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Report from DIOGENES Kick-off Meeting in Kraków, October 12–13, 2023

Keywords: DIOGENES, legal history, conference, networking group

On October 12–13, 2023, the Jagiellonian University in Kraków (JU) hosted an inaugural event for the DIOGENES group (Digital Network of European Legal Historians), founded within the Faculty of Law and Administration. This networking initiative seeks to establish an international network of scholarly connections, particularly targeting Ph.D. candidates and early-career researchers (postdoctoral scholars). A major challenge faced by legal historians is the absence of a comprehensive database of contacts to facilitate international collaboration. The primary objective of DIOGENES is to address this gap by creating a user-friendly digital space that fosters sustained communication among its members.

The DIOGENES kick-off meeting aimed to build a community of young researchers. The two-day event brought together over 50 experienced and emerging scholars from 15 European countries, representing 29 academic institutions, including several from Germany (University of Augsburg, University of Bayreuth, University of Regensburg, Free University of Berlin, Humboldt University of Berlin, Karl Eberhard University in Tübingen, University of Cologne, Westphalian Wilhelm University of Münster, Friedrich Schiller University of Jena), Hungary (University of Szeged, University of Miskolc, University of Debrecen), Austria

(University of Vienna), Czechia (Masaryk University of Brno), Finland (University of Helsinki), Latvia (University of Latvia in Riga), the Netherlands (Maastricht University), Norway (University of Oslo), Slovenia (University of Ljubljana), Slovakia (University of Saints Cyril and Methodius in Trnava), Spain (Complutense University in Madrid), Sweden (Stockholm University), Ukraine (Lviv National University of Technology), Great Britain (University of Durham, University College London), as well as from national centers such as: Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, the University of Rzeszów, the District Bar Council in Warsaw and the Jagiellonian University in Kraków.

During the opening ceremony, Professor Dorota Malec, Vice-Rector for International Cooperation at the Jagiellonian University, welcomed attendees and emphasized the importance of international collaboration in a globalized world. She highlighted the particular value of maintaining connections between academic institutions, especially for legal historians navigating contemporary challenges in the field. The subsequent speaker, Dr. Hab. JU Prof. Maciej Mikula, JU Professor and manager of the flagship project Critical Heritage Studies Hub, provided a broader context for the JU's initiatives in legal heritage studies, outlining their primary objectives. Panel discussions were moderated by Dr. Piotr Alexandrowicz (AMU), Paweł Kaźmierski MA (JU/Jena), Dr. Denes Legeza (Szeged), Dr. Przemysław Pałka (JU), Dr. Kamila Staudigl-Ciechowicz (Vienna/Regensburg) and Izabela Wasik MA (JU).

During the inaugural panel titled "Publish or Perish in Legal History," Prof. Dr. Hans-Peter Haferkamp (Cologne) provided key insights for early-career researchers on producing high-quality scholarly monographs. Prof. Haferkamp began by underscoring the critical importance of formulating a clear research question, which should be grounded in a comprehensive review of current literature to ensure alignment with the latest scholarly developments. He highlighted the significance of carefully structuring the monograph, advising that substantial time should be devoted to this stage. He stressed avoiding redundancy and crafting precise titles. Additionally, Prof. Haferkamp emphasized the necessity of employing clear, transparent, and logical language, which he identified as essential to the success of a monograph, while cautioning against the excessive use of irony. He recommended limiting the length of monographs, noting that a doctoral dissertation should focus on presenting novel research findings rather than serving as a textbook. The work should directly address the posed research question. Prof. Haferkamp also advised against uncritical citations of prominent thinkers, instead encouraging the development of original theories. He emphasized that such theories must be time-intensive, open to falsification, and actively applied within the work. In

the final portion of his presentation, he cautioned against prioritizing formatting and bibliography creation over writing the main text and advised avoiding indirect citations altogether. During the subsequent discussion, participants raised concerns about the variability in national standards for evaluating scholarly publications and asked Prof. Haferkamp whether he found writing subsequent monographs easier compared to earlier ones.

The second part of the panel featured a discussion with distinguished participants, including Prof. Peter Oestmann (Münster), Prof. Agustín Parise (Maastricht), Prof. Alberto Iglesias Garzón (Madrid), Prof. Heikki Pihlajamäki (Helsinki), and Dr. Ian Williams (UCL). This lively exchange focused on best practices for preparing manuscripts for submission to academic journals. The panelists, all editors of prestigious international journals, emphasized the importance of language quality in submitted publications. They particularly addressed the challenges faced by scholars whose native languages are neither English nor German – both dominant languages for European publications in legal history. The discussion highlighted strategies for overcoming these barriers and improving linguistic clarity. In addition, the panelists encouraged researchers to disseminate their findings on international platforms while also stressing the value of publishing in their native languages. They underscored the importance of contributing to national academic dialogues alongside engaging with broader, transnational audiences.

The event continued with a highly engaging open discussion titled “Networking of Young European Legal Historians – Past, Present, Future.” This session began with a presentation on the historical evolution of networking initiatives among legal historians in Europe. Prof. Haferkamp and Prof. Adrian Schmidt-Recla (Jena) shared their personal experiences of organizing the *Forum Junger Rechtshistoriker* during the mid- and late 1990s, offering valuable insights into the challenges and successes of fostering academic networks in that era. Following this, the discussion shifted to the activities of the Association of Young Legal Historians (AYLH) during the first two decades of the 21st century, highlighting its role in connecting emerging scholars across Europe. This retrospective on previous networking initiatives provided a natural transition to exploring future possibilities for collaboration. The conversation focused particularly on leveraging digital communication tools to enhance connectivity and create innovative opportunities for engagement among young legal historians in the years to come.

During the open discussion, participants explored potential future directions for the development of DIOGENES and strategies for strengthening collaboration among researchers

from all participating institutions. Topics included the promotion of DIOGENES through social media platforms and the establishment of partnerships with existing organizations, such as the AYLH and *Das junge Netzwerk Rechtsgeschichte*. Participants highlighted the complementary role DIOGENES could play in supporting these organizations' efforts to promote and internationalize research in legal history. Several discussants proposed extending group activities to undergraduate and graduate students studying the history of law, as well as establishing connections with student research groups. This approach could help integrate aspiring legal historians into the DIOGENES network early in their academic journeys, even before pursuing doctoral studies. Representatives from numerous academic institutions actively contributed to the discussion, affirming the importance of the initiative, and recognizing its potential to promote legal history research, particularly among the youngest members of the academic community.

The final panel of the first day, titled "Legal History Across the Atlantic Ocean," provided valuable insights into transatlantic academic experiences and perspectives. The first part, "Legal Historian as a Fulbright in the US," featured Prof. Tomáš Gábriš (Trnava), who shared his experiences applying for and participating in a Fulbright scholarship. Prof. Gábriš completed his fellowship at the University of Pittsburgh's Department of Slavic Languages & Literatures from September 1, 2017, to January 31, 2018. During his presentation, Prof. Gábriš detailed key aspects of the application process, including crafting a compelling research proposal, securing letters of recommendation, and completing the necessary documentation. He also addressed the challenges of adapting to a new cultural environment, overcoming language barriers, and navigating an unfamiliar academic system. Prof. Gábriš emphasized the numerous benefits of the Fulbright experience, such as access to unique research materials, opportunities to network with field experts, and personal growth through cultural exchange. He expressed his appreciation for the extensive resources at the University of Pittsburgh Library, which offered a wealth of books and journals directly related to his research project. The discussion extended to the interdisciplinary nature of legal history, with participants debating its role within the social sciences. It was noted that legal history offers unique contributions, such as providing historical context and enriching our understanding of the evolution of legal systems, setting it apart from other legal disciplines.

Between the two parts of the evening panel, a popular networking session was held, allowing attendees, including both audience members and invited panelists, to exchange ideas and establish connections.

The evening session of the panel, “Scientific Career in the US,” featured participation from prominent American scholars via the MS Teams platform. Panelists included Prof. Piotr Górecki (University of California, Riverside), Prof. Michelle McKinley (University of Oregon), Prof. Lauren Thompson (Georgia State University), and Prof. Gregory Ablavsky (Stanford Center for Law and History). They offered valuable advice for young European researchers interested in pursuing academic careers in the United States and discussed the practical challenges and realities of the American academic environment. The discussion highlighted the advantages and disadvantages of different publication avenues in the United States, including American law reviews, which differ significantly from peer-reviewed journals, and book chapters, which serve as alternative platforms for disseminating research. The panelists also provided guidance on navigating the pathways into American academia, outlining potential opportunities and challenges.

The second day of the DIOGENES kick-off meeting began with a discussion panel titled “Archival Law and Research on Legal History.” This session featured Prof. Dr. Adrian Schmidt-Recla, Prof. Herbjørn Andresen (Oslo), Dr. Mariana Dias Paes (Max Planck Institute for Legal History and Legal Theory), and Dr. Jakob Maziarz (JU). The panel examined the varied and often restrictive access policies for archival resources in different countries, which significantly impact research in legal history. Key topics included the reliability and ethics of conducting historical legal research, as well as the challenges of balancing personal data protection with the presentation of research findings. Panelists deliberated whether it is even feasible to conduct meaningful legal historical research without unrestricted access to primary sources. They also shared strategies for addressing denied access to specific archives, drawing on their personal experiences to illustrate potential solutions to this pervasive issue.

A second networking session took place between the panels, offering another valuable opportunity for participants to build connections and strengthen relationships.

The event concluded with the final discussion panel, titled “Legal History and The European Research Council (ERC).” Panel chair Dr. Piotr Alexandrowicz introduced the session with an overview of the ERC, emphasizing the importance of research funding and explaining the ERC Starting Grant application process for early-career researchers. He also presented a working list of ERC-funded projects in legal history, noting that such grants are typically divided between two panels: SH2 (Institutions, Governance, and Legal Systems) and SH6 (The Study of the Human Past). This division requires applicants to determine whether

their project will primarily target legal scholars (SH2) or historians (SH6), a choice that shapes the narrative strategy for the proposal.

The panel featured presentations by two distinguished scholars and ERC laureates. Prof. Phillip Hellwege (Augsburg), who received an ERC Consolidator Grant in 2014 for his project “A Comparative History of Insurance Law in Europe,” delivered an in-person talk. He discussed the qualities expected of a Principal Investigator (PI) in an ERC Starting Grant, the challenges of leading a large research team, and his own experiences with the application process, offering practical advice for potential applicants. Prof. Ulrike Müßig (Passau/Sorbonne), recipient of an ERC Advanced Grant in 2013 for her project “Reconsidering Constitutional Formation: Constitutional Communication by Drafting, Practice, and Interpretation in 18th and 19th Century Europe,” joined remotely. She elaborated on the evaluation criteria for ERC Starting Grants and provided insights based on her extensive experience. The session concluded with a discussion, during which panelists addressed audience questions and shared their personal experiences with ERC funding and legal history research. This panel offered invaluable guidance on navigating the ERC application process and managing the complexities of funded research projects.

At the end of the event, a brief summary of the two days of the DIOGENES kick-off meeting was presented. Organizers expressed optimism for ongoing collaboration and the potential for new connections through planned online meetings.

The DIOGENES kick-off meeting received an overwhelmingly positive response from attendees who had gathered in Kraków. Within months of the event, the group had organized several follow-up activities. In March 2024, an international online conference marked the 220th anniversary of the Napoleonic Code, featuring a discussion panel with leading experts as well as presentations by emerging legal historians. Additionally, the group hosted its first two online networking sessions, focusing on strategies for publishing in academic journals and exploring new forms of collaboration for the group’s future development.

We warmly invite anyone interested in collaborating with the DIOGENES networking group to contact us at diogenes@uj.edu.pl.

