

The 131th meeting of the Comité des Travaux Historiques et Scientifiques (CTHS) was held in Grenoble 24-29 April 2006. The proposed topic was “Tradition and Innovation.”

Representing the CHP, under the auspices of the l’Institut de recherche et prospective postales (IREPP), Sébastien Richez presented a paper entitled “*La Poste qui se projette : pratiques de la prospective dans une administration devenue entreprise, XIX^e - XX^e siècles,*” (“*Projecting the Post Office: Forward-looking practices of an administration that became a business in the 19th-20th centuries*)

Abstract:

In the 19th century the former general management of the Post Office, under the guardianship of the Ministry of Finances, showed its inclination to foresightful planning on the subject of the tremendous increase in mail traffic and its direct consequences on the quality of postal service. In the 1920s – “les Années Folles” – the PTT ministry was the subject of essays that predicted a radical change in its status. The Trente Glorieuses – the period between the end of WWII and the late 1970s - offered a different perspective that was by now completely institutionalized. It was accompanied by an economic boom and presaged the sprawling technological vision of the Post Office. Oppositely, the crisis of the 1980s predicted a calamity that led the Post Office to fear for its longevity.

What is the common denominator of these different historical moments, as the Post Office continuously looks to its future? It consists of the primary strategic concern of an institution that is involved at every level of economic, social, political, and cultural activity, an institution that must also concern itself as much with the impact of technological innovations on its services as with the ongoing evolution of its place in society.

The different phases of the Post Office’s outlook over time may be pieced together with the aid of internal journals, summary publications, and survey reports that also indicate, correctly or not, how different decision-making bodies envisioned the future of the Post Office.