

**Call for Papers
to Session 78**

on the XVIth World Economic History Congress, Stellenbosch, 9-13 July, 2012

Second-Hand Circulations in World Perspective:

Local Practices and Global Motivations Regarding the Re-Use of Old Objects (Early Modern – Modern Times)

Recently, new historical research highlighted the importance of second-hand circulations across a wide range of goods and a broad spectrum of societies in the past. Current social-anthropological research, however, stressed the need to place these essentially European findings in a global perspective. As such, differences and similarities can be brought into sharper relief by exploring the ways in which (a) local usage and (b) economic, social and cultural evaluation procedures of second-hand goods were susceptible to change through space and time.

As methodologies and interpretations in this field of research are constantly growing, so looms the need to reflect on existing paradigms and assumptions regarding long-term changes in second-hand circulations. Now is the time to challenge established orthodoxy, which claims that ‘usage’ and ‘value’ (economic, social and cultural) of second-hand declined from the end of the eighteenth-century onwards. As this line of reasoning goes, the existence of material waste before 1800 is not denied as such. Throughout history, especially cities were prone to considerable material waste-problems caused by high concentrations of people and products in a constrained area. However, a modern propensity of present-day consumer to re-use old objects, is being structurally questioned. Industrialisation and ensuing demographic growth made second-hand circulations simply less viable and turned our present-day post-industrial cities into ‘throwaway societies’. As production, transport and distribution-chains of mass-produced goods grew more cost-efficient and returns for wage labour started to improve, the use and exchange value of once cherished cast-off goods gradually lost their economic rationale for all but the deprived.

Nevertheless, the standard narratives on the evolution of second-hand circulations are inevitably one sided, since they only deal with the material ‘invention’ of our present-day waste problems. They do not account for very place and time-specific late eighteenth-nineteenth century Western discourses in science, health care and public policy, which were all aligned to make cast-off products suspicious, unhealthy, unrespectable, unsound, and eventually, useless. Moreover, they neglect current social-anthropological research which continuous to underline the importance of second-hand recycling attitudes for different cultures all over the world. Indeed, the multiple uses and values of old objects are always actively mediated, debated and discussed. Used objects are either given economic, social or cultural functions or became stigmatized as such. Indeed, second-hand objects only become waste when they are valued and used accordingly.

This session wants to place second-hand circulations in a global and multi-disciplinary perspective. It welcomes (a) historical papers from any region, primarily focusing on the transition from early-modern to modern times; or (b) social-anthropological papers on the ways in which second-hand objects are used and valued in different spaces and times. Participants will be asked to place local findings – based on empirical research or new theorizations – in a larger comparative and long-term framework:

The following themes will be developed, relating to organizational practices, consumption motivations and historical change:

1. How did second-hand circulations fit into societies across Africa, the America's, Asia and Europe?

How were practices of thrift, repair, re-use, and circulation of previous owned products organised? Were they commercially structured? If so, how were they interlinked with the market of new and mint products? Who were the sellers involved, and how were they perceived in society? Which goods were considered 'second-hand', and which became 'waste'? How were these goods priced and evaluated?

2. What do we know about the consumers of second-hand products?

Were second-hand circulations only restricted to the lower tiers of society? What were the motivations regarding the consumption of used products? How was reuse and recycling connected to 'waste regimes'? And how did it fit in the context of increasingly efficient ('modern') economies?

3. How did second-hand transactions evolve in the long-term?

Is use and reuse of older products only economically efficient in societies with an abundance of low wage labour and a scarcity of high-priced resources? Do second-hand markets become obsolete as societies and economies modernize or do they continue to play an important role in supplying the needs and wants of consumers?

Submission information

All proposals should include a title, abstract of approximately 500 words and contact information for the author(s). Paper proposals should be received by **November 30, 2011**

Please contact: ilya.vandamme@ua.ac.be or msugiura@tiu.ac.jp