

Description for the general public

**Ius Commune Venetum:
Normative Identities and Legal Pluralism in the Venetian Terraferma (16th–18th Centuries)**

In the contemporary world, the governance of complex political entities and global networks constantly deals with norms rooted in various sources, which often interfere or even contradict each other. This coexistence of multiple legal, social, and institutional frameworks within the same space is a phenomenon well recognized by legal science. There are various theoretical frameworks to understand its nature, often debating it under the concepts of "legal pluralism" or "normative hybridity".

This variety of competing norms is not unique to contemporary law: it characterized many periods of the legal past and it was particularly intensified in the early modern era (ca. 1500-1800) during the formation of composite states. Rulers and legal scholars of that time developed various means to handle this problem without imposing a single, unified legal code.

The project focuses on the Republic of Venice and its mainland territories (so called *Terraferma*) between the 16th and 18th centuries. At that time, the Venetian Republic was a powerful composite state that governed highly diverse cities and regions operating under different legal systems: instead of forcing a unified law on everyone, it allowed local communities to keep their own municipal statutes while maintaining control through a central supreme court. The main goal of this project is to uncover how this system actually worked in practice. To achieve this, the research involves an extensive investigation of unpublished historical archives. The work will consist of reading and cross-referencing centuries-old civil trial records from the central Venetian appellate court with local municipal laws. By reconstructing complete legal cases, the project will observe how judges and citizens practically resolved daily disputes and contradictions between local traditions and central authority. Through a study of archival records and peripheral statutory reforms, it will be possible to understand how such a system could remain united despite its diversity, ensuring the respect of local normative identities and how local elites practically used legal pluralism to defend their autonomy within complex institutional frameworks.

This specific interaction of normative layers has received limited scholarly attention in legal history so far. This case study may serve as a mirror to look at early modern governance from a new angle.

Today, the questions of legal pluralism, the management of non-uniform institutional unions, and the constant search for a balance between centralization and regional autonomy are equally important as they were centuries before. While discussing these issues, it is highly useful to take into consideration the experiences of the legal past. It is not the aim of this project to transfer direct solutions from then to now, but rather to use conclusions regarding the methodology of Venetian normative negotiation to enrich the current legal discussion in areas crucial for modern jurisprudence and governance.