

Common Rules Project (2011 – 2014)

The regulation of institutions for managing commons in Europe 1100-1800

Project goal

This project aims to understand how efficient and effective regulation can be developed, executed by well-functioning institutions.

We focus on commons, which are institutions for collective action (1) which existed in the European countryside for centuries, and were set-up to regulate the collective use of natural resources (grassland, woodland, water) for large parts of the rural population. Although the European commons largely disappeared under governmental pressure, especially during the liberalization wave of the 19th century (2; 3) commons are still omnipresent in many developing countries and still survive in many parts of Europe today (4; 5).

Our project concentrates on the regulation of commons in Western and Southern Europe, examining the internal structure and changes of rules on various commons, in relation to a number of independent variables such as population growth, changing land use (e.g. the balance between arable and waste land), climate, etc.

The main objective of the project is to initiate a European-wide comparison of bodies of rules by studying commons in Western and Southern Europe, using the regulations that can be found in various historical records, for several centuries in each case. Once the specific rules are entered into the collective database, we intend to analyse these according to a jointly developed method of analysis, and publish our conclusions in high-ranking journals.

All data collected for the project will, after the publication of the analysis results, be freely available via www.collective-action.info

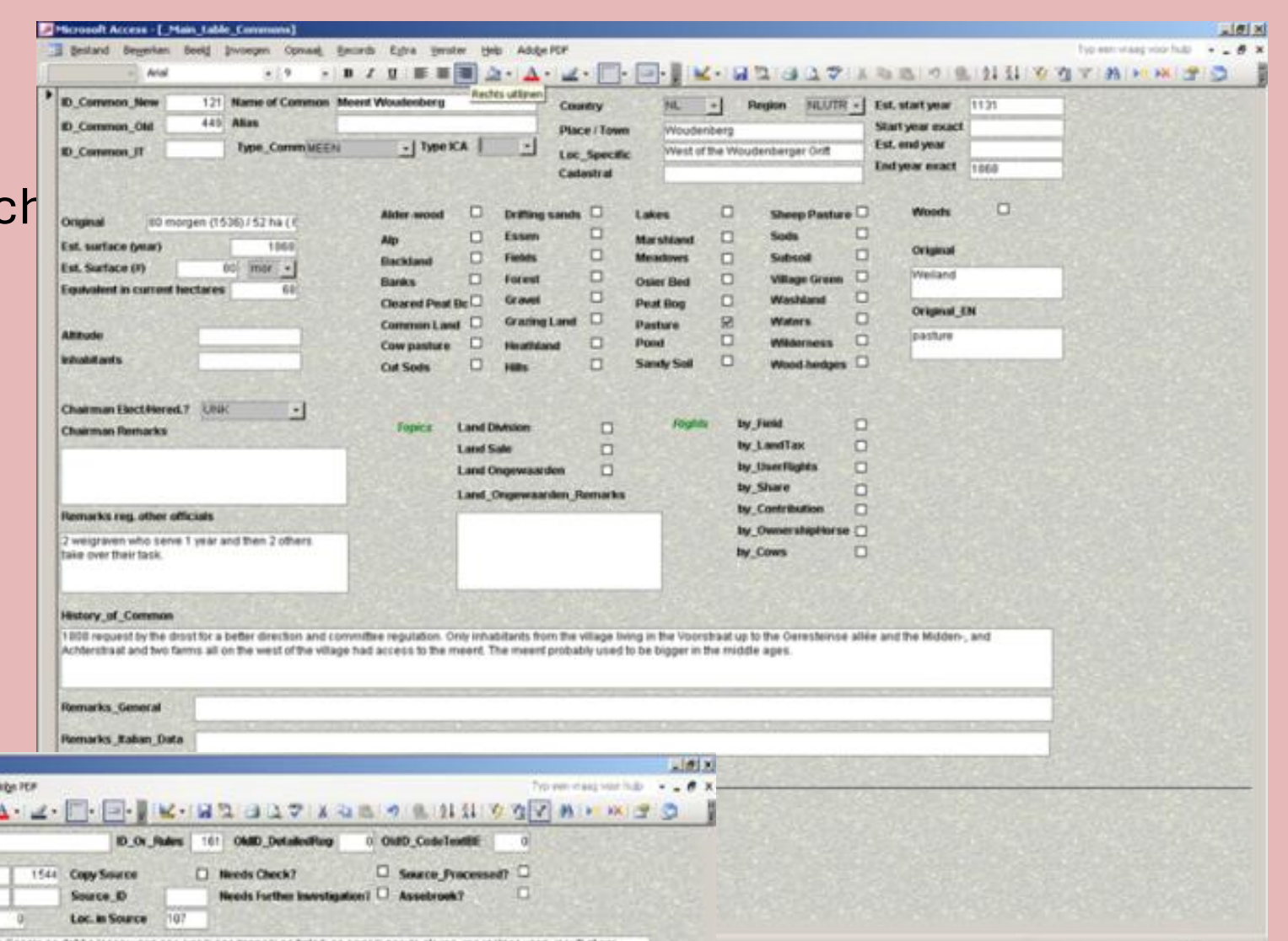
Literature

1. Ostrom, E. (1990). *Governing the commons: the evolution of institutions for collective action*. The Political Economy of Institutions and Decisions. Cambridge University Press (Cambridge).
2. Vivier, N., Demélas, M.-D. (2003). *Les propriétés collectives face aux attaques libérales (1750/1914)*. Europe occidentale et Amérique latine (Rennes).
3. De Moor, M., Shaw-Taylor, L., Warde, P. (2002). *The management of common land in north west Europe, c.1500/1850*. Brepols (Turnhout). 2nd print.
4. Rodgers, Chr.P., Straughton, E.A., Winchester A.J.L., Pieraccini, M. (2011). *Contested Common Land. Environmental Governance Past and Present*. Earthscan, London.
5. Congost, R. and Lana-Berasain, J.-M. (2007). *Campos Cerrados, debates abiertos: Analisis historico y propiedad de la tierra en Europa (siglos XVIIIIX)*, Universidad Publica de Navarra (Pamplona).
6. Ostrom, E. (2005). *Understanding Institutional Diversity*. Princeton University Press.

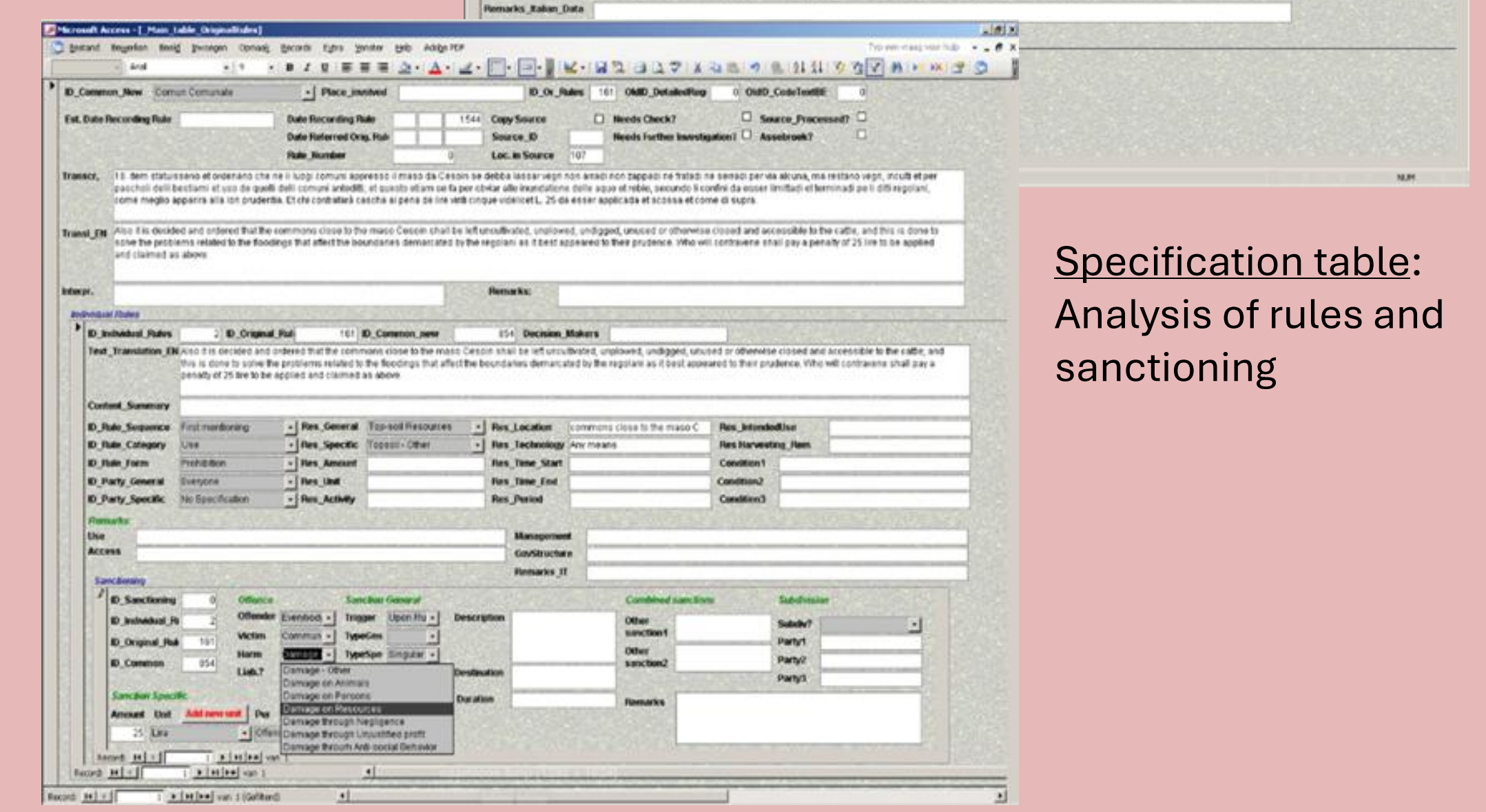
Method

In order to understand the institutional diversity that can be found within the European boundaries we aim to develop a collective “grammar” of institutions, in line with 2009 Nobel prize winner Elinor Ostrom’s attempts to do so (6), but applicable to longitudinal analysis. As historians we believe that a (very) long-term perspective on institutional change is a condition sine qua non we cannot understand what makes institutions resilient to external change and internal problems.

Main table:
contains general information about each case



Specification table:
Analysis of rules and sanctioning

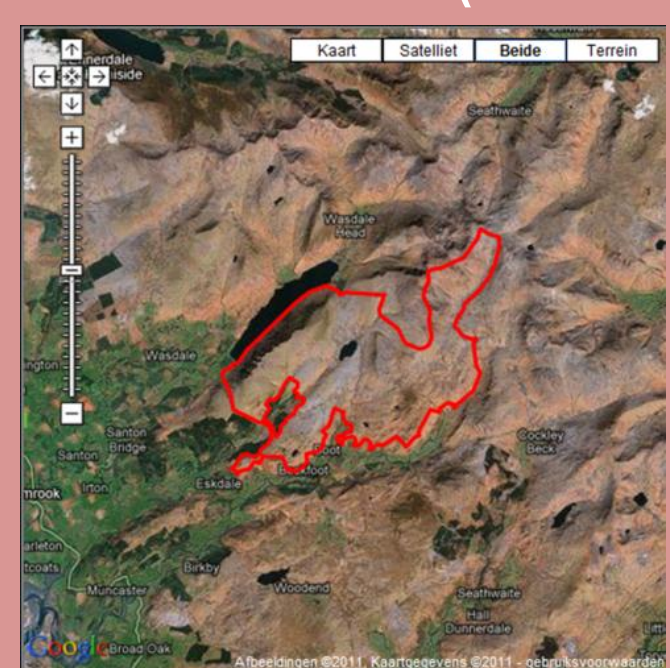


International comparison of commons’ regulation

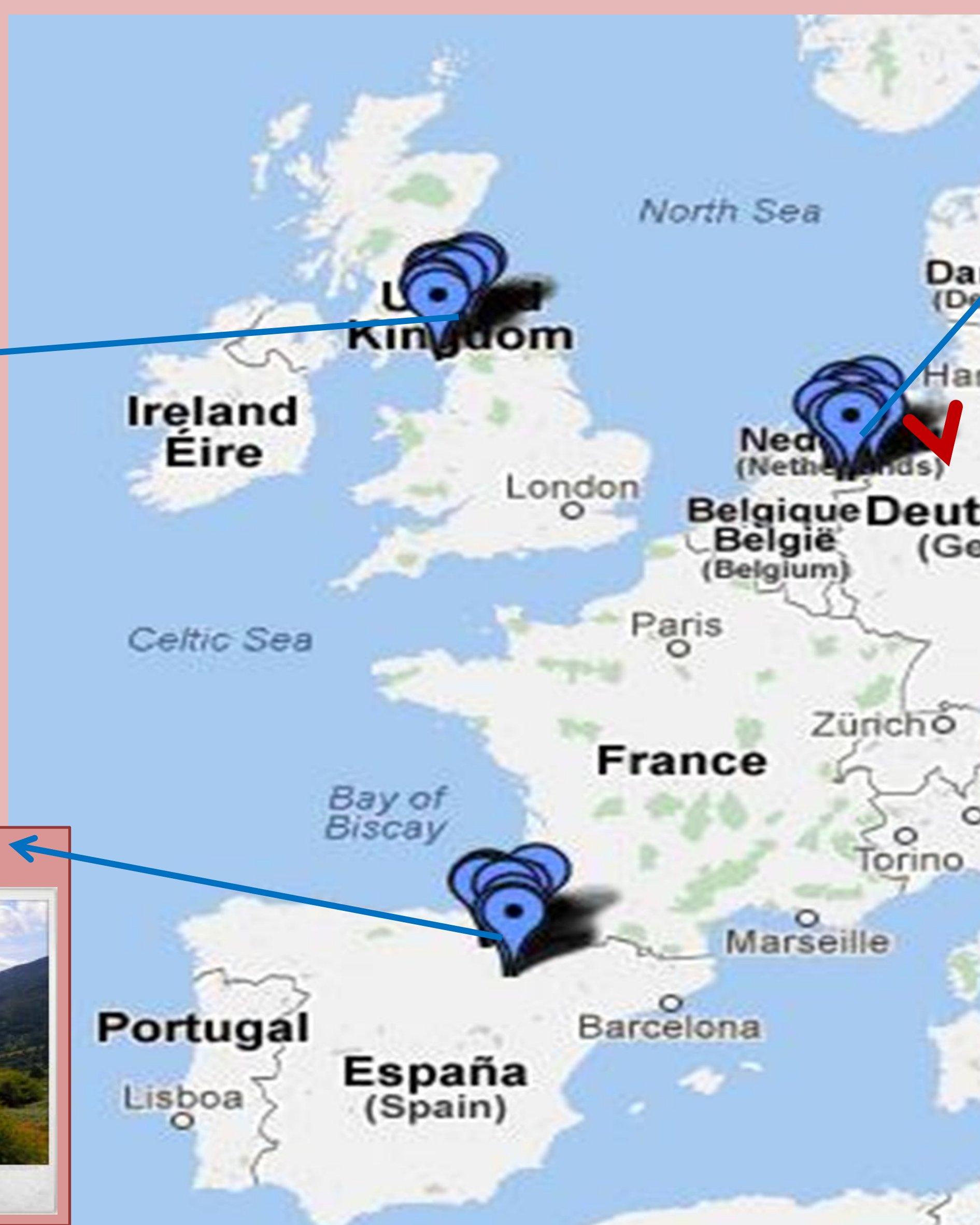
Current scope of the project:

- 12 Dutch cases
- 10 English cases
- 10 Spanish cases

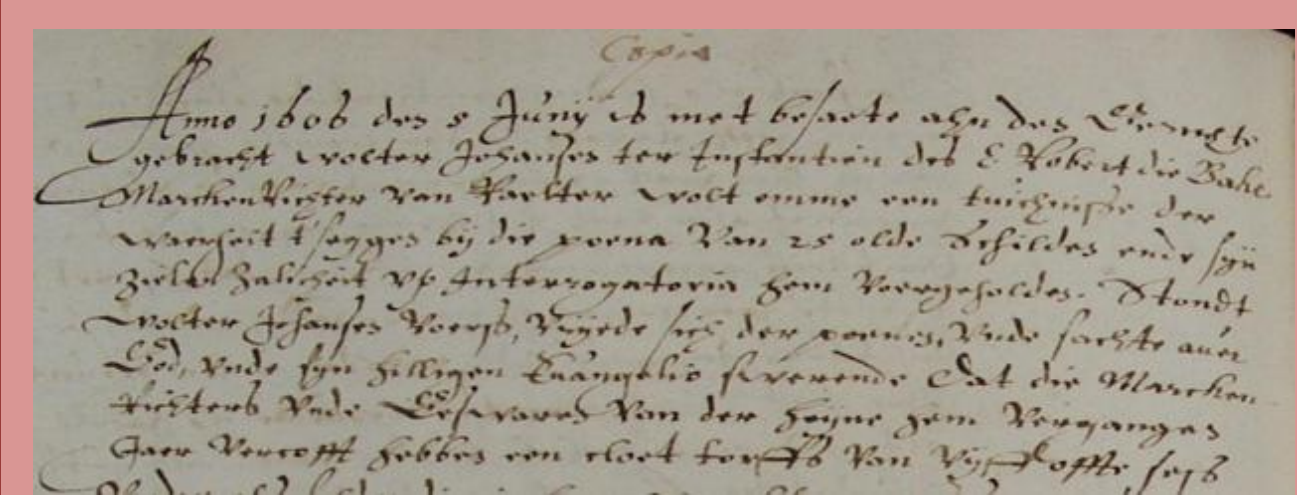
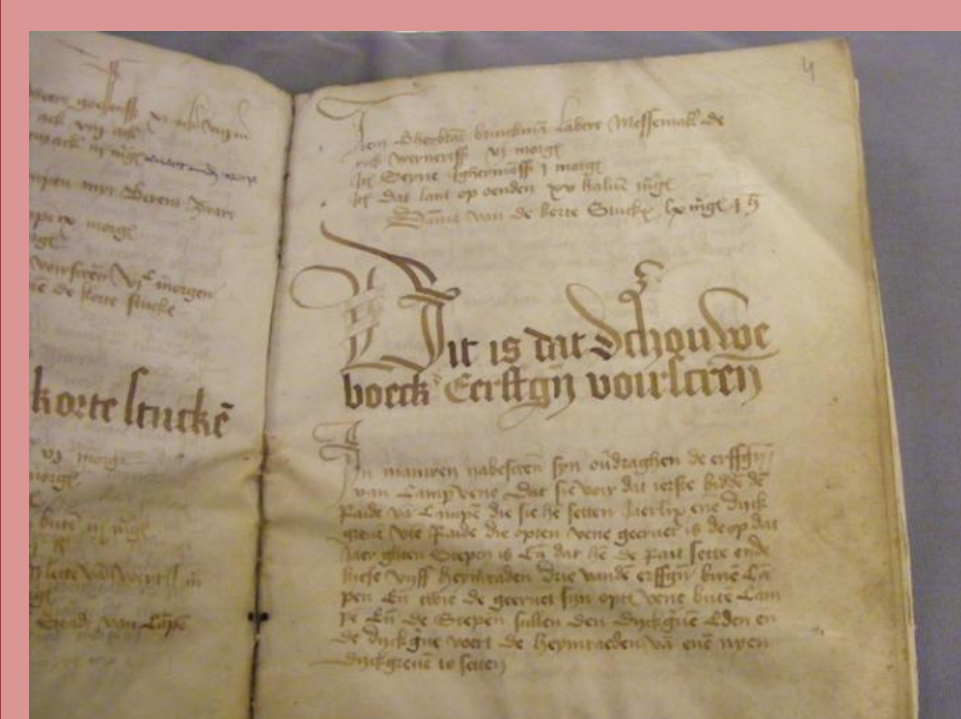
Eskdale commons (Cumbria, England) Middle Ages - c. 1859



Comunidad de Bardenas Reales de Navarra (Navarra, Spain): 1705 – today



Marke Raalterwoold (Overijssel, Netherlands), (before) 1445 – 1859



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