

## **The magic triangle of Gdansk. Forests, timber traders, and international markets (1870-1939)**

### **DESCRIPTION FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC**

The geographical position of Gdansk on the south bank of the Baltic Sea, at the mouth of the Vistula, the mixture of different kinds of professionalism (merchants, traders, insurance companies, shipping companies, etc.), the presence of business men of different nationalities, religions, and languages (German, Polish, English) having business and personal contacts with foreign partners in Western Europe has historically given the town and its port a huge importance. Symbolic and effective meeting point for the outlet of many commodities coming from Pomerania and some other regions of Poland, the port of Gdansk played an important role in international timber trade from the early modern period. United Kingdom has been the biggest wood consumer for centuries, while a series of countries around the Baltic Sea (today's Scandinavian countries, Poland, and Russia) have always been the biggest providers. But while the role of the Nordic countries has been studied quite well, the importance of Poland and of its forest resources, particularly for the period 1870's-1939, when timber became part of the industrialization process in advanced as well in peripheral countries, has been totally neglected by the literature on the international timber trade. The basic research question of this research project is to outline the complex relations existing between the forests administration in the Pomeranian region, the timber merchants, and the articulated organization of the timber exports to the international markets.

The research project will be developed using different archival resources starting from the Polish ones, first of all those existing in the Gdansk State Archive, but including also the British (because of the role of its market), the Swiss, the Swedish, and the Finnish public and business archives (because of the international agreements - and more specifically the organization of cartels - among the timber traders).

This research will enrich our knowledge of Polish firms in the long term economic development of Northern Polish regions connected with the timber trade. It will also offer important elements for the economic, social, and cultural heritage of one of the most characteristic activities of this area, which testifies the long term commitment of private and public actors of Pomerania to the rational and respectful use of the wood, one of the most relevant natural resources of the country. Today, since the environmental policies play an important impact on several aspects of the decision process, the knowledge of the historical dynamics in this sector is crucial. Building bridges with the past permits to understand better the present, and to outline part of the future.