

# Call for Sessions - WEHC 2015 [S20053]

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## **Proposed title of the session**

The contribution of rural coastal areas to international trade networks in the early modern period

## **Abstract**

Most studies of international trade networks tend to remain silent about the contribution of the surrounding rural coastal areas to the emergence, structural development, operationalization and maintenance of these international trade networks. The contribution of rural coastal areas, for example in terms of supplying regional produce for export, but more importantly as a supplier of transport services to the nearby gateways of international trade. This session challenges this neglect and proposes an alternative starting point for the long-term comparative analysis of exchange networks during the early modern globalization: the delta and its surrounding (mostly rural) coastal areas. We define the delta broadly as a geographical unit that captures not only the central gateways located at the estuary of the main river of the delta, but also incorporates the immediate foreland of the gateway, that is: the larger water basin of which it is part. For example, in the case of Amsterdam, we consider the Zuiderzee as the delta of which Amsterdam is the central gateway. Characteristic for deltas are the presence of islands, a long, often broad coastline that constituted the crossing between water mass and dry land and the presence of the mouths of one or more rivers. Insofar as towns and villages were connected directly to the delta (that is, not requiring intermodal transportation), they are considered part of this geographical unit.

Starting point is a clear awareness in recent historiography that many regional economic and societal structures were shaped by their interaction with nearby gateways of international trade, that were accessible via the delta in which they were located. Some regional economies relied almost exclusively on providing maritime transport services to leading cities in the world economy, whilst having only limited international trade of their own. This was true for Frisian shipmasters in the Dutch commercial system of the Golden Age, or for the “truly maritime men” in coastal Gujarat, “who fished and who sailed the vessels on which trade depended”, as Das Gupta has highlighted, but it also may apply to the Greek shipping fleet, which is one of the largest commercial fleets in operation today. Alternatively, in regions such as Scotland, in the slipstream of Britain, industrialization took off relatively early, international shipping and trade rapidly became dominant sectors in their regional economy and in the late eighteenth century they made a vital contribution to the industrial centres along the British coast. If it were not for the “carriers from the periphery”, who would operationalize the core’s international trade and global expansion?

We have accepted papers that review current historiography of selected early modern international trade networks worldwide by adopting an economic-geographical perspective in which the central gateway of the network is analysed in the broader context of the delta and the rural coastal areas that surround it. The contributors will focus on the complex of shipping- and trade-related services that was provided by the rural coastal areas to the central gateway of the delta.

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## **I. Corresponding Session Organiser**

Dr. Werner Scheltjens (University of Leipzig [Germany])

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## **II. Co-Organiser(s)**

1. Corresponding Organiser.
2. Prof. Markus A. Denzel (University of Leipzig [Germany])
3. Prof. Toshiaki Tamaki (Kyoto Sangyo University [Japan])

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## **III. Expected Participant(s)**

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