

## **Global Networks of Power: Imperial legacies of German urban electrification in Latin America**

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### **Topic: 1. Industrial Heritage and Traces of Colonialism**

*Oral presentation*

#### **Abstract**

Based on previous research on large-scale electrification in Valparaíso and Santiago de Chile at the end of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, this paper promotes a comparative and again critical interpretation of financial strategies and business methods that determined the imperial grip of German firms on emerging electrical markets in places of geostrategic interest around the world.

From a multilocal perspective that combines technological, economic, and cultural history with intakes from urban and environmental geography, anthropology, and heritage studies, we analyze the *modus operandi* of German 'electrifying' actors in Latin American cities – be they capital cities like Santiago and Mexico City, or global port cities like Valparaíso and Salvador de Bahía –, thus placing the events within in the specific geopolitical context that conditioned global electrification at the time.

By doing that, we factually tell the story of Berlin's business elite, who, from the capital of the newly unified German Empire, came to dominate large part of the world's electricity markets by the turn to the twentieth century, thus initiating a change in the hegemonic world order that exploded with the First World War.

The results of this analysis are useful in two ways. They allow for a parallel reading of current-day energy transitions and a critical reflection on correlated impacts of international financial capitalism; and they can interconnect places and people that despite being spatially distant from each other do share similar experiences with technology, business methods, and modernization promises Made in Germany.

#### **Shortbio**

Marion Steiner is an independent researcher affiliated with the University of Chile, director of the ESPI Lab for Critical Industrial Heritage Studies in Valparaíso, and TICCIIH's Secretary General. As a cultural geographer with academic titles from Humboldt University Berlin, University Paris 8, and Bauhaus University Weimar, she has specialized in global industrial heritage interpretation working across continents and at the interface of academia and local communities. Her research focuses on entangled urban history, European imperialism, and emerging decolonial heritage perspectives from the South. Her current ANID-FONDECYT project 11230957 is financed by the Chilean State from 2023 to 2026.

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