



Probing European police systems

SYSPOE Project – European police systems

ANR-12-BSHS3-004

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A collective investigation on European police systems

The field of history of police has experienced a vigorous growth for 15 years in France. During this phase, the project of a collective European investigation was conceived to prevent the mere accumulation of monographs, develop comparisons and remove artificial barriers to a history composed from a national stance, in France and abroad. SYSPOE studies the construction and the recompositions of 18th and 19th century European police systems, defined as more or less organized articulations of forces between the actors contributing to policing or preserving public order. It aims to analyse how very different forms of police organizations were established in similar socio-political conditions, in order to bring a new understanding of European societies in the 18th and 19th century by the study of social regulation. SYSPOE aspires to design conceptual tools for writing a truly European history of police and to analyse the mutations of contemporary police systems, to contribute to the public debate on these issues.

Empirical research and epistemological reflections

SYSPOE combined empirical research and a collective reflection on the notion of police system, in an experimental approach. The analysis was developed from various levels, on a selection of thematic work packages, each of them including archival research : spaces of circulation for conceptions and practices of policing, spaces of police innovation, notably colonial territories (work packages « Circulations and police systems » and « Police systems and colonial territories ») ; situations of interaction between different actors of policing (work packages « Plural policing » and « Police systems and military cultures ») ; specific moments and events that crystallize, move, create or change police systems (work package « Crisis, revolutions, disasters »). Along these work packages, the team gathered in several workshops for a collective reflection on the notion of police system.

Major results

SYSPOE transformed the notion of police system into an analytical tool, making possible to compare various forms of social regulation, from different periods or continents. The objects for a global history of police are now identified. A new transnational chronology of the history of police has been established, from 1750 to 1950. Three long cycles of transformation alternate with period of slower change. SYSPOE paved the way for a global history of police. The cooperation developed with international researchers during the project will be continued by an annual European meeting.

Scientific production

The results and proceedings of SYSPOE workshops and conferences have been released in special issues or special sections in international journals and several collective volumes are currently in the works. We put a specific emphasis on international valorisation, by supporting the organization of panels in international conferences (European History and Social Sciences Conference, Society for French Historical Studies) and financing translations for international editorial projects.

Facts about the project

SYSPOE is a fundamental research project co-ordinated by Vincent Denis (IHMC, UMR 8066 – CNRS, ENS, Pantheon-Sorbonne University ; Institut universitaire de France), in association with the following laboratories: IRHIS (UMR 8659 – CNRS, Lille 3 University), CRHQ (UMR 5583 – CNRS Caen University) and TELEMME (UMR 7303 – CNRS, Aix-Marseille University). The project has started on January 2013 for a duration of 42 months. It received an ANR grant of 200,000 €