

SFB 1150 „Cultures of Decision-Making“

Project Area C “Modes of Decision-Making”: Abstracts of the projects

Project C01 Medieval Rabbinic Responsa as a Practice of Religious Decision-Making (Regina Grundmann)

This project examines the practice of decision-making in the Jewish responsa literature of the Middle Ages, using the example of Solomon Ibn Adret (ca.1235 – ca. 1310). Central questions are: how decision-making and halakhic authority are performed in the response; how halakhic collections of knowledge are drawn on as a resource for decision-making; how the contingency of decision-making is handled; and finally the mediality and materiality of decision-making.

Project C02 The function of the Supernatural in the Process of Imperial Decision-Making in Byzantium (6th to 12th centuries) (Michael Grünbart)

The project examines how the Byzantine emperor referred to various resources in order to make accurate and accurately-timed decisions. Personal advisors, prophets as well as diviners, supported him in interpreting supernatural phenomena which indicated future events or possible developments. By consulting their expertise – both their gifts of clairvoyance and their knowledge of occult sciences – the emperor was able to consider his options and evaluate situations when making decisions.

Project C03 Decision-Making by Drawing Lots in the Middle Ages and Early Modernity (Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger / Wolfgang Eric Wagner)

Drawing lots separates decision-making from the rational weighing of options and shifts it to an external level not accessible to the actors involved. Nevertheless, it can serve as a strategically used element of procedure. This project examines how lots have been applied in the framework of pre-modern processes of collective decision-making and the election of spiritual offices and municipal councils in particular. It inquires into their presuppositions, framing conditions, objectives and effects.

Project C04 Decision-making in Early Modern Court Proceedings: A German-English Comparison, 16th to 19th centuries (André Krischer / Peter Oestmann)

The project examines civil litigation with respect to economic and commercial issues. It focuses on the activities of the courts as well as on the argumentation of litigants for the need to make decisions. In this connection, it poses the question of how those involved worked out legal solutions when both facts and the legal basis were in dispute. Decision-making is thereby reconstructed as a contingent process. For this purpose, the variety of court systems and trial procedures in Germany and England between the 16th and 19th centuries offers good opportunities for comparative research.

Project C05 Prussian Civil Servant Bureaucracy and Local Self-Government: Village Decision-Making in the Prussian Province of Westphalia in the 19th and early 20th centuries (Werner Freitag)

The project examines practices of decision-making in the Westphalian villages around 1900, concentrating on local government. The Prussian local civil servant (or Amtmann) not only had to gauge the scope of statutory requirements but also had to take into consideration village interests and claims for participation. Consequently, the project examines bureaucratic procedures, informal negotiations with the village and parliamentary consensus-building with regard to modes of decision-making.

Project C06 Political Decision-Making in the Federal Republic of Germany (Thomas Großbölting)

This project considers practices and modes of political decision-making and how they changed in the Federal Republic of Germany from the time of its founding until the 1970s. Using nuclear and education policies, it will inquire when and under what conditions political actors perceived a need for decision-making and set up procedures for it – both at the central and federal levels of government. Furthermore, the project will also analyze how processes of deliberation were completed and interpreted in the interplay between politics and expert knowledge as well as between societal expectations and demands for participation.

Project C07 Political Decision-Making in Socialist Czechoslovakia (Eduard Mühle)

This project looks at processes of political decision-making in communist Czechoslovakia (1948-1989). It focuses on the Politburo of the Central Committee as the centre of political power and decision-making. It thus asks about the different communicative logics and modes of decision-making, while giving special consideration to: the relationship between formality and informality, agenda-setting, the importance of information and the public representation of decision-making, taking the example of the policy fields of provision/consumption and nuclear energy.