The history of the city of Rotterdam, the position of the Port of Rotterdam and its historic connection with the German hinterland, especially the Ruhr-Rhine region is as relevant today as it has been since the 19th century.

According to the ideas of the new economic geography a region keeps itself intact. Nonetheless, in the last decades the transnational economic region of the Ruhr area and its port, Rotterdam, which developed in the late 19th century, seems in decline. According to the ideas of new economic geography, an historical incident can result in agglomerations that are characterised by positive economies of scale. As a consequence, such agglomerations will keep themselves intact, even when the original reason for its development disappears. The question is whether this is true for this region, or are recent transformations so fundamental that the region itself is threatened?

Professor Hein Klemann, an economic historian at the Erasmus School of History, Culture & Communications, leads a research group that looks at the history for the entire Rhine region. History

“The history of the city of Rotterdam, the position of the Port of Rotterdam and its historic connection with the German hinterland, especially the Ruhr-Rhine region is as relevant today as it has been since the 19th century. It informs cross-border investment, international competitiveness, the impact on industry and jobs in the city and the changing nature of the labour market and new skills requirements.”
shows the impact of economic activity and how it connected cross-borders, questions the concept of national economies and emphasis the importance of transnational economic regions. This historical analysis and knowledge is of vital importance in Rotterdam retaining its competitiveness as an international city and, through it’s port, as a gateway to the Europe. It informs cross-border investment, the access of the port, retaining international competitiveness, the impact on industry and jobs in the city and the changing nature of the labour market and new skills requirements.

**Results**

- This research enables us to better understand the importance of the Rotterdam region and its port for Europe, especially Germany, and answer the question whether the special position this port, and therefore Rotterdam, for the heart of the European economy, is structural or is threatened by the changes, especially geographical changes, within the economy of Germany.
- More fundamentally, it can test the ideas of the New Economic Geography. As these ideas implicate continuity over decades if not centuries, testing these ideas is only possible by building huge databases and using Geographical Information Systems to analyse these.

**Impact & next steps**

Until now a number of PhD theses and Conferences on the Transnational Rhine Region have increased our insight and strengthened the impression that transnational regions are important, probably more important than national economies. To increase our knowledge on the transnational Rhine Region and make the step from impressions to statistical evidence, a huge database should be build. Then it will also be possible to analyse the continuity or discontinuity of such geographical patterns.

**People involved**

Prof. Hein Klemann, Maritime Museum Rotterdam
Dr. Els Jacobs, Prof. Ben Wubs.