

## Research Project

### 'Lessons to Learn? Unfolding a Global Market in Difficult Times'; The British Chamber of Commerce for Switzerland 1920 - 1950

#### Third-party funded project

**Project title** 'Lessons to Learn? Unfolding a Global Market in Difficult Times'; The British Chamber of Commerce for Switzerland 1920 - 1950

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**Organisation / Research unit**

Europainstitut / Neuere europäische Geschichte (Herren-Oesch)

**Department**

Europainstitut / Europainstitut

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**Status** Active

The project develops a research rationale with digital methods enabling a line of inquiry that reveals the function of chambers of commerce beyond institutional history and sheds light on the closely guarded secrets of Anglo-Swiss(-German) relations during World War II. Until now, historical research investigated chambers of commerce as institutionalized interests of trade and industry. Focusing thereby on a national context, on the instruments that gave liberal access to the market, but less on their practices, the function of networks, individual actors, and their ties to the global market. With the British Chamber of Commerce for Switzerland (BSCC), established in 1920 in Basel, as an example, the classical understanding of a chamber of commerce is challenged by the fact, that their members acted as foreigners in the specific local environment of Basel, although shaping, contributing and addressing connectivity with the British market in its global dimensions at the same time. Since the BSCC not only survived World War II but was also operative in times of war, this example allows discussing how global networks developed in times of crises and war. The newly accessible fond provides insights in more than 3,000 different actors and trading conditions for more than 1,400 goods. While this information is overwhelming and nearly unprocessable within an institutional history, the use of currently developed methods within the fields of Digital Humanities, in particular network analysis and the creation of a member database, allow unfolding practices and interdependencies of global market structures even and especially in situations, when paper trails are hidden or destroyed. The dissertation investigates the unfolding of a global market in difficult times with three goals on the methodological level: I. The investigation of another unit, the individual actors, of the institution under consideration with new (digital) methods, allows to reveal new insights on their practices, networks, ties and activities and therefore on very real economic circumstances. II. Focusing on the World War II. period will shed new light on market practices and individual actors, which are hard to identify, since they avoided to leave paper trails. III. The creation of a member database of the BSCC. This approach enables to reframe the institution and its actors locally and globally and understand them in their multi-layered complexity. Therefore, the project is relevant in both respects, as insights in global networks during crises and war, and in the use of digital methods, to the research fields of the Digital Humanities and micro-global History. Since, the proposed narrative is multidimensional in respect to the methods, data, sources and especially the individual actors and subjects, it allows to investigate far-reaching (international) trade networks and market relations and at the same time the consideration of specific actors which shaped and made use of these, with the specific microcosm of Basel as starting point to unfold a global market.

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**Add publication**

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