

SHOT 2026 Open Session Proposal

Technologies of Governance: Infrastructure and Empire

Abstract

How did technologies become embedded within the institutions, practices, and material infrastructures of colonial governance?

Histories of technology have traditionally emphasized invention, innovation, diffusion, and social use. Comparatively less attention has been paid to the ways technologies became embedded within the institutions, practices, and material infrastructures of colonial governance. Across empires, communications systems, transportation networks, surveying, mapping, engineering works, public health technologies, and other infrastructures were not merely technical achievements; they also became integral to the exercise of political authority, the implementation of public policy, the extension of administrative authority, and the management of colonial societies.

This Open Session invites papers that examine the historical relationship between technology and governance across colonial and imperial settings. Contributors are encouraged to explore how technologies were introduced, institutionalized, regulated, adapted, contested, or resisted, and how technological systems both shaped and were shaped by colonial institutions. Comparative perspectives across different empires, regions, and colonial experiences are particularly encouraged.

Rather than organizing papers around a single technology or region, this session seeks to encourage comparative discussion on how technologies functioned within colonial systems of governance and how governance, in turn, influenced technological development.

To help us gauge fit, prospective contributors might consider:

- How did a particular technology or infrastructure become embedded within the institutions or practices of colonial governance?
- What does your case study reveal about the relationship between technology, political authority, administration, law, or empire?
- How does your research contribute to broader comparative understandings of technologies of governance across different imperial or colonial settings?

Type of Papers: Regular Papers

Keywords: Colonial Governance; Infrastructure; Empire; History of Technology; Comparative History.

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