

Linked Histories: Police-Ordinances as an Information-Hub for Early Modern History

Annemieke Romein¹, Andreas Wagner², Saskia Limbach³, Klaas Van Gelder⁴, Margo De Koster^{4,5,6}, Jørgen Mührmann-Lund⁷, Nicolas Simon⁸

¹KNAW Huygens ING; ²Max-Planck-Institut für europäische Rechtsgeschichte; ³Mainz University ; ⁴Ghent University, ⁵Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, ⁶Vrije Universiteit Brussel, ⁷Århus University, ⁸Casa de Velasquez, Madrid

**N.B. We submit this as a paper-proposal,
but if you think it is better suited as a poster, we can comply with that.**

Policeygesetzgebung or police-ordinances can be seen as the first kind of voluntaristic laws. These norms fit between formal law and traditional statutes, customary law and social norms. These normative rules could thus come in a plurality of forms; therefore, literature regularly refers to these various types as *multinormativity*.¹ To avoid confusion, we will talk about ‘*normative rules*’ to indicate both legislation and other forms of guidelines for society.

These normative rules contain much information, which is relevant for many historical sub-disciplines; but more so, these rules are an underestimated connector in history. While the texts themselves contain information on jurisdiction, location, date, government (e.g. prince), responsible institutions (e.g. authors, those present at decisive meetings), addressees, penalties; they most importantly contain information on the perceived problem at hand (topics).

These topics offer a multi-dynamic perspective: not only do we learn what was perceived as problematic; we are also able to check and compare whether similar issues arose in adjacent ‘states’. With a topic-based approach, it is possible 1) to test the hypothesis that governments copied (successful) norms from each other²) it is possible to quick-search data and compare approaches. As a ‘hidden layer,’ it then could become possible to trace social and economic problems *and* solutions throughout a connected area when data gets connected. Furthermore, while studying sources for the early-modern period, it becomes possible to make diachronic comparisons to see how states dealt with problems over time.

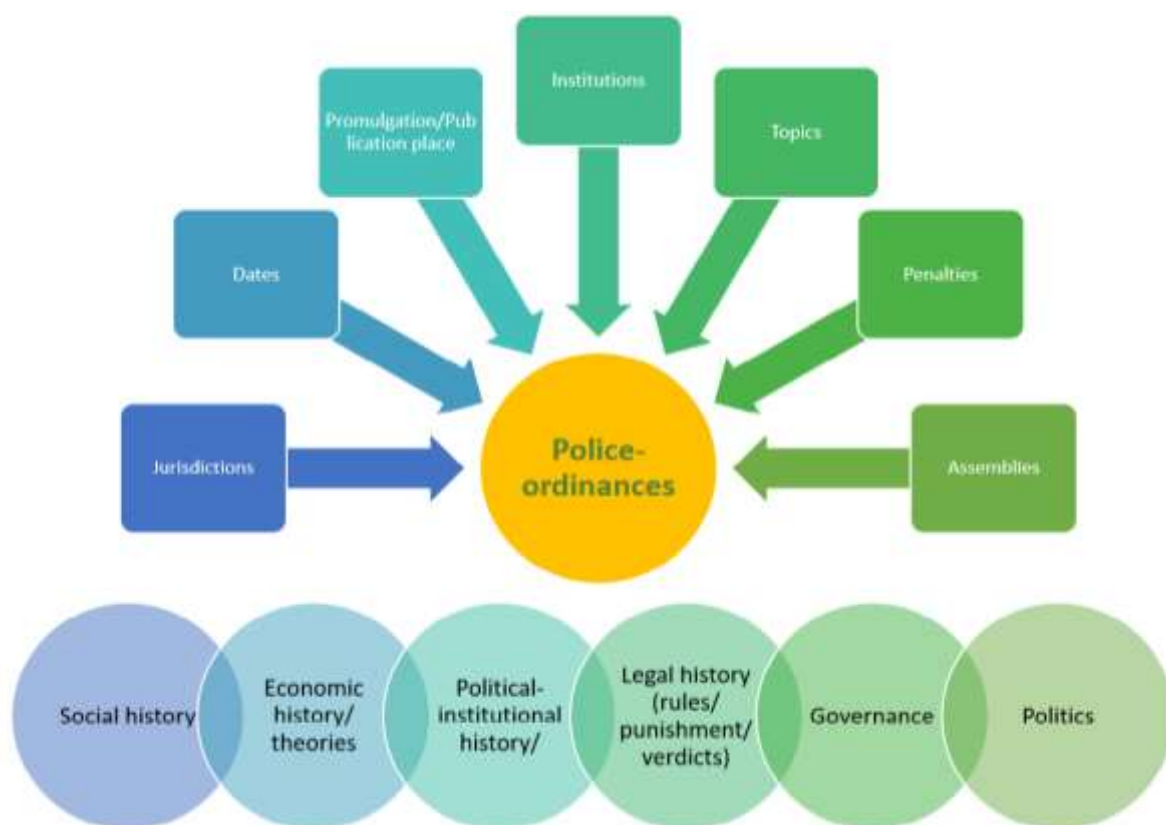


Figure 1. Police-ordinances contain much information, useful and connecting various research fields. Some examples.²

¹ Thomas Duve, ‘Was Ist ›Multinormativität‹? – Einführende Bemerkungen’, *Rechtsgeschichte Legal History - Journal of the Max Planck Institute for European Legal History*, no. 25 (2017): 88–101, http://data.rg.mpg.de/rechtsgeschichte/rg25_088duve_einfuehrung.pdf.

² Own creation.

State of the field

In the 1990s, a large project at the Max-Planck-Institute für europäische Rechtsgeschichte (MPIeR) was launched, resulting in an inventory (repertorium) of 68 states leading to a dataset containing summaries of over 200,000 texts with metadata on each of the individual sources.³ The focus of this project was on the Holy Roman Empire, Switzerland (Bern and Zürich), Austria, Denmark and Sweden – up to now data for 31 states has been redacted and published in twelve printed volumes, containing an overview of the police-ordinances of these areas.⁴ This data is all structured alike, though it does not make use of full-text. The repertory is presently being prepared to be published as an online database.

Since 1846 the Royal Commission for the Publication of Ancient Laws and Ordinances has published several volumes containing normative texts published within the borders of nowadays Belgium.⁵ Not only on the state/ provincial level but also at the local level (costumes) have been gathered and reissued. As of September 2020, the *LORD-project* will commence at Ghent University employing a post-doctoral researcher to make an inventory of the early modern Flemish costumes and how they related to princely legislation.

In 2017 the project *Law and Order?! started at Ghent University (17th-century normative texts from Flanders and Holland⁶); this led to the Entangled Histories DH-project at the KB National Library (NL) to tested the possibility of automatic meta-dating normative texts through the initial categorisation (topics) of the MPIeR project based upon full-texts.⁷ The last two projects continue in the project *A Game of Thrones?*⁸ at KNAW Huygens ING comparing the categories and dealings with ‘order’ within three federation-republics (Berne, Gelderland and Holland).*

All-in-all, studies are or have been conducted for several Western-European early modern states. (See map 1 for the currently, individually studied countries). The topical approach of these administrative norms could be expanded to any European country, including the UK and the Ottoman Empire; furthermore, it could even encompass the rules issued in former colonies.⁹

³ Karl Härter, ‘Introduction to Repertorium der Policeordnungen der frühen Neuzeit’, in *Repertorium der Policeordnungen der Frühen Neuzeit Band 1, Band 1*, ed. Karl Härter and Michael Stolleis (Frankfurt am Main: V. Klostermann, 1996), 1–36; Michael Stolleis, Karl Härter, and Lothar Schilling, *Policey Im Europa Der Frühen Neuzeit*, vol. 83 (Vittorio Klostermann, 1996). See also: <https://www.rg.mpg.de/forschung/repertorium-der-policeordnungen>

⁴ See: https://www.rg.mpg.de/publikationen/repertorium_der_policeordnungen

⁵

https://justitie.belgium.be/nl/informatie/bibliotheek/koninklijke_commissie_uitgave_belgische_oude_wetten_en_verordeningen

⁶ <https://www.nwo.nl/onderzoek-en-resultaten/onderzoeksprojecten/i/45/28645.html>

⁷ <https://lab.kb.nl/dataset/entangled-histories-ordinances-low-countries>

⁸ <https://dmponline.dcc.ac.uk/plans/47333/export.pdf>

⁹ Catherine Denys, ‘Écritures policières coloniales et circulations impériales : le bureau de police de Port-Louis à l’île de France (Maurice), 1766-1788’, *Revue d’histoire moderne contemporaine* n° 66-4, no. 4 (30 December 2019): 32–52, <https://www.cairn.info/revue-d-histoire-moderne-et-contemporaine-2019-4-page-32.htm?ref=doi>.

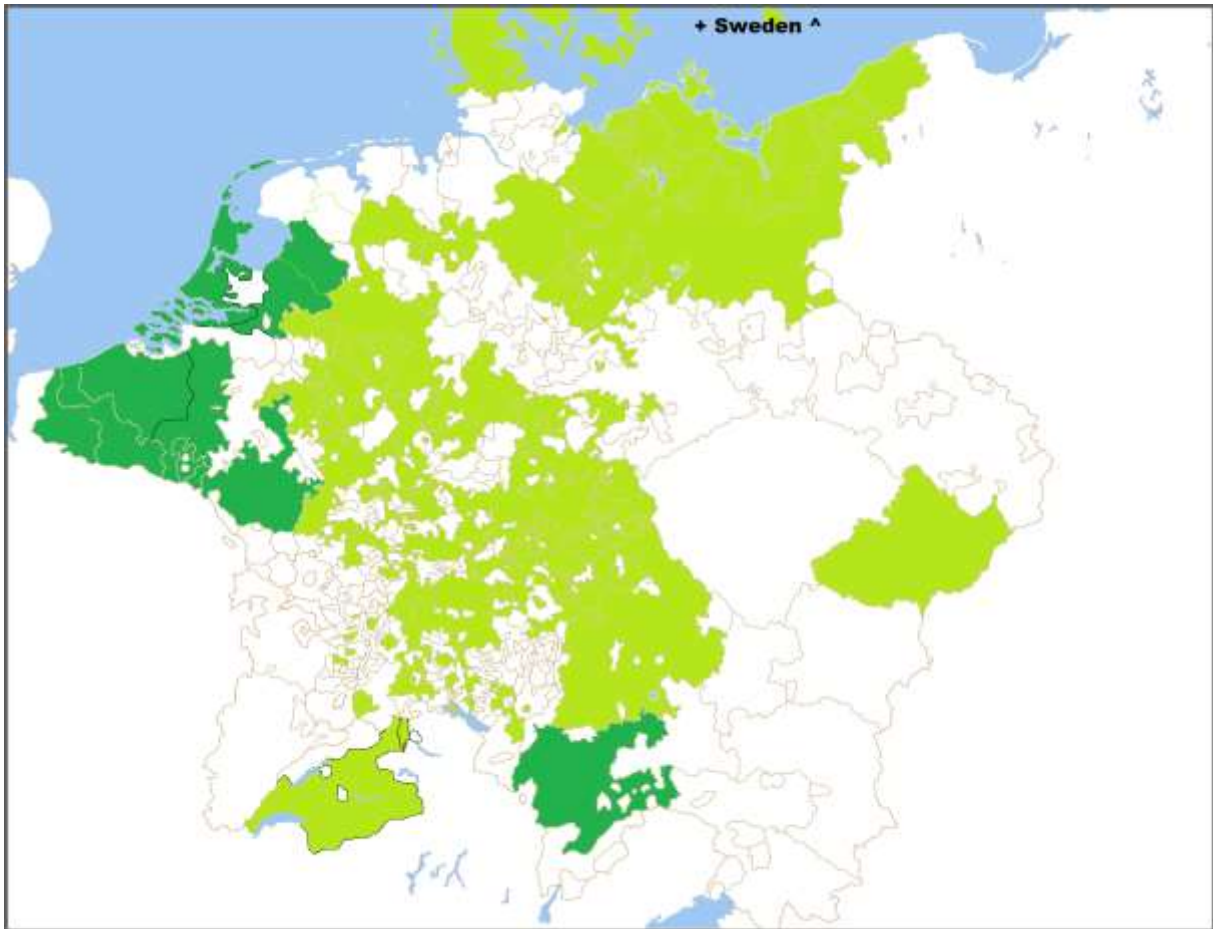


Figure 2. MPIeR *Repertorium* and other initiatives (dark green), period 1500-1800.¹⁰

Approach

The MPIeR project has created a bespoke data-scheme to reflect changes in territorial denomination over time, legislators and different forms of ordinances. Most importantly, it has defined a vocabulary of subject matters that was then applied across all states in the database.¹¹ However, up to now this has been made accessible only via subject matter indices in the respective printed volumes, and there has been no ready way to investigate cross-boundary developments, for instance. Presently, this is about to change by the imminent publication of the repository as one consolidated database. But none of the aspects of the data will, in this first step, be rendered in an interoperable, i.e. formally defined and machine-readable way (neither the various administrative units in their historical dynamics, nor the legislative persons or bodies, nor the vocabulary of subject matters). This is where the present proposal picks up and links available data and data models to comparable research projects and general schemes.

Within the original MPIeR-project, a hierarchical categorisation was created. Within *Entangled Histories* a provisional Simple Knowledge Organisation System (SKOS) was created to deal with the

¹⁰ Map: Blank map of the Holy Roman Empire in 1648
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Holy_Roman_Empire_1648_blank.png
 Data: https://www.rg.mpg.de/publikationen/repertorium_der_policeyordnungen

¹¹ For both, cf. again Härter 1996.

need to use translations across borders (see figure 3).¹² This SKOS was created to use it as a basis for the Maui back-end in Annif.¹³ Annif is a tool designed by the Finnish National Library in order to automatically create metadata.¹⁴ Creating automatic metadata has been successfully tested even though it was only done on a very small test- and training set: thus the computer can apply pre-trained (hierarchical) categorisations to individual police-ordinances and it is expected that with more data it will become more successful.¹⁵ This implies when expanding the MPIeR-dataset with full-text and using these in Annif, it becomes possible to have Annif categorise the unseen ordinances. Such full-text expansions will require proper guidance to distinguish between structured and unstructured data.

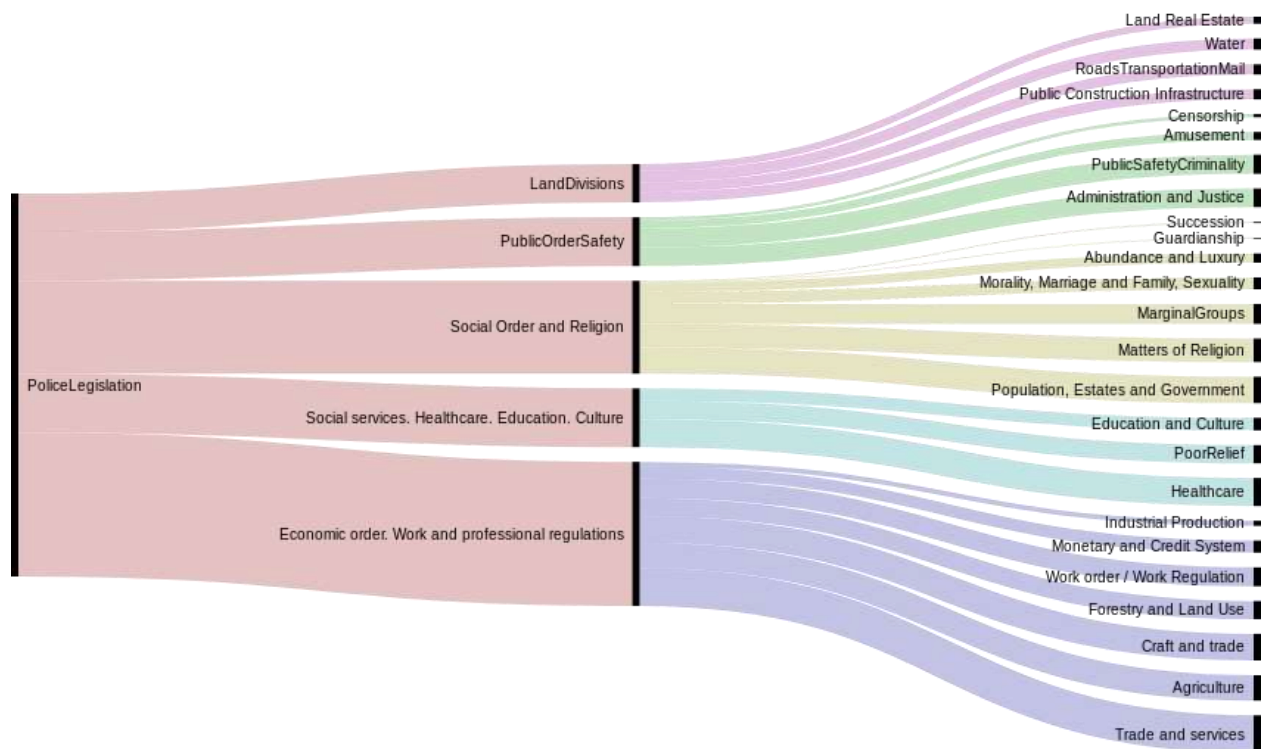


Figure 3. The first levels for the top category 'Police legislation'. Bar width indicates the number of texts in this category.¹⁶

Next steps

We are aware that if we want to integrate our data into a mutually accessible way. This means we need:

- taxonomy cleaning¹⁷ and translation,

¹² Joseph T. Tennis and Stuart A. Sutton, 'Extending the Simple Knowledge Organization System for Concept Management in Vocabulary Development Applications', *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 59, no. 1 (2008): 25–37, <https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.20702>.

¹³ Osmo Suominen, 'Annif: DIY Automated Subject Indexing Using Multiple Algorithms', *LIBER Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (29 July 2019): 1–25, <https://doi.org/10.18352/lq.10285>.

¹⁴ <http://www.annif.org/>

¹⁵ <https://lab.kb.nl/about-us/blog/categorisation-early-modern-ordinances>

¹⁶ Through: Alluvial Diagram - <https://app.rawgraphs.io/>; archived: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3564586>.

¹⁷ Cf. Martinez-Gonzalez, M. Mercedes, und Maria-Luisa Alvite-Diez. „Thesauri and Semantic Web: Discussion of the Evolution of Thesauri toward Their Integration with the Semantic Web“. *IEEE Access*, 2019, 1–1. <https://doi.org/10.1109/ACCESS.2019.2948028>.

- integration of comparable approaches

and work on deliverables:

- LOD-SKOS vocabulary for subject matters,
- formal ontology for dynamic historical administrative units¹⁸.

Reaching consensus over this, internationally, is a challenge; hence we are looking for suggestions and best-practices on how to push this forward within Linked Open Data.

¹⁸ Cf. Gantner, Felix, Bettina Waldvogel, Rolf Meile, and Patrick Laube: „The Basic Formal Ontology as a Reference Framework for Modeling the Evolution of Administrative Units“. *Transactions in GIS* 17/2 (2013): 206–26. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9671.2012.01356.x>; Lacasta, Javier, Francisco Javier Lopez-Pellicer, Aneta Florczyk, Francisco Javier Zarazaga-Soria, and Javier Nogueras-Iso: „Population of a spatio-temporal knowledge base for jurisdictional domains“. *International Journal of Geographical Information Science* 28/9 (2014): 1964–87, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13658816.2014.911412>; Garbacz, Pawel, Agnieszka Lawrynowicz, and Bogumil Szady: „Identity Criteria for Localities“. *Frontiers in Artificial Intelligence and Applications* (2018): 47–54, <https://doi.org/10.3233/978-1-61499-910-2-47>; Southall, Humphrey, and Paula Aucott: „Expressing History through a Geo-Spatial Ontology“. *ISPRS International Journal of Geo-Information* 8/8 (2019): 362-379, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijgi8080362>.

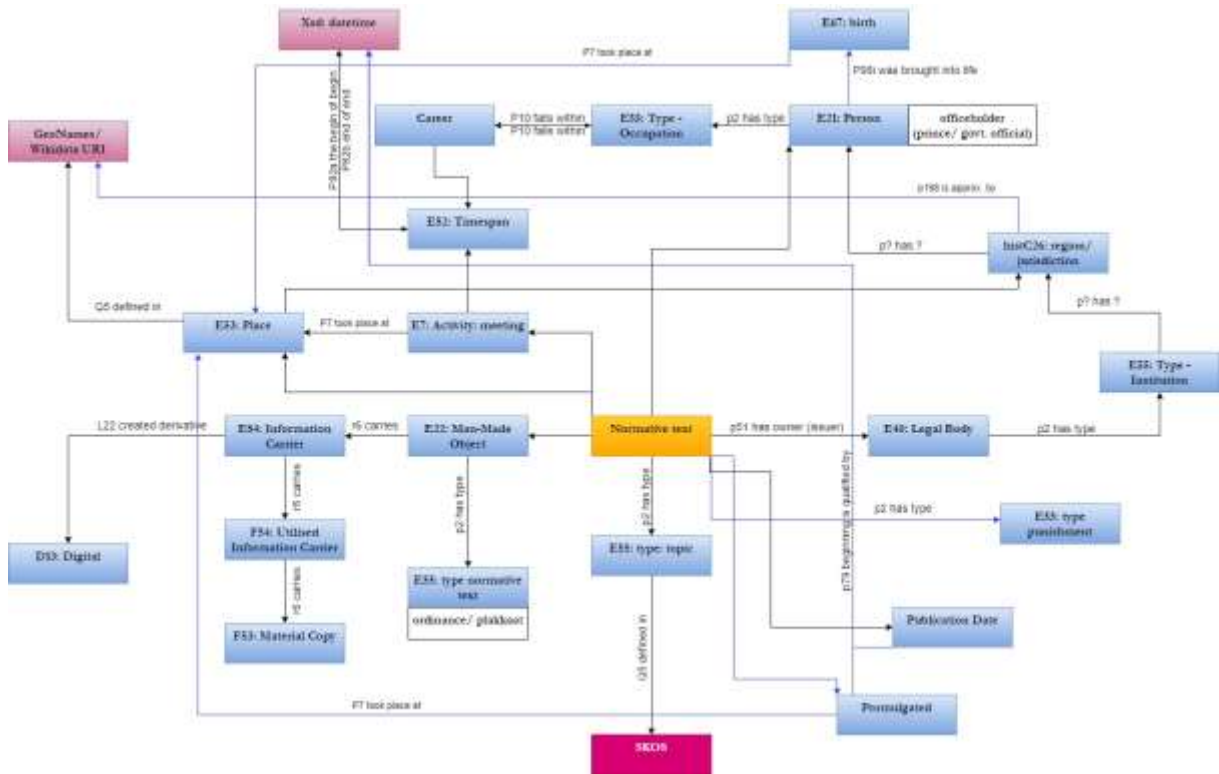


Figure 4. Provisional ontology police-ordinances (created in draw.io¹⁹).²⁰ Work in progress!

¹⁹ Draw.io draft version:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1pxNk_ZK7NBgtfbZrjoZIt6DgYYjhOOqJ/view?usp=sharing

²⁰ Work in progress, provisional ontology in Onto-Me is being created at:

<http://ontome.dataforhistory.org/project/55>