

# SPRU Friday seminars

**Date** 6 June  
**Speaker** Johan Schot (SPRU)  
**Title** Writing the Rules for Europe. Experts, Cartels and International Organizations

## Abstract

Writing rules for Europe in the early twenty-first century appears to be the job of politicians and policy makers in the European Union (EU). Alongside the management of the Eurozone or the coordination of foreign policies, for example, their manifold governing tasks include decisions on production and transport technologies, communication and energy infrastructures and the technical appliances we use, the food we eat, and the clothes we wear. The resulting technologies, systems, and standards provide a material, institutional, and cultural foundation for Europe. They ensure that Europe will not suddenly fall apart, even if the Euro as a currency were to collapse, for example.

The Europe discussed in my presentation (and in the book on which it is based) should not be conflated with the EU, however, no matter how important the latter may be. In fact, it explicitly aims to decenter the EU, and argues the EU (and its predecessors) was a latecomer in the process of European integration. The European integration process has been constituted during the last 150 years or so through the creation of a set of rules by a variety of organizations, committees, and technical experts operating inside them.

Volume 3 in the book Making Europe book series (see [makingeurope.eu](http://makingeurope.eu)), Writing the Rules for Europe (co-authored with Wolfram Kaiser) discusses the work of these organizations, and demonstrates that Europe's integration was largely conceived by

experts (chiefly engineers) who preferred to work behind closed doors, hidden from the public eye. These experts in the first instance responded to what they considered the need for practical coordination resulting from the rapidly growing transnational flows of people, goods and information in the nineteenth century. They believed that established diplomatic channels were too cumbersome and that diplomats lacked technical expertise. Experts sought to fill the emerging regulatory gap with their own know-how and agendas.

During the twentieth century they made increasingly self-confident claims about making rules for Europe. They often saw their technocratic approach as a superior form of conducting international relations. The presentation (and book) will demonstrate how these experts developed a specific technocratic framing and practice of managing transnational relations – something that I will call technocratic internationalism. Subsequently I will discuss how this framing influenced the post-war European integration process as fuelled by the European Union.

I will focus on transport, especially railways. This sector faced huge cross-border governance challenges from its start deep in the nineteenth century, and demonstrates how European integration worked on the ground throughout the twentieth century. It will show that we can only understand the successes and failures of the European integration process by looking at long term continuities.

## **Bio**

Johan Schot joined SPRU as Director in January 2014. Previously he was professor in social history of technology at Eindhoven University of Technology and University of Twente). He is also Director of the Foundation for the History of Technology in Eindhoven. In 2009 Johan Schot was elected to the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW).

His research focuses on: 1) The origins, nature and outcomes of radical and long term sociotechnical change, in particular

sustainability transitions; 2) The history and governance of transnational infrastructures, in particular the role of experts; 3) The development of a new transnational European history through the lens of technology, including wider issues of technocracy and democracy.

He is the initiator and founder of a number of influential national, European and global research programs and networks, among others the Greening of Industry Network; The National Research Program on the History of Technology in the Netherlands in the 20th century from 1995-2003; the Tensions of Europe Network; the Digital European Science and Technology Museum; and the Dutch Knowledge Network on Transitions towards Sustainable Development.

He is series editor (with Phil Scranton) of the Palgrave *Making Europe. Technology and Transformations* book series and of *Routledge Studies in Sustainability Transitions* (with Jan Rotmans and John Grin) and finally the Technology and European History book series (with Ruth Oldenziel) published with Amsterdam University Press/Chicago University Press.

### **Key Publications:**

Wolfram Kaiser and Johan Schot, *Writing the Rules for Europe. Experts, Cartels, International Organizations*, forthcoming in 2014 with Palgrave/Macmillan.

John Grin, Jan Rotmans and Johan Schot, *Transitions Towards Sustainable Development. New Directions in the Study of Long Term Transformative Change* (New York/London: Routledge 2010).

Johan Schot, Harry Lintsen and Arie Rip (eds.), *Technology and the Making of the Netherlands: The Age of Contested Modernization*, (Cambridge Mass: MIT Press 2010).