

# Identity, Citizenship and Legal History

XXVth Annual Forum of Young Legal Historians

Brussels, 5 – 8 June 2019



Historically, the concept of citizenship encompassed three distinct, yet interconnected dimensions. The first and foremost dimension was of a legal nature: citizenship was a legal status which allowed one to act freely in accordance with the law and, when necessary, to claim its protection. In its second dimension citizenship presupposed one's active participation in society's political institutions. And last, though certainly not least, citizenship was closely linked to membership of a specific community that provided a distinct source of identity. All three dimensions were closely related to each other. This can perhaps be most aptly exemplified in the ancient boast of '*Civis romanus sum!*', which encapsulated simultaneously a plea for legal rights, a republican sense of duty, and a distinctly Roman feeling of the imperial pride. Since the nineteenth century, these dimensions have been linked predominantly to the modern nation-state, a model which is nowadays increasingly challenged on the internal as well as the external level. Internally, many states are seen to be struggling with federalism, separatist movements, legacies of colonialism and right-wing identity politics. Externally, today's governments are confronted with issues, such as climate change, demographic shifts, migration streams and a global and interdependent economic system, that require international cooperation or even supranational institutions.

The XXVth Annual Forum of the Young Legal Historians aims to shed light on these questions by looking at the legal history of the closely intertwined concepts of citizenship and legal history. Throughout history, citizenship and identity has been defined in different ways and at different levels. For instance, in antiquity the often smallish Greek *poleis* could hardly be compared to the expansive Roman Empire. Medieval life in Europe consisted of a feudal patchwork of kingdoms, principalities and free city-states, yet all were considered part of Christendom. Identity could also be determined by social class (e.g. aristocratic families) or by profession (e.g. the guilds). The nineteenth century saw the rise of nationalism and revolution, whilst at the same time European powers expanded their colonial empires. Despite these evolutions, it cannot be denied that there is also much continuity to be found. Although diversity and globalisation have reached an unprecedented scale and form today, these phenomena

are not entirely new. Each era has had its international relations, its trades, wars, economic discrepancies, migrants and refugees.

There is, in short, enough reason to expect that we can learn from history. Such an endeavour necessitates a multidisciplinary approach since legal constructions can be fully appreciated only when combined with insights from the related fields of history, philosophy, political science and sociology. Therefore, the organizers welcome both traditional approaches in legal history and methodologically innovative research.

If you would like to present a paper during the conference, please send an application including an abstract of not more than 250 words and your CV to [aylh2019@gmail.com](mailto:aylh2019@gmail.com) before **15 January 2019**. It is also possible to apply for a full panel. In that case, your proposal should also include, in addition to individual paper proposals, an abstract introducing the theme of the panel. Presentations have to be in English and should not exceed 20 minutes each. The conference fee will be € 100,- and does not include accommodation. Further information about the upcoming forum can be found at the [website](#) of the conference. Information about the Association of Young Legal Historians and the past Annual Forums is available at the [AYLH-website](#).

We look forward to welcoming you to Brussels.

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Maxime Jottrand (Université libre de Bruxelles, CHDAJ)  
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