Public behaviour has been regulated in many European cities since the late Middle Ages. Historians have traditionally interpreted this as a top-down process, explaining it as a step towards civilisation. Legal historians, however, have shown how urban populations could participate in the making and enforcement of law.

This paper examines how communities communicated with the authorities to request and enforce laws against deviant public behaviour - such as the playing of dice games and other street entertainments. It argues that this ongoing dialogue was necessary to balance the everyday social life of urban communities. While the authorities lacked effective means of social control, cooperation with neighbourhoods was essential both to mitigate the effects of public disorder and to avoid applying excessively harsh punishments, which would have been unacceptable against popular recreational practices with wide participation.

The paper discusses archival sources and theoretical frameworks for possible future research, focusing on actors, locations, and means of communication. In particular, some case studies of street gambling repression in eighteenth-century Venice are presented.