

## **Call for Papers – Workshop (GHI Washington, D.C. – June 1-3, 2017)**

### **Organizers:**

Dr. Sebastian Felten, Philipp Lehmann PhD, PD Dr. Christine von Oertzen / Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin

Prof. Dr. Simone Lässig / German Historical Institute, Washington, D.C.

### **Beyond Data: Knowledge Production in Bureaucracies across Science, Commerce, and the State**

How do bureaucracies produce knowledge from the data they gather? This question has been raised not only in the history of science and technology, but also in colonial and postcolonial studies, business and administration history, media and organization studies. In recent years, practices of collecting and transforming data have become popular objects of study in these disciplines, yielding a rich literature on how knowledge was produced and applied in state administrations, academic institutes, businesses, religious institutions, and other public and private organizations. Practices of systematic knowledge production and utilization were thus not confined to one particular domain but rather emerged in science, commerce and state administration alike. Therefore, much can be learned by comparing and contrasting fact-keeping in these different domains.

This workshop aims to bring together scholars from different fields to explore how practices of making and using knowledge emerged and evolved within and across science, commerce and state administration. In order to historicise assumptions about how bureaucratic

knowledge production works, the workshop will also examine how actors of the time conceptualised these practices: how did they think that their bureaucracies gained and acted upon knowledge? Here, we will pay particular attention to knowledge transfers between western and non-western institutions and their perception in both transnational and (post-) colonial contexts. The papers will tackle the big question of knowledge production in bureaucracies through case studies and an emphasis on technologies and practices of knowledge making within larger frameworks such as governance, empire, and capitalism.

Bringing together researchers from various disciplines within and beyond history, the workshop will expand existing scholarship by exploring the methods and tools to compile and process data in a broad range of settings – from local administrations to mining offices, from colonial trade companies to insurance firms, and from the early modern period to the recent past. By juxtaposing examples from different periods and contexts, the workshop will address questions that are difficult to answer through individual case studies alone: Did the need to know shared by government, commerce and science result in similar material practices of collecting and transforming large amounts of data? Or did the divergent internal logics of these domains produce idiosyncratic approaches and tools? In what ways did methods and tools to classify, order, and process information migrate from one institutional context to another and change? And do we have to specify – and possibly diversify – our notion of knowledge when the aim of information processing is not so much getting the facts straight but making decisions? The workshop will move the debate on knowledge practices from epistemic questions – how did actors acquire knowledge in spite of overwhelming environments? – to questions about the different rationalities and the corresponding material processes of knowledge production in institutional contexts.

The workshop will be held on June 1-3, 2017 at the German Historical Institute (Washington, D.C.) in cooperation with the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin. We especially encourage submissions of work in progress.

The workshop will be conducted in English. The organizers will cover travel and accommodation expenses for invited participants. Please send a short abstract of a proposed contribution (no more than 400 words) and a brief academic CV with institutional affiliation as one PDF file to [bureaucracies@mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de](mailto:bureaucracies@mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de)

Deadline for proposals is November 1, 2016.

For questions, please contact PD Dr. Christine von Oertzen ([coertzen@mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de](mailto:coertzen@mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de))