Nowadays we are used to attaching a great importance for the local labour market to army locations and garrisons. The positive influence is justified with numerous civilian jobs which directly depend on the military employer. Town treasurers also value the spending power and consumption of the soldiers, the employees of the armed forces administration and their families. Therefore, as soon as the shift of troops and the shutdown of locations are announced, worried mayors and other political function carriers express their opinion to support the receipt of the local barracks in the media. The economic results of the discount are regularly described in the darkest colours.

In the 17th and 18th centuries exactly the opposite results arise. Contemporary municipal authorities considered themselves overjoyed if they had succeeded in the improbable trick to get rid of the local garrison. To the town councils it would have been unthinkable, that not one hundred years later their successors competed for the permanent presence of army units. Hardly a file stock gives so reliable information over the pre-modern garrison locations as the so-called Gravamina. Since the second half of the 17th century petitions for the reduction of the billeting burdens meet here as well as well-founded complaints in individual cases. The garrisons of the 18th century were inestimably also regarded as an important economic factor. In difference to modern times their effect was generally classified as negative. Moreover, the presence of soldier families wasn’t welcomed as an increase of the spending power but interpreted as a large load. Therefore marriage restriction belonged to the normal phenotype of the armies throughout all the ancien régime.

Concerning the perception of the local garrison the break took place at the beginning of the 19th century. In this period the “increase in the trade industriousness” gained similarly
common use as the former documents had prophesied that the complete ruin of the municipal economy had to be expected at short. By the way – the applications of the municipalities were not based on a rational calculation about the profitability of the barracks, drill grounds and other facilities of the armed forces. Except for superficial estimate calculations about the sales volume of a battalion or regiment acceptable attempts for a realistic cost-benefit analysis were generally missing. Although the establishment of a garrison was connected with considerable infrastructural costs, which were only partly refunded by the empire or the respective territorial government, the municipalities put a positive balance without further ado. In the following historians and other experts also never examined the direct and indirect economic consequences of armed forces locations. Knowledge about the significance of the demand of a garrison for the local market is hardly reliable.

For the early modern period, there are also no meaningful research results. In 1975 André Corvisier has drawn the attention on the significance of the garrison for the development of the municipal economy. His analysis based on the official reports of French Intendants from the second half of the 17th century in. For the Old Reich Henning Eichberg has made a first attempt to set the advantages and loads for the civilian population summarily against each other by analysing the example of the Swedish garrison Stade in the 17th century. As a result he had to notice the unpredictability of the economy of single fortresses, though. The highly selective research results probably can be generalized. On the one hand, the armed forces weren’t restricted on the local market to purchase weapons and war technical supply goods. Within the 17th century supranational production and trade structures could obviously be found. Muskets and shotguns were often produced and bought outside the territory. The saltpetre for the powder production was traded just like the horses on the European market – notwithstanding all temporary or permanent trade restrictions. On the other hand, the military wasn’t restricted to the role of demanders. In the late 19th century single units still ran sausage kitchens, laundries, tailor workshops and sometimes even tinning factories. The military production strongly limited the commercial local demand and – this point was seen even more critically – overcapacities were supplied on the local market to local demanders. The simple model of civilian suppliers and military demanders isn’t complex enough to describe the complicated network of economic interactions at a cost-benefit analysis.

Although there are no detailed studies on the influence of militarily controlled consumption on the municipal or regional commercial development, the historical research assumes predominantly that the relations between early modern garrisons and the municipal economy were not basically different from the modern conditions and that in the 17th and 18th
centuries cities also profited from the permanent presence of troops. This historical
insinuation raises the question why in this case the early modern perception differed so
strongly from the reactions described at the beginning. Could it be possible, that the opinions
of the 19th and 20th century can not be transmitted back to the 18th century or were the
contemporaries simply mistaken? For certain the sources have to be reviewed critically. Partly
the complaints aimed at general tax reduction and exaggerated the social and economic costs
and burdens. But it would nevertheless be anachronistic to blame the town councils for their
lacking appreciation of economic relations. From the civil point of view the economic
relationship between town and local garrison turned out so difficult primarily because the
military society refused to accept the role of a well-behaved consumer and demander of local
services they were intended to. On the contrary to many craftsmen and traders, the soldiers
were also troublesome competitors, since they often looked for additional income with which
to supplement their meagre pay.

I would like to show that these conflicts not only mirrored structural imbalances in the
distribution of burdens and profits but also enable to observe the functioning of the
contemporary company economy. From modern settings the early modern situation varied on
following aspects:

1. The self-perception and the area of responsibility of the civil municipal authorities.

2. The structure of the administration of pre-modern armed forces ignited economic
   conflicts too. Again and again, local craftsmen and authorities complained that
   uniforms, equipment objects or shoes were purchased abroad or that a free baker who
   did not have the citizen rights was preferred to the municipal baker office.

3. The truly extensive economic activities of common soldiers.

4. The institute of the so-called company economy which means that every company
   commander got a fixed sum of money to pay his people and to do the required duties. A
   largely autonomous management allowed the officers to run their companies at loss or
   profit. The gained surpluses represented their most important income source.

The town councils measured the economic use or damage of the fortress in terms of the
advantages and disadvantages which concerned their citizens liable to pay taxes. For all other
inhabitants they felt only conditionally responsible. The members of the armed forces enjoyed
exemption from taxes and the so-called civil charges. They were only bound to pay the Akzise
which exclusively belonged to the state earnings as a tax on consumer items like beer and
wine. To soldiers and officers the cities had to give quarter for free. This remained part of the
burden of the citizenship. Their special state of jurisdiction excluded the military from legal proceedings by the city courts. From the municipal authorities’ point of view the armed forces cost a lot of money and caused much trouble. Attempts to sanction interventions in the privileged trades and to criminalize certain forms of acquisition were the logical consequences of this opinion. The historical analysis of the fortress economy of the 17th and 18th century shouldn’t adopt the restricted economic perspective of the contemporaries which completely ignored national economic effects. But examinations should also be careful not to ignore it completely and to avoid anachronisms by following economic analysis categories of today. The structure of the economic conflicts between military and civil society shows many parallels and coincidences with the conflicts with court craftsmen, free masters and cloister economies. The early modern economic history shows a competition of varying privileged classes demanding their so-called right of nourishment.

The numerous existing gainful employments of the majority of the common soldiers and non-commissioned officers had a very simple reason. The monthly basic pay didn’t suffice to finance living although it included additional benefits in form of a free accommodation and bread rations. Therefore it was necessary to earn extra-money. This could be realized by delivering additional service tasks as paid guard duties. But it was also possible to join gainful employments completely different in the civil sector. The only limits set on the part of the army were the ban of earnings from criminal actions and that the duties shouldn’t suffer from the business activities. Other restrictions did obviously not exist. The town councils normally raised the objection that the military interpreted the rights to carry out a business too generously but they were not allowed to impose any sanctions against members of the armed forces. The competences of the council court did not extend far enough to put a stop to such unauthorised activities, while the regiments as a rule showed no interest in following up the complaints of the organised craftsmen, so long as company economies profited from the activities of the soldiers. In every particular case complaints about soldiers, non-commissioned officers and their families had to be addressed to the responsible company commander. If this measure did not show success, the town councils had to go to higher authorities: the regiment boss, the governor and, if the complete corps refused to put a stop to the irregularities, the state government. If the action succeeded the later issued an order that the military encroachment on civil income had to be put to an end. But the proceedings always took time and the conceptions of legality could differ in individual cases.

But most economic activities of common soldiers and non-commissioned officers didn’t bother any petitioner or court. A soldier could be paid by the day without any problems.
Knitting of socks, lace production, spinning, carrying messages or loads, gardening, chopping fire wood or harvest work was often taken as work. The whole pallet of low-paid and non-skilled activities was open to military persons. In the phenotype of the garrison soldiers knitting to pass the time on guard must have been ordinary. The municipal authorities made no attempts to impose regulations there. Far more sensitive were the reactions if soldiers practised skilled work. The town councils concentrated exclusively on two areas. They tried to prevent interventions of the military in privileged trades and they tried to prevent tax evasions. All earning possibilities which lay below this threshold were often not even registered. From this lack of records suffers every economic history referring to the low-paid and non-skilled income sector. For the persons affected it meant a piece of luck. It is proved that quite a number of military persons who really got trouble with the civil courts hadn’t provoked the economic conflict wilfully relying on their special legal status. They rather had failed in their search for a non-privileged income or a loophole in the law. Repairing of roofs thatched with straw or wood shingles was such a disputed activity some skilled building workers claimed as their granted privilege. Mending of half-timbering constructions was also controversial. And in 1783 the court war council in Münster had to decide whether the making of fishing-, bird- and fly-nets belonged to the rope maker’s trade or not. It belonged and so the artillerist had to close his shop and to look for a new income. In another case the government had to decide if the sewing of bonnets was reserved to the tailor’s guild. Here the wife of a corporal was allowed to continue her gainful employment. A much bigger problem from the city councils’ point of view were those soldiers who had regularly served an apprenticeship and after becoming journeyman took active service. These men simply showed no understanding why they shouldn’t work in their business as usual and they knew very well that the regimental jurisdiction would prevent them probably from penalty. This put an additional attraction to the military service in the 18th century und officers knew about this effective connection and tried to prevent their soldiers from sanctions by the civil justice. In all companies of this time members of the so-called overcrowded trades served. The tailors, shoemakers and weavers were sought-after workers in the military workshops as well. This was the second reason why officers weren’t interested in complying with the demands of the civil craftsmen and traders. The fact that the tailors and shoemakers were poor handicrafts increased the conflicts because the regular guild masters were quick to react to violations of the trading regulations.

But the guilds and offices themselves didn’t form a cohesive interest group. Not surprisingly the single masters followed up their own economic interests. For example, employing soldiers
could occasionally be useful to avoid the upper limit for the number of employees established by their guild. Or in another case an impoverished joiner could give his civil name to a workshop which in reality was driven by a group of non-commissioned officers. Both, soldiers and craftsmen tried to get round the prevailing regulations trickily. Although it was in principle forbidden to the soldiers to work for civil customers the practice of barter economy could hardly be prevented. So a baker gave beer to his quartered sergeant and the sergeant – a tailor journeyman – sewed a new dress for the baker’s wife in return. When questioned both answered that the sergeant wasn’t able to pay the beer in cash. Illicit work, favour services and barter deals formed a giant grey zone. In most cases attempts of the authorities to establish governing trade failed although smaller fines and detentions were imposed occasionally. Let me resume the general reasons for this:

1. Legal and illegal fields of activity overlapped. Each individual case had to be examined in long proceedings. The existence of an independent military jurisdiction protected the soldiers from sanctions by the civil justice. As the municipal authorities appeared as advocates of their guilds and citizens, the officers tried to support the interests of their soldiers.

2. The commanding officers ran uniform tailor and shoe-repair shops within the companies or regiments. In order to their firm monthly budgets they were interested to finish as much work as possible inside the army. It was only another small step from here to accept also civilian orders when there were free capacities or to employ some civil journeymen.

3. Some civil masters liked to work with soldiers to avoid disturbing trade regulations and for profit.

4. The armies employed skilled workers. The work soldiers handed in was qualitatively comparable to that of the civil craftsmen. Therefore many customers did not see any necessity to engage privileged artisans.

5. There was simply no awareness of doing wrong or an effective social control. Hosts, neighbours and colleagues registered very exactly and watched with some distrust, if soldiers cultivated an effortful lifestyle. Working soldiers performed the moral duties. For very few people it was important if the income was regularly earned or if it violated against regulations.

It has to be concluded that today’s functional distinction between executive power and economy did not exist in early modern Germany. In the 18th century, the armed forces not
only demanded goods and services, but appeared as producers and competitors for civilian enterprises too. The change took place by the abolition of the budgeting and increasing payments.