

Workshop: Call for papers

**State Descriptions Revisited:  
Historical Forms of Territorial Representations, 18-21th centuries**

20-21 January 2022,  
Leibniz Institute for East and Southeast European Studies (IOS) Regensburg, Leibniz  
Wissenschaftscampus, Universität Regensburg, Germany

Organizers:

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Current debates on politics increasingly demand an integrated vision that includes both environmental responsibility and economic development, circumstances of belonging and of mobility, and draws on ethics beyond pure material concerns. From this vantage point the workshop explores past representations of political spaces, whether descriptive, narrative, numeric or visual, and their political backgrounds. How did they circulate and what notions of governance did they reveal?

Descriptions of kingdoms, principalities, cities and other administrative units, whether in the form of encyclopedic handbooks, gazetteers or numeric and visual representations displayed such an integrated vision. In Europe, their connection to travel literature is well known, similar to their ties to university curricula and their functions as intellectual tools for metropolitan, provincial and colonial administrations in the 18-19<sup>th</sup> century. They were holistic representations of political spaces, shaped both by considerations of economic utility, ethical values and political virtues. A host of studies looked at the methods and early modern theoretical origins of this heterogeneous genre, produced by learned administrators, university professors or interested amateurs. Their academic institutionalization as 'Statistik' (descriptive statistics) in Central Europe constitutes a chapter of its own in the history of science and governance.

The historical scholarship on the genre has remained fragmentary in scope and guided by methodological nationalism by focusing on single empires, nation-states and institutional contexts. Our workshop seeks to accomplish a comparative view by asking about geographic and historical continuities and long-distance circulation of practices of describing administrative units across regions and empires.

We invite historians, geographers, ethnographers and social scientists to explore the proliferation of this heterogeneous format on a global scale by placing it in rapport with the consolidation of modern territorial states and their hunger for tax-relevant data. By charting the dynamics of territorial representations across the socio-political space, we wish to address also the larger geo-political dynamics that framed them.

The workshop addresses mainly, but not exclusively, the following themes:

- World-making and world-ordering: State descriptions created the fiction of well-bound and homogeneous administrative spaces. They operated with systems of categories on peoples and environments, by drawing geographic, social, political and normative borders and attributing physical, political, ethical characteristics to them. They distinguished between 'we' and 'them' as functional units of political fictions. What was their perspective on political legitimacy? Can we chart multiple and rival accounts of the same political space?
- Authors, sponsors, 'envirotechnical' infrastructure: Whenever built on fieldwork, descriptions of the political space were costly operations, relying on material, institutional and infrastructural support and informants. How did technical know-how travel across political borders? Did European regions display specific geographies of knowledge, different from other world regions?
- Formats, styles and scales of representations: We are interested in the disciplinary formats, from gazetteers to German-style state descriptions to administrative statistics and maps, but also narratives and images; important are also the local, regional, imperial and transregional scales of representation. Did the practitioners combine diverse media, such as texts, maps, illustrations, and if yes, to what effect?
- Traces into the present: representations of administrative spaces were assembled either as compilations of published material and/or unpublished sources, sometimes as a combination of both. Some of them exemplify decentralized practices of encyclopedic knowledge production. Are there continuities and functional equivalents of this practice into the present?

The languages of the workshop are English and German. Please send your one-page abstract to [borbala.toeroek@uni-due.de](mailto:borbala.toeroek@uni-due.de) and [hausmann@ios-regensburg.de](mailto:hausmann@ios-regensburg.de) until 30 September 2021.

The conference-related costs will be covered by the organizers. We aim at a full-presence event, but online participation will also be possible.