take place at the Herder Institute in Marburg. The organisers will seek to cover costs for travel and accommodation.

To submit your proposal or for further information on the conference, please get in touch with the organisers:

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Themes and questions:

The following list includes topics closely related to the conference theme. It is not complete, and please feel free to submit proposals for topics that concern state assessment but are not listed below. In general, we are interested how norms of "successful" (and "failed") statehood changed from geographical reach in 19th century political geography to the contemporary focus on institutions and economic growth. How are "successful" and "failed" states conceptualised at particular points in time, and what spurs these concepts to change? How are frameworks of state assessment updated, complemented or supplanted? What role do scientific innovations play in this development? Who are the practitioners, and who has hegemony over the practice of state assessment? What impact does the assessment of a state's likelihood for survival have on this state itself - i.e. can state assessment become a self-fulfilling prophecy?

List of possible topics:

1. The significance of the rise of modern sciences for the assessment of states (e.g. statistics, demography, economics, computerisation, etc.)
2. Case studies of the assessment of successful and failing states (e.g. the US "Inquiry" during the First World War, Soviet "scientific forecasting", the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development's assessment of post-communist East Central Europe, etc.)
3. Historical contexts and the emergence of categories for state assessment (e.g. national self-determination as a prerequisite for independent statehood, territorial coherence as a marker for successful states, the norm of economic growth, etc.)
4. Practitioners of state assessment and their networks (e.g. scientific communities, international organisations and NGOs, commercial enterprises, etc.)
5. State assessment and its impact on international politics (e.g. the assessment of the interwar "seasonal states", international politics and state collapse in the Middle East and at the Horn of Africa, interaction with non-recognised states such as the "Islamic State", or the Donetsk People's Republic, etc.)

ORGANISERS

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