

Social and political order of the communal towns in the European peripheries from the 12th to 16th c.

The project's aim is to take on the research on the development of communal towns in the areas which in the High and Late Middle Ages underwent the process of conquest and colonization as well as expansion and development. The geographical scope of the project covers the regions that belonged to culturally, politically and economically various zones: Prussia and Livonia, Wales and Ireland, and four regions of the Castilian monarchy, or so-called Atlantic Spain (Galicia, Asturia, Cantabria, Basque Country). Our hypothesis assumes that the essence of the development of towns in medieval Europe was not about transferring ready-made models and forms of political and social organization from the post Carolingian centre to the peripheries, but rather about their constant modification and adjustment to local needs and conditions. These processes led to emerging new forms of urban life in the European peripheries. Subsequently, these new forms were adopted in the local or regional scale. Thus, the development of the communal town in medieval Europe was predominantly of a polycentric character. Chronologically the project covers the period from the second half of the 12th c. to the turn of the 15th and 16th c. The term "social and political order" used in the title means the systemic and legal framework of the community as well as patterns of behaviour, ideas, social ties and communication means functioning among its members. The communal town is understood as a legal and spiritual community, based on formal norms, values, notions and social identification. The research conducted under the project shall distinguish the features common for the urban community in Europe, and the specific features, typical of regional or local urban landscape.

The concept of our research assumes focusing on three major groups of problems, which are considered as basic for the characteristics of social and political order of the urban commune: 1.) formation of the community of inhabitants, 2.) making and maintaining of peace, 3.) normalization of social life and social disciplining. A starting point for methodological conception of the project are considerations on the political order of the medieval urban commune published in 1990s and at the beginning of 2000s, as well as the research on the normalization of social life and social disciplining. The project sets new perspectives for studies of the European town, because we still do not have comparative studies of the urban communities on such a wide territorial scope.