

Call for Papers

»Global Value Chains in Modern Economic History«

2nd Bayreuth Economic History Seminar

12-14 June 2019, University of Bayreuth

Convenors:

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Global economic relations have changed fundamentally in the past decades. Yet, academic and public catchwords like “globalisation” can barely capture these changes that culminated in the disappearance of the colonial and imperial eras’ divide between resource exporting and finished goods exporting economies. This coincided with the rise of multinational corporations and increasing dominance of “intra-industry”-trade. Thus, while growing trade integrated nations into the global economy, the production of commodities increasingly disintegrated in that, as detailed in the seminal article by Robert Feenstra, ever more corporation spread individual production steps across several national economies.

The emergence of Global Value Chains is commonly identified as the driving forces behind this trajectory. Advances in transportation and information technologies, it is said, enabled businesses to go global and slice production processes into small steps using specialists or capitalising on lower labour costs in national economies that were thus interlinked in global production processes—sometimes identified as world-market factories or global assembly lines. Economic geographers pioneered research on this so-called global shift of the 1970s and 1980s, with economists and international trade

scholars following suit. Today, globally disintegrated production processes prevail no longer only in the “classical” sectors of textiles, apparels, cars, and light-consumer electronics, but encompass African flowers, apples from New Zealand and tomatoes from China. Often, little known global corporations now govern sophisticated global value chains that have replaced conventional bilateral trade and in the process have turned formerly exotic into staples for global middle-classes. For 2013, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development’s “World Investment Reports” estimated that no less than 80% of global trade derived from transactions within Global Value Chains rather than from open trade on international and national markets.

As economic and business historians we doubt that the disintegration of production and the rise of GVCs are particularly novel developments in the evolution of capitalism. In fact, global divisions of production and the transfer of semi-finished goods are as old as capitalism. This is evidenced in the many studies by economic and business historians of production processes spanning globally as early as in 18th and 19th century, of which cotton is possibly the most prominent case. We therefore have reasons to believe that “Global Value Chains” are actually part and parcel of the economic organisation of production that we usually call capitalism. However, the degree to which they were important may have changed over time. Therefore, this call for papers suggests that our interest may have to shift from the question “when did it start” (Richard Baldwin) to questions like “how did global production change”, and, “what trajectories can we identify in comparative, long histories of Global Value Chains”.

The proposed conference acknowledges the notion of “commodity chains”, as introduced by Terence Hopkins and Immanuel Wallerstein to highlight the role of commodities and the control over their chains in European global colonial expansion, yet our empirical and analytical interest is in the industrial Global Value Chains of the long 20th century that connected specialised production processes in different parts of the world and created huge, globally-integrated multinationals as well as more obscure linkages of dependence and governance. Further, the conference considers how 20th century Global Value Chains often successfully bridged or circumvented political turmoil, war, crises and economic nationalism, and were sometimes crushed by such geopolitical changes. Another point of interest will be the invisibility of many GVCs in national accounting, which prevails throughout much of the 20th century because economic actors often avoided formal incorporation of production processes and

instead used “cloaking” and informal, “gentlemen”-style agreements. This means, that only the detailed case-study approaches of business historians can fill the resulting gaps in historical research and provide the material to study GVCs as long-term historical practice.

With the second Bayreuth Economic History Seminar (BEHS) we want to draw the attention of economic and business historians to the meaning and impact of Global Value Chains as an important economic driving force in capitalism’s evolution throughout the 20th century. While we welcome a broad range of proposals, we hope to attract papers that address one or more of these three branches of research in particular:

1. We invite scholars of international trade and economic historians specialised on researching trade flows to explore possibilities for drawing upon existing historical trade statistics to uncover the existence and trajectories of 20th century GVCs. Such paper could, and probably must, be general and experimental to start with.
2. We invite business historians to present historical case studies that uncover the actual governance of global production processes in the 20th century—in particular we are interested in governance by factory and company managers and also how labour movements, competitors, and regulators challenged existing governance in GVCs. Conventional research has focused on GVCs in sectors like textiles, motor cars, IT, and consumer electronics and we welcome expansions of such studies. However, other branches are also of relevance and of increasing interest; research on GVCs for foodstuffs, for example, has expanded in recent years.
3. We want to encourage scholars to rethink their ongoing or completed research along the lines of GVC-approaches. For example, in the aftermath of the recent financial crises, financial services are now frequently discussed as a global value chain that transforms savings into credit. We are explicitly open to experimental exercises in this respect and we are also interested to learn about Global Value Chains in public administration and utilities.

The conference aims to engage in critical debates of GVC-approaches, based on empirical evidence from economic and business history and also from related disciplines. We wish to facilitate an exchange of economic and business historians with specialists in trade,

international economics, political economy as well as with sociologists and anthropologists working with explicit foci on economy and history. We very much welcome submissions from senior scholars in the respective fields and also explicitly encourage junior scholars to submit paper proposals. A workshop aimed at developing pre-circulated papers will form part of the conference. This call is open to scholars from all continents and from different disciplines. Traveling expenses and accommodation can be covered up to a maximum of 1500 Euro per person.

Please send a proposal of maximum 2 pages including a short CV until March, 8th 2019 to: joh@uni-bayreuth.de

Decisions will be done until mid march. We expect all speakers to submit a paper draft for the conference until May 1st 2019.