

CFP

Kinship and Business. Law, Gender and Generational Perspectives (16th–20th Centuries)

Verwandtschaft und Geschäft. Recht, Geschlecht und Generationperspektiven (16.–20. Jahrhundert)

Parentela e impresa. Diritto, genere e prospettive generazionali (secc. XVI-XX)

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Conveners

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Economic activity is structured within and via social relationships. In research on economic and social history, highly diverse forms and qualities of social relationships come into focus depending on the perspective taken. While business enterprises as a form of economic activity's social organisation are among the established thematic fields, the past few decades have witnessed the genesis of historical kinship research, which examines culturally and legally defined concepts of relatedness as well as specific types of relationship networks and organisational forms in combination with associated economic practices. From the perspective of historical kinship research, dealing in greater depth with the relationships between kinship as a form of social organisation and enterprises would appear promising in light of how numerous companies are to this day led by groups of related individuals or guided by such groups' interests as shareholders and/or proprietors. In this, entrepreneurial logics and kinship-related dynamics can lead to ever-new situations as well as generate conflicts, thereby having significant effects on enterprises.

From the perspective of kinship research, wealth that is generated, owned, managed, invested, transferred, etc. via protagonists' kin relations and economic activities is a central and pivotal aspect that points in two directions: toward the constitution and practice of kinship orders and toward the structure and practice of economic activities. Wealth formation, management, and transfers can take on highly diverse material and cultural forms. One way for groups of kin to accumulate wealth has been via

businesses—as active entrepreneurs, through voluntary or compulsory capital investments, or through working relationships with said enterprises. The diverse interactions and transactions via which the resources at issue here were put to work were undergirded by economic expectations and calculations while also adhering to the logics of various social relationships. These logics' definitions were socio-cultural in nature—based on specific legal cultures, concepts of gender and generation, and notions about belonging and social proximity, appropriateness and fairness, security and risk, etc. The emphasis of this conference is on questions of wealth's employment in the context of enterprises—be they in commerce or in production. We seek to start from a broad understanding of what a business entity is—thereby including not just commercial and industrial enterprises, but also small businesses in the trades, retail, and services, as well as entrepreneurial activities in the agricultural sector. And in many cases, various areas of economic activity and kin relationships overlap to begin with.

With regard to social relationships, this conference will be paying special attention to kinship and marriage. These starting points bring with them fundamental questions and realisations from more recent historical kinship research that address social and economic practice as well as discourses. Accordingly, and in contrast to earlier assumptions, kinship is regarded here as having been a relevant quantity and category throughout the history of the modern period and into the present. For the early modern period and taking into account differences between milieus and regions, tendencies towards hierarchisation within families and kin networks have been ascertained in terms of access to resources and in terms of authority, above all among nobles and patricians as well as in some agrarian milieus. This shift was coupled with preferential treatment of one or more sons and with the exclusion of other sons as well as daughters from inheritance—and thus also coupled with associated positions of power or rulership. Consequently, the question arises as to whether enterprises pursued comparable “dynastic” strategies or in fact acted otherwise.

The studies done so far have shown that kin relations played an exceptionally important role in commercial businesses—something that had to do not only with consolidating ownership of such businesses, but also with the organisation of the entrepreneurial activities in question. The assignment of positions and functions in a company to family members also served to reduce transaction costs and frequently represented an important strategy via which to improve and better anchor leadership competencies and knowledge. On the other hand, long-term close relationships between families and especially industrial-sector enterprises frequently hindered such enterprises' expansion, since such relationships tended to limit the growth of capital and other business-relevant resources.

In this regard, marital property regimes—in terms of whether such property was defined as joint or separate—were no less important than succession and inheritance, along with the question of the significance and handling of the inheritances, dowries, or marriage portions brought into marriages by women. A wife’s dowry could improve her husband’s creditworthiness, provide the necessary funds for investments or for the division of a company, or render debts manageable; and conversely, a business situation could also influence their choice of spouse. What realms of entrepreneurial possibility did this open up, and what potentials for conflict did it entail?

It is in such overlapping perspectives that we discern a lack of research, which we would like to address with a conference transepoachally focused on the 16th to 20th centuries. Contributions should interrelate business and kinship in connection with issues of law, gender, and generation. This focus gives rise to the following questions:

- What sorts of kinship networks shaped enterprises with regard to financing and leadership? On what social relationships and forms of organisation were business constructions based?
- In what way did the entanglement of families and enterprises affect the growth of business and what consequences did this have for spaces and regions characterised by the strong presence of family-run enterprises?
- How did the wealth contributed by women, family wealth, and wealth held by the enterprises relate to each other? What links and overlaps existed between families, kin-branches, and businesses? What role did the wealth that women contributed to enterprises play in them?
- To what extent did family and kin-related strategies influence entrepreneurial actions and vice-versa?
- What legal norms shaped family enterprises and what legal practices followed from these norms?
- In what ways were women involved in wealth-related transactions?
- How did intergenerational transfers of businesses look, what kinds of conflicts resulted, and what arrangements were made in order to avoid conflicts?
- How were businesses structured in cases of unusual family and kin constellations such as widowhood or administration by a guardian or trustee?
- How did situations of family conflict—such as feuds between brothers or separation and divorce—affect economic practice?

Keynote: Martha Howell, Columbia University

Conference languages are German, English, and Italian with simultaneous translation into English.

Please send your proposals for papers (1 page/300 words) with a short academic CV in your preferred language by 28 February 2020 to:

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