



Call for Papers

“Historical Small States Studies: State of Research and Perspectives”

**Conference, Liechtenstein Institute, Liechtenstein,
October 23 – 25, 2025**

In the roughly three-quarters of a century of its existence, small states studies have repeatedly asserted their relevance, but ultimately without leaving the fringes of academic and public attention. In recent years, various developments have led to an increase in the number of voices emphasising the scientific and political importance of research on small states. ‘Challenging and exciting times’ have been promised for the research field (Thorhallson, 2018). Current geopolitical developments have added a sense of urgency to the discussion about the condition of small statehood and whether small states can be ascribed the potential ‘to steer our world towards peace and stability’ (Sarkissian, 2023).

Small states studies constitute an interdisciplinary field of research. Due to its genesis, however, the field has remained strongly shaped by political science. It is true that the research interests in the field have undergone a certain diversification, especially in the context of the end of the Cold War and the intensification of debates about globalisation. Nevertheless, the continuing dominant role of political science has led to a certain thematic narrowing of research, which centres particularly on the questions of the vulnerability and the possibilities of existence of small states in the international order. Where it has focussed on the ‘inner life’ of small states, political science has concentrated on a few selected questions, such as the relationship between small statehood and democracy.

Overcoming the existing narrowing of research perspectives has eminent scientific potential and promises significant political returns. Many people in the world live in small states, more than scholars sometimes seem to realise. And the number of small states is not decreasing; on the contrary, it has increased following the last wave of decolonisation and the end of the Cold War. Separatist movements in different parts of the world show that small states continue to be an attractive form of political organisation of the commonwealth for many. It is also evident that small states do not simply suffer international developments but participate in the shaping of conditions – in the words of Robert Keohane’s famous observation: ‘If Lilliputians can tie up Gulliver, or make him do their fighting for them, they must be studied as carefully as the giant’ (1969). When it comes to increasing the knowledge potential and thus the scientific relevance of small states studies through new research approaches, historical scholarship has an important role to play.

Historical approaches in the field of small states research are central, not least because an appropriate understanding of small states and small statehood has to historicise the subject matter. The ideas about small states have changed over time just as continuously and sometimes profoundly as their number and the conditions under which they have developed. This also means that a universal definition of the small state - which must ultimately remain unattainable - is not a prerequisite for historical research in this field but rather a part of



the topic. The historical meaning and significance of state size are not reconstructed and analysed with the aim of establishing generalisable causal relationships and theorising them - which is an essential purpose behind the guiding political science question of a specific 'small state behaviour'. Rather, this meaning and significance are studied in their historicity, in concrete historical situations – both for the social, economic, political and cultural life within these states and for the development of these political entities in the international context.

The Department of History at the Liechtenstein Institute invites interested scholars to an international conference with the aim of examining the current state of historical small states studies and discussing possible future directions for this research. The aim is to bring together historians working on small states in order to discuss their work and approaches and to exchange views on the profile of historical small states studies. The perspective is broad both spatially and temporally: it includes research on contexts worldwide, from the early modern period to recent contemporary history. Since the objective of the conference is not least to capture the diversity of historical research on small states, no preferences are formulated with regard to possible thematic orientations. However, the guiding questions of the research presented must focus on the meaning and significance of small state size - for developments within states and/or in international and transnational contexts. Not all studies on the history of small states necessarily form part of historical small states studies, which deal with small statehood. The smallness of states is, of course, essentially treated as a relative notion. Contributions that combine empirical work with conceptual considerations are particularly welcome. Thereby, papers need not necessarily be limited to the field of historical small states studies but can also reflect on the relationship between historical research on small statehood and general historical research.

The conference will take place from 23 to 25 October 2025 at the Haus Gutenberg conference centre in Liechtenstein. As the event is also intended to promote networking among scholars, participation is expected to be on-site. In justified cases, however, online participation may be considered.

Paper proposals, outlining a contribution of 25 minutes, should not exceed 700 words. The abstract should be accompanied by a brief biographical note of no more than one page detailing the current academic affiliation and past and present research. The aim of the organisers is to cover the travel and accommodation expenses of all conference participants. The option of a publication will be discussed at the end of the event.

Please submit abstract and biographical note in one single .pdf file by e-mail to: [stephan.scheuzger\[at\]liechtenstein-institut.li](mailto:stephan.scheuzger@liechtenstein-institut.li). The deadline for submissions is February 28, 2025. The receipt of proposals will be confirmed. Applicants will be notified about the acceptance of their proposal by March 10.