

Monopolising the Common Good **Commercial Lobbying and Political Economy in Europe, ca. 1650–1850**

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Organisers:

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Lobbying can be defined as the attempt by particular groups to exert influence on persons in positions of public authority. Often these groups also seek to influence public opinion via the media in order to create an environment favourable to their goals. Most scholarly studies on lobbying are carried out by political scientists, while historians analysing economic pressure groups have in general focussed on the period from the 19th century onwards when lobbies became increasingly organised. There are good reasons, however, to extend the systematic inquiry into the activities of pressure groups back to the early modern era. Lobbying became an issue as soon as the State (or the Prince, respectively) began to take an active role in directing economic policy, thus making an influence over such decisions desirable. In Europe, this was the case from the 17th century onwards, when the direction of economic affairs, which until then had been seen from an Aristotelian perspective as belonging to the sphere of private households, came to be considered as a task to be performed by the Prince. Other preconditions favouring an increased lobbying activity arose during the following century, such as the rise of political economy making available different visions of economic policy as well as the creation of a public sphere, which could be influenced by the dissemination of journals and other printed texts.

This conference addresses the problem of economic lobbying between the second half of the 17th century and the end of that formative period of modernity often referred to as „Sattelzeit“ (1750–1850). The following aspects and questions could be discussed :

– *Practice and Organisation of Lobbying*: How were economic pressure groups of the pre-modern era organised and which were the consequences of the different forms of organisation (simple self-organisation, institutionalised corporations, Chambers of Commerce etc.) for the practice of lobbying?

– *Lobbyists and Governments*: Did governments encourage lobbying, for example by setting up new councils where merchants and manufacturers had a voice, or did merchants seek to form their own organisations, perhaps even in opposition to governments? How was lobbying shaped by the respective form of government? Are there discernible changes over time?

– *Discourses of the Common Good*: Lobbying creates a triangular relationship, in which the representative of a particular group influences the holder of public power to take decisions with consequences for the whole community. Since group interests tend to be considered illegitimate as soon as they have a negative impact on the community as a whole, lobbyists are forced to present the interests of the group they represent as corresponding with the interests of the whole community. Which rhetorical and discursive strategies did lobbyists use in order to monopolise the common good for their interests?

– *Lobbying and the Rise of Political Economy*: What was the relationship between the discourses used by lobbyist and economic theory? Did lobbyists use economic theories to back up their claims? And if they did, had these theories been created by political economists and were already available to lobbyists, or did the latter bring forward new theories thus taking an active role in shaping political economy?

– *Influencing Public Opinion*: The 18th century, scholarship has suggested, saw the advent of a public sphere. To what degree and by which means did early modern lobbyists seek to influence public opinion?