In their earliest forms, human communities were structured by kinship; transcending these boundaries was inextricably linked with the emergence of institutions, networks and beliefs, binding communities together in ties of solidarity. Regardless of whether cooperation or conflict was the norm in human interactions, communities and solidarities did not come easily, but required an active participation among those involved, and their creative imagination. The structures and practices of communities and their dynamism over time has been a topic of extensive historical and sociological research. Amongst the immense diversity of all historical experiences, urban communities speak most to the imagination: they are places of exceptionally complex human interactions, bringing together large numbers of people in a condensed space over prolonged periods of time.

Yet, a certain ambivalence exists among scholars about the effects of urbanisation processes on communities, and their social, institutional and ideological underpinnings, both in past and present society. At the turn of the twentieth-first century, for instance, cities were primarily viewed as hotbeds of economic activity and as places where citizens could effectively shape their communities through participatory politics at the local level. More recent events, however, have brought issues such as political polarisation, economic inequalities and declining social cohesion back to the forefront in the interdisciplinary field of urban studies and the historical study of cities and towns. This ambivalence partially has its roots in an unease with modernity, but the questions of how present urban societies organise themselves, how their communities relate to one another, and the social and economic implications of these forms, are thus just as valid for the pre-modern period.

The meaning of community in an urban context may be regarded first and foremost as a historical question: waves of historiography have crystallised around the role of cities as engines of economic growth or political change, or as aggregations of people responding to challenges. Cities and the nature of their communities, perhaps more than any other area of history, have always been subject to the shifting priorities of generations of historians, reflecting the concerns and debates of each era. Historians continue to debate the nature of urban society and the role of cities in shaping economic, cultural and social change in wider society. Many of the most pressing questions of urban history relate to forms of social and economic organisation and, as emphasised by the geographically and chronologically diverse
contributions in this volume, emerge in similar forms in the study of very different urban contexts. How could networks and solidarities be formed in urban settings, divorced from traditional networks of kinship, and often among fluid populations shaped by fast-paced migration? How did urban communities - formal, informal or imagined - enable or prevent different types of social and economic interaction and innovation? And how was the inevitable flip side of community, exclusion, accommodated in different urban contexts? These questions allow us to explore not only individual late-medieval and early modern cities and towns, but many commonalities of the Western urban experience.

If anything has emerged as a consensus amongst the recent historiography of cities, it is, as in established sociological theory of cities, that urban experience cannot be conceived of in the singular. In particular, medieval and early modern urban historians have come to see their subjects as complex, multi-faceted, plural and individualised; there was no single urban community, but multiplex communities, or rather webs of networks and solidarities. By emphasising the lives of individuals and the social and economic connections they formed, both within and without institutions, it becomes clear that the city itself was never a singular and reified entity, but always a venue situated within a wider social and economic world. In many respects the contributions in this volume both continue and expand this trend, but along the way they use new technologies and new comparisons and examine new case studies from all corners of Europe.

**Historiography of communities**

The essays in this volume address the formation and workings of communities in medieval and early modern urban Europe from social and economic perspectives. Indirectly, a better understanding of pre-modern communities has consequences for how we understand modern communities, as both are traditionally defined in opposition to each other by scholars. A brief mention of the different uses of the word 'community' is therefore required before exploring the recent historiographical and methodological developments in the study of pre-modern communities which inform the arguments made in the chapters that follow.

There is, perhaps, no other topic in medieval and early modern history of which our understanding is more distorted by classic and contemporary sociological interpretations than that of communities. Sociologists from Ferdinand Tönnies to Zygmunt Bauman have assumed that there are fundamental differences between pre-modern and modern times in their typologies of societies, with the underlying belief that the colloquial use of the term of community is 'to some extent associated with the hope and the wish of reviving once more the closer, warmer, more harmonious type of bonds between people vaguely attributed to past ages'. Tönnies defined this idea of community, or Gemeinschaft, as an organic type of association based on kinship, neighbourhood and friendship, in which individuals freely subject themselves to the good of the community. The transformation of towns (Städte) into large cities (Großstädte) was detrimental to communal relations, solidarities and norms, giving way to a new form of mechanical association: a society, or Gesellschaft, artificially bound together by formal relations between individuals who pursue their own interests. Although Tönnies introduced these concepts as normal types for analytical purposes, they are most often misunderstood as defining consecutive stages in the historical development of societies. The community of the pre-modern world is, then, no longer accessible to us. Further, Bauman considers that it may never have existed at all, apart from the experience of community as something entirely of the past and at the same time a possibility of the future.

Although many sociological approaches theorise that communities were the foundation of collective life and individual self-fulfilment in pre-modern times, they tell us very little about the ways in which men and women in medieval and early modern urban communities organised themselves collectively or saw themselves as members of certain social groups. Historians have therefore criticised uncritical attempts at applying modern ideal types to medieval and early modern historical realities, or at retrieving 'the lost community'. Instead, recent historical studies endeavour 'to return to early modern understandings and practices of community'. Notwithstanding this criticism, over the past decades, the study of historical communities has greatly benefited from concepts and methodologies borrowed from urban sociology and community studies amongst others fields of enquiry.

First of all, the social network analysis of communities proposed by Barry Wellman has been highly influential. He sought to answer 'the community question', that is, the issue of how urbanisation and industrialisation affected 'the organisation and content of primary ties'. In this line of thought, communities have been conceptualised as networks of interpersonal ties, which can be empirically analysed, and as such are not determined by normative or spatial boundaries. A second impetus driving the study of communities came from Benedict Anderson, who contends in his Imagined Communities that modern communities - and particularly nations - are imagined. From this point of view, communities are not made up of people bound together by space or social ties; rather, their members are connected through imaginary ties which are in various ways perceived and symbolically constructed. Finally, historians have more recently been inspired by Henri Lefebvre's work to revisit the relationship between community and space.

The equation of individual places with a specific and singular community had been especially strong in the tradition of English local history, exemplified in the work of the 'Leicester School', but this has long been criticised as the 'tyranny of the discrete'. Communities can no longer be understood as depending on place, or as merely occupying space in the physical sense: they are the product and producers of social and spatial practices, and sometimes conceived in spatial terms.

These three broad approaches, each with its own definitions and methodologies, provide complementary social, cultural and spatial analyses of communities. The concept of community - as both the object of study and analytical tool - cannot be reduced to a fixed content, thereby making it necessary for historians, and other scholars alike, to provide a working definition that is subject to scrutiny and to specify their methodological approaches. In recent studies on medieval and early
modern communities, historians have begun to expand their approach to incorporate the various dimensions of community, drawing on social ties, public or private space, discourse, identification and representation, and defining community broadly as a set of interrelated social processes and practices that expresses the collective identity of a group of people.\textsuperscript{15}

It is now a commonplace amongst historians to recognise that both pre-modern and modern communities were and are characterised by a certain degree of heterogeneity and that the fluidity of the pre-modern community boundaries necessitated the structuring and reinforcement of their cohesion by institutions, rituals and rhetoric – harmony and rivalry, inclusion and exclusion were in fact two sides of the same coin. While normative ideals played their part in the formation of communities, they were never a direct representation of normative imagined or ideal communities.\textsuperscript{16} Connectivity and movement, which necessitated a constant negotiation of boundaries, were inherent to the functioning of these communities, as men and women typically belonged to several, often overlapping, social groups, depending on political interests, occupation, ethnicity, neighbourhoods or confessions, also implying an emphasis on the identity and agency of these actors.\textsuperscript{17} These insights are also a starting point for an exploration of the social and economic dimensions of medieval and early modern urban communities and solidarities.

**Themes and perspectives**

The word ‘community’ is very common in titles of books and articles on the medieval and early modern periods. It remains a convenient umbrella for research in almost all sub-disciplines of historical study, despite being subject to criticism.\textsuperscript{18}

A brief sketch of the most important research themes serves as a background for the questions raised in this volume, but it is not possible or necessary to summarise all of the literature here.\textsuperscript{19} If the recent studies on (urban) communities have something in common, it is a shift in the past two or three decades from a socio-economic approach to a more socio-cultural perspective, whereby ‘elites’ and ‘classes’ have been gradually replaced by ‘communities’ and ‘networks’. As a consequence, the focus has moved from the political, social and economic rivalry in pre-modern societies to the binding aspects of cooperation, communication and identification.\textsuperscript{20}

This development is first of all noticeable in a strand of studies dealing with political communities, which emerged at different levels, as people formed governments of all kinds and configurations from the central Middle Ages onwards.\textsuperscript{21} Some urban communities achieved complete political autonomy, particularly on the Italian peninsula in the twelfth century, but in most parts of Europe cities and towns were part of a broader political community: that of the realm.\textsuperscript{22} The relationship between princes and cities attracted a lot of attention from historians working on the process of state formation in the later medieval and early modern period.\textsuperscript{23} More relevant here are studies on the urban polity, as both a united body and as a composite network of communities, which range from studies on power in cities and towns to those on the representation of the body politic and civic identity. Singular communities in the form of political institutions and ruling oligarchies are no longer the main focus of historians; they have turned to the ways in which different groups or sub-communities organised themselves to participate in politics and made efforts to justify their political claims. This has resulted in, for example, a better understanding of the political participation of guilds and less clearly demarcated middle groups – the so-called commons or Gemeinde – and in a wider sense, urban political culture and its underlying ideas.\textsuperscript{24} The language of the common good was employed as an ideological weapon by both urban authorities and citizens in their political dialogue.\textsuperscript{25}

Recent studies on urban political culture further illustrate that medieval and early modern urban communities were not cohesive entities, although they certainly cultivated this image in the face of external and internal threats.\textsuperscript{26} Continuous processes of migration resulting in a constant renewal of the urban populace and the necessity to integrate newcomers who were attracted by the political, social and economic opportunities offered by cities and towns.\textsuperscript{27} In practice, therefore, cities and towns were made up of several, often competing, interest groups and solidarities, which nonetheless thought of themselves as belonging to one political community. This competition, as well as efforts by authorities and townpeople to maintain social hierarchy and order, came to be expressed in religious and civic processions and festivities and other forms of representation.\textsuperscript{28} The role of ceremony and ritual in the formation of urban society has in particular been highlighted by historians and other scholars, showing that authorities and elites could not easily dominate the urban community – its members had to continuously negotiate their position with each other. The complex interrelatedness of religion with urban political, economic and social relations and the role of religion in the performance of the urban community are now fruitfully studied under the heading of civic religion.\textsuperscript{29} The religious developments of the sixteenth century had a profound impact on the organisation of early modern urban communities, especially in the early modern German and French cities and towns, where confession was an important force that divided as well as bound communities together.\textsuperscript{30} This process of confessionisation reinforced the significance of religion in the formation of urban communities, but it can hardly be called a new factor.

The third theme that may be distinguished is the provision of public and social services that came with the construction of solidarity, which was closely related to the political and religious aspects of community formation in medieval and early modern cities and towns. Being part of a particular group, whether a citizen or inhabitant of a city or town, a member of a guild or a resident of a neighbourhood, entailed both benefits and obligations. As a consequence, tensions could arise at different levels, for example between the urban community and solidarities within it, but also between communal and individual interests.\textsuperscript{31} Charity and poor relief were simultaneously an expression of community and a means to demarcate communities from one another, as has been demonstrated in numerous studies of the medieval and early modern periods.\textsuperscript{32} The provision of public services in a broad sense of the term (schools, public works, sanitation, regulation) was not subject to a linear movement towards centralisation and expansion of the control of urban authorities,
but the result of continuous negotiation between different interest groups that constituted the urban community. Changing attitudes towards the poor, ideas about the responsibilities of authorities and citizens and the availability of resources all had an impact on the configurations of public services, and access could be restricted for particular groups. A central notion seems to have been that citizens or residents, in the case of urban communities, or members of smaller communities within them, were required to contribute to the common good, from which they profited in exchange. Citizenship, for example, was an important institution that mediated these interests between authorities and urban residents in a legal sense, but which also determined and expressed the social relations between the urban community and those who belonged to it.

The three key themes come together in the recurrent question (or assumption) that emerges from sociological and historical studies, that is, if and in what ways medieval and early modern urban cities and towns, the members of which were tied together by practices of solidarity, were socially more cohesive than their modern counterparts. Complexity, and the varied networks that are seen as promoting economic and cultural vigour, tend to be perceived as characteristic of modern cities, while the 'historic community' is considered to have been cohesive and singular. In particular, the perception in contemporary society of a loss of community has prompted historical interest in the process of community formation and building. Recently, the concepts of 'civil society' and 'social capital' have, in their various definitions, been employed by historians to dissect the perception of social cohesion, or – conversely – the socio-economic inequalities, of medieval and early modern urban communities. They found that these concepts did not really stick, particularly because it appeared to be difficult to empirically test the hypothesis that social capital, embodied by norms of reciprocity, networks of interpersonal relations and social institutions, actually fostered solidarity, trust and exchange among townsfolk. It is striking, however, that the ingredients of social capital are exactly the same as the defining characteristics of communities, except for the emphasis that some authors put on the spatiality of communities (although others argue that community is about networks and not about place). The same questions are asked over and over, implying that it is no sinecure to formulate an answer that balances the ideal vision of medieval and early modern urban communities as places where justice and peace reigned, and bonds among their members were strengthened by cooperation and solidarity.

One important insight coming from the literature is that there is no single answer – the organisation and workings of historical urban communities were highly dependent on contextual factors, which have not yet been clearly identified by urban historians. With regard to the question of the continuity between medieval, early modern and modern times, this entails that inhabitants of cities and towns may have faced similar problems but found very different solutions to solve them. Finally, it reminds us that a pragmatic use of words like 'community' and 'solidarity' can be semantically problematic as they invoke unhelpful comparisons still very much tied to a binary opposition between pre-modernity and modernity.

This pitfall is not easily avoided, but conceptual and empirical rigour with a clear focus on case studies may be a first step to a better understanding of pre-modern communities.

**Methodological approaches and new digital tools**

The last few decades have seen history undergo many 'turns', not least the cultural and spatial turns, yet despite the growth of Digital Humanities and Digital History as fields in their own right, we seem to have avoided widespread adoption of the term 'digital turn'. Historians might be tired of turning, or perhaps the range of insights offered through digitally enriched research is so broad as to defy a single categorisation. Nonetheless, the rapid development of digital techniques and resources has, perhaps even more profoundly than the preceding turns, enabled a host of new perspectives upon pre-modern urban societies that would not have been otherwise feasible. The possibilities enabled by digital research range from the simple breadth and depth of information which has been made available and quickly searchable, through digitisation by international and national projects such as Archive.org, Early English Books Online and the efforts of individual scholars. The scale of information available through machine reading quite simply allows for perspectives that would not have been attainable to previous generations of scholars, yet it poses its own challenges. While a historian working through an archive manually tends to acquire a natural understanding of the scope and nature of its materials, making sense of a digital archive, which can be orders of magnitude larger, requires specific tools and approaches to make sense of the mass of data.

The longest standing digital research technique used by historians to make sense of their data is the relational database. Since the 1980s databases have become essential tools in almost any historical research project, especially when it comes to the kind of record linkage that enables historians to make the most of the plentiful property and financial records that survive from many medieval and early modern cities. Yet, while methodologies structured around the use of databases offer possibilities in terms of understanding and exploring records, they also impose some of their own challenges. The rigid structure of a database table does not sit well with the vernacular and imprecise nature of many pre-modern records. How can a description of someone, 'sometime' residing in a certain town be recorded as part of a logical chronology in a database? The impossibility of recording the multiple affiliations and occupations that were especially common in the pre-modern era in a single database field leads us to take advantage of relational databases, and then set up sub-tables, but these dramatically increase the complexity of a project. Nonetheless, database recording and exploration enable a step-change in the volume of records that historians can examine, and the speed at which they can do it, especially where, as in the case of prosopography, historical and genealogical interests align to justify large-scale record transcription or digital indexing. Techniques to extract standardised data from the large volume of scanned printed materials are also unlocking large amounts of data for database analysis. Record linkage is even becoming automated through the use of digital tools.
of linguistic processing and algorithmic identification of individuals in different sources in order to generate prosopographies. The relational database might no longer be 'state of the art', but it still offers a relatively accessible way of exploring and making sense of large volumes of complex information. Innovation in digital humanities is opening up approaches to semantic data tagging and Natural Language Processing of records, providing an alternative to the reductive process of categorising information derived from them into a rigid structure, but these methods are some way from being widespread or easily accessible.

Recent years have seen the growth and maturation of tools that really allow historians to make the most of the digital data that they have accumulated, especially in terms of Social Network Analysis. Network analysis is nothing new, and in many senses replicates many of the traditional methods of the prosopographer, but digital tools are becoming available for this transformation, from cumbersome applications requiring detailed curation of multiple plain text input files, to accessible and intuitive desktop applications such as Gephi and cloud-based dedicated humanities tools such as Palladio. More important than the tools themselves is the fact that the network approach is now widely understood by historians, and tailored tutorials and guides are now available, for example at the Programming Historian.

The possibilities raised by network theory now frame historical approaches to complex social phenomena, especially within cities. However, while formal network analysis is used by sociologists employs complex statistical measures of centrality and integration, the nature of historical sources means that we can seldom hope to record the totality of a network, rendering these measures more problematic. Consequently, historians have tended to use network analysis as an addition to traditional methods of prosopography, and as an exploration and visualisation tool. Mike Burkhardt’s remarkable study of the records of the Hanseatic Bergenfahrer shows the full potential of Social Network Analysis for examining a circumscribed community, while the ‘Six Degrees of Francis Bacon’ provides an innovative way of exploring biographical information while punning on a ‘parlour game’ from popular culture. Whether or not the technicalities of formal social network analysis are adopted, the concepts and principles of network theory underlie many recent approaches to urban social history. Whether looking at families and citizenship, or particular specialised urban trades, viewing social relationships through the lens of networks, and with the aid of databases, allows us to see the multifaceted nature of pre-modern urban relationships.

Geographical Information Systems (GIS) have also become much more prominent in the study of early modern cities. The complexity of pre-modern urban forms, as well as the sheer volume of data, such as records of land conveyances, have tended to prevent historians from examining the city in a spatial manner. The spatial dimension of communities can now be analysed in more detail by using historical GIS applications which allow historians to map and link data to geographic spaces. New insights emerge when sources which are inherently spatial – very many early modern urban sources describe streets, parishes and properties – are actually projected onto a map. This is especially true when combining diverse sources, or where spaces might be described in different ways, or when archaeological, topological and topographic, or even auditory materials and questions are brought into the equation: institutional boundaries might divide, but streets and spaces brought people together. The use of GIS and related technologies makes these kinds of connections and relationships much clearer to researchers. Colin Arnaud’s paper in this volume embraces these digital spatial approaches, and considers locations of residence and business premises throughout the cities of Strasbourg and Bologna in terms of proximity not only to each other, but to other urban features. Alexi Baker, who has written elsewhere of her approaches to ‘vernacular GIS’, uses the technology to examine social networks through a spatial lens. These approaches first appeared, in analogue form, through the work of, for example, Derek Keene, but their widespread application is the product not only of the ‘spatial turn’, but also of digital technologies.

Urban historians have used GIS techniques to understand city spaces in both qualitative and quantitative ways. Projects such as Locating London’s Past have applied GIS technologies in a traditional manner to map social phenomena, such as crimes and occurrences of plague, statistically. Other projects, such as City Witness, have mapped qualitative experiences and testimonies onto the spaces and vistas of medieval Swansea, while the DECIMA project has explored a wide range of social, economic and emotional geographies of Renaissance Florence. The possibilities of using GIS to combine historical evidence with other classes of information, especially archaeological finds, offer exciting opportunities for studying the dense urban environment, such as in York, where Gareth Dean has been able to correlate the documentary and material evidence for the distribution of artisanal trades in the late-medieval period. At the same time, these projects show that collaboration is a key element in successfully developing historical GIS applications, especially also with cultural heritage institutions, in order to make use of all the technical possibilities and ease the time-consuming process of preparing historical data for analysis.

**Approaches and topics**

The growth of cities and towns in medieval and early modern Europe was a transformative process, although it was not linear and was varied in its outcomes. The intensive interactions between people in urban settlements gave rise to new and changing forms of political, economic and social organisation, as well as to novel institutions and structures. These urban communities had important political and cultural aspects, but the central question of this volume is how the configurations of these communities shaped social and economic processes, and how social and economic factors moulded the institutions, networks, spaces and ideas that constituted urban communities. It was around these questions that two conference sessions were held in Vienna and Lisbon in 2014, where most of the contributions to this volume were presented by their authors. In addition to analysing social and economic processes that characterised medieval and early modern cities and towns from the perspective of communities, the authors explore the new possibilities of digital methods to examine the formation, structures and effects of urban communities.
To be sure, the notion of community is not entirely absent from recent social and economic histories, not least studies dealing with credit, migration, commercial communities, markets, charity and poor relief, public health and environment. Older studies on socio-economic structures, in which class or status groups are used as prime categories of analysis, also make clear that the urban social fabric was more than the sum of its parts. Communities cannot be reduced to networks, institutions, spaces or ideas, but might best be understood as specific configurations of these variables. As the initial by-product of human interactions, communities had become a constituent part of the urban social ecology during the central Middle Ages.

In the medieval and early modern urban contexts, the authors of this volume show how communities can be understood as groups of people delineated or bound together by certain common characteristics, whether objective or perceived, such as social ties, political ideas, religion, education, ethnicity, profession or place. Such communities existed insofar as individuals had a shared sense of belonging to particular groups, which informed their interactions with others and guided their patterns of behaviour, and which brought (self-)recognition and identification, benefits and obligations. Communities as social organisations constituted from repeated human interactions were formed at different levels in cities and towns; their scope and focal points varied accordingly, and their boundaries were fluid and often overlapping. As we have already reflected, although cities and towns are often described as urban communities in the singular (for instance, the body politic), they actually consisted of several, often overlapping sub-communities or solidarities, which were not necessarily restricted to the physical boundaries of the city or town.

The effects of these communities on economic and social exchanges are not easily measured or captured in a definition. On the one hand, the idea of the urban community as a single entity, a corpus Christi, body politic or commonwealth, could serve to unite diverse forces in the service of the common good, thereby strengthening the ties of social cohesion and mutual trust within cities and towns that were nonetheless growing more socially heterogeneous throughout our period. Concord and unity, however, were inherently unstable, due to the competing interests and dissenting voices within the urban community at large, as well as the economic inequalities and social hierarchies. At a lower level, communities formed the basis for exchange, solidarity and sociability, but, for example, parish and neighbourhood communities were the stage for conflicts and litigation too. Strong solidarity can have negative effects for those excluded from membership, and this was no different in the medieval and early modern periods. But it might in fact be helpful to understand solidarity and strife as two sides of the same coin: communities formed contexts for recognition and self-definition, cooperation and competition.

This tension can be traced in most of the chapters in this volume. In her contribution on citizenship in early fifteenth-century Barcelona, Carolina Obradors-Suazo demonstrates how (family) networks made and unmade social reputations - the basis for citizenship. By belonging to the community of citizens, members of the Sarrovi family could profit economically from the privileges conferred on them, but they continually had to maintain the delicate balance between personal and collective interests. As a case study, this chapter also shows the variety in ways to access, and privileges derived from, citizenship as a legal status that marked boundaries between the inhabitants of medieval cities and towns.

Tensions between groups with different interests within the city walls were also present in fifteenth-century Norwich, where political, economic and social divisions came to the fore in a highly symbolic way during Gladman's procession. Derek Crosby analyses the multifaceted motivations of the protesters who stood up for their stake in the well-being of the urban community. The political unrest reconfigured Norwich's political economy in the long run, underscoring the complex interplay between the political relations, socio-economic structures and ideology of which urban communities were composed.

The configuration of urban communities was predicated on space; or, more precisely, on the syntax of urban space that structured social relations. In his comparative study on late-medieval Bologna and Strasbourg, Colin Arnaud reconstructs the topography of these cities' neighbourhoods. Strikingly, services were more or less equally distributed among Strasbourg's neighbourhoods, whereas Bologna had a clear centre and more peripheral neighbourhoods, making the intermediary ones the most likely to develop active communities, characterised by people living and working together and having access to all kinds of services. This chapter raises the question of how neighbourhood topographies, with different degrees of social cohesion, were formed in the Middle Ages across Europe, and how spatial configurations produced distinct processes of community formation and structured the relations among the heterogeneous urban population. These are questions that can be fully addressed by a comparative approach that applies advanced digital mapping.

In the same vein, John Jordan studies the role of communal ties in resolving conflicts in the early modern town of Freiberg. Conflicts were inherent to urban society, and courts sought to resolve tensions through (im)material exchange; in the case of Freiberg, aggressors were obliged to name a guarantor. By analysing the social and economic backgrounds of those involved in these legal transactions, as well as the ties between them (in particular kinship, profession, neighbourhood and economic status), Jordan dissects the networks of the inhabitants of Freiberg.

None of these variables alone fully explains what kinds of support were sought by pledgors or offered by guarantors, but it is more important to recognise that people did not turn to the established communities to which they belonged as often as one would expect; they also relied on informal networks, which are less visible in the sources. The bottom line, however, is that communities and their members were inclined to restore urban peace, an ideal that was often broken in daily interactions.

Another well-known type of exchange that characterised urban communities and solidarities was the support of the poor, whatever the motivation of the benefactors. Charitable practices and mutual aid strengthened social ties within cities and towns and expressed the religious and civic ideal of a corporate body, but
at the same time these activities targeted specific groups, thereby becoming a means to include and exclude people from the community. Suzana Miljan and Bruno Škreblin describe how the poor were regarded as unavoidable members of the urban community in late-medieval Zagreb, a relatively unknown case study from a western European perspective. The paucity of the extant sources does not permit a detailed analysis of the well-being of the pauperes or the effects of the various forms of charity, but they clearly show that integration and marginalisation were closely entwined in a way that can only be explained by a careful contextual analysis.

In her chapter on the mutual aid of the occupational guilds in Mechelen, Brussels and Antwerp, Hadewijch Masure makes a similar point. The support offered by guilds to their members evolved over time, and can only be understood by taking the wider system of urban poor relief into account. From the late thirteenth century, most of the guilds set up poor boxes, which often became obligatory and more exclusionary around 1500. The concurrence of several mutually reinforcing factors – of which the social and economic do not seem to have been decisive – account for this process of formalisation, not least the need among guild masters to demarcate their status and professional communities within the urban community writ large.

Moving on from processes of urban community building, the following three chapters thematically and methodologically share the use of advanced databases with 'shallow' data to uncover social relations and the characteristics of groups which are difficult to capture at the level of the individual. Bram Vanmeleuwenhuyze explores the possibilities of his ‘Who was who in late-medieval Brussels?’ database, which contains thousands of topographical and biographical records about ordinary inhabitants of Brussels. It takes a huge effort to realise such an ambitious plan, but the time investment now pays off in the form of a first step towards an ‘urban sociography’, which will result in a more profound understanding of the different layers of Brussels’ population, the networks of these individuals, their places of interest, and the communities to which they belonged.

The value of this quantitative approach and the possibilities opened up by these advanced databases are illustrated in more detail by Dana Durkee and Andy Burn, whose contributions offer new insights into the urban community; the behavioural and moral codes to which guild members adhered also strengthened their trustworthiness within the wider urban community. Although institutionalised solidarities, the lively companies were also deeply embedded in early modern London’s wider social fabric and culture.

Sarah-Maria Schober takes on similar questions of community formation, but she focuses in her chapter on individual practices of bonding, and the meaning of belonging to a professional community. Based on the correspondence of two inhabitants of early modern Basel, Felix Platter and Dorothea Gemusein, the first of whom belonged to an ‘imagined’ community of academic physicians, Schober maps the places and social practices, such as gift-giving and salacious jokes, that structured the playful encounters between these two members of Basel’s upper social stratum. By giving marzipan, for example, Platter alluded to his belonging to a relatively fixed professional identity, illustrating that interactions between individuals beyond the seemingly fixed boundaries of communities were enabled by this sense of belonging, as well as how practices of bonding were transferred from one social realm to another.

Finally, the intersection of professional communities was important in an economic way, as Alexi Baker demonstrates in her chapter on how the sprawling
community of 'scientific' instrument makers of early modern London, a growing city with a rapidly expanding consumer base, stood at the heart of a flourishing commercial sector. The makers of instruments belonged to different livery companies and formed various networks, and are difficult to delineate, yet Baker shows the economic and technological importance of this 'commercial community' through statistical analysis and digital mapping, illustrated further by the fine example of the successful George Willdey. The dynamics of community formation and the places where these processes occurred could have a great impact on socio-economic developments, as this chapter further illustrates. New digital research techniques also clearly enhance our understanding of the very diverse communities that made up medieval and early modern cities and towns.

Pre-modernity and urban complexity

Together, the contributions collected in this volume, in all their thematic and methodological diversity, confirm that late-medieval and early modern urban European societies were not lacking in complexity or plurality. As is to be expected, there is little evidence of a monolithic 'historic community' in any of the case studies. On the one hand, the authors demonstrate how late-medieval and early modern cities and towns were characterised by political, cultural and religious practices that underlined and performed the ideal community as a body, and the well-being of the community (utilitas publica or bonum commune) was often expressed in social and economic terms. On the other hand, the ties that bound the urbanites together were as much those of cooperation as of competition. Both urban communities and urban solidarities had to be continually reinforced, as tensions permanently arose among solidarities within the urban community, as well as between individuals and the solidarities to which they belonged, because of existing social hierarchies and economic inequalities.

Across the period in question, there was visible growth in the complexity of social institutions and economic structures, but this was certainly not a straightforward development; it was more of an incremental change than a defining shift. Measuring the complexity of medieval and early modern cities and towns against contemporary urban societies does not prove very helpful in any way, and — without denying the qualitative differences in complexities between both periods — in many ways the social and economic institutions and practices that emerged during the earlier period still characterise today's urban communities and the interactions of their inhabitants. Besides challenging the traditional periodisation of pre-modern urban history, this volume also questions the divide between pre-modern and modern communities. The authors cover a timespan from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century, crossing distinctions between the late medieval and early modern.

An important question for further research is how time as a factor increased the complexity of urban institutions and structures. Processes of community formation should perhaps be understood rather as commencing at different moments and developing at different paces, but at the same time becoming entangled, than as a diachronic development from pre-modernity to modernity. Cross-European or even wider comparisons would be important to unravel these processes. A single volume cannot possibly cover the whole continent or provide systematic comparisons, but all of these chapters attest to both the similarities and differences in urban experiences across Europe. "Community" appears to be a convenient term that by the multiplicity of its meanings answers to the layering and dynamism of late-medieval and early modern urban society. Nonetheless, the contributions clearly attest to the fact that the basis for broader comparisons lies in the development of empirical case studies, so that historians can carefully define communities to analyse how their formation reflected and deflected broader social and economic processes. From an analytical point of view, the term 'urban communities', both in the singular and the plural, clearly offers a useful category to unravel the impact of the interrelated process of political, economic, demographic and cultural change on the ways in which urbanites interacted with each other to form durable social organisations at the local level. One of the promising opportunities in this respect is offered by historical GIS in its capacity to integrate and analyse cartographic, historical and archaeological data, allowing us to gain a more fluid understanding of the (re-) production and meanings of communities in the process of urban development, and of individuals whose lives were entangled with multiple communities.

In sum, this volume makes clear that a historical-contextual approach to urban communities is necessary to understand how they were formed and maintained. New digital research tools make it increasingly possible to re-examine sources that provide answers to the question of community. This, together, marks a first step to a theoretically more developed understanding of the dynamic process of urban community formation from the Middle Ages to the twenty-first century.

Notes

1 See, for example: Glaeser (2011); Barber (2013); and for a less optimistic view on recent urbanisation processes: Davis (2006). See, for a recent historical overview: Clark (2013).
2 Blackshaw (2009); Delanty (2003) have written concise introductions on the topic of community, while Bell and Newby (1974); Lin and Mele (2013) provide collections of classic and more recent readings.
4 Tönnies (1887), 3-5, 27, 282-90.
5 Bauman (2001), 3.
6 Withington and Shepard (2000), 12. However, less effort has been made to go beyond the somewhat obligatory critique of modern sociological concepts, for example by utilising the growing historical knowledge about pre-modern communities to propose alternatives.
7 Wellman (1979).
13 Burke (2004), 5.


34 Goddard (2013); Ryckbosch and Decraene (2014).

32 See, for example: Costa (1999); Boone and Prak (1996); Gerber, Studer and Schwinges (2002); Withington (2010); Van der Heijden, Van Nederveen Meerkerk, Vermeesch and Van der Burg (2009); Van der Heijden (2012); Rawcliffe (2013); Fay (2015). See, also the theme issue of Post-Classical Archaeologies, 2 (2012); http://www.postclassical.it/PCA_vol.2.html [accessed, 22 May 2016].


30 Van der Heijden, Van Nederveen Meerkerk, Vermeesch and Van der Burg (2009); Van der Heijden (2012); Rawcliffe (2013); Fay (2015); Prak and Van Zanden (2006).

29 See, for a fine synthesis: Lynch (2003). For case studies, see amongst others: Cavallo (1998); Parker and Bentley (2007); Rosenthal (2005); Torre (2011); Vannieuwenhuyze and Vernackt (2014).

28 Parker and Bentley (2007); Rosenthal (2005).

27 Brady (1998); Ocker (2007); Close (2009); and see, for a synthesis: Tracy (2006).

26 We do not strive to be exhaustive in listing relevant works, and the studies referred to should be taken as a starting point for further reading. We are also aware of the bias towards English-language literature.

25 See, for the presence of foreigners in medieval and early modern towns: Amelang (2007); Mueller (2010); Cerutti (2012); Lucasen and Willems (2012); Queider, Chil and Pluchet (2013).

24 See, for example: Amelang (2000a); Raite (2006); Dale, Williams Lewis and Osheim (2007); Benes (2012); Kodres and Mand (2014); Halteback, Widder and Von Hestenig (2015); Demets and Dumolyn (2016). See, for the presence of foreigners in medieval and early modern towns: Amelang (2007); Mueller (2010); Cerutti (2012); Lucasen and Willems (2012); Queider, Chil and Pluchet (2013).


22 See, for the presence of foreigners in medieval and early modern towns: Amelang (2007); Mueller (2010); Cerutti (2012); Lucasen and Willems (2012); Queider, Chil and Pluchet (2013).

21 See studies on civic identity and urban privileges: Boone and Stahel (2000); Attreed (2003); Withington (2010); Lecuppre-Desjardin and Van Bruaene (2010); Otechakovskiy-Lauren (2014).

20 Chevalier (1982); Tilly and Blockmans (1994); Rivaud (2007); Blockmans, Holenstein and Mathieu (2009).


18 Reynolds (1997); Watts (2009), 132-33. See, for the presence of foreigners in medieval and early modern towns: Amelang (2007); Mueller (2010); Cerutti (2012); Lucasen and Willems (2012); Queider, Chil and Pluchet (2013).


16 We do not strive to be exhaustive in listing relevant works, and the studies referred to should be taken as a starting point for further reading. We are also aware of the bias towards English-language literature.


14 Nevol (2010), 351-52.
Carolina Obradors-Suazo

"Community, like love, is where we find it.1 This essay explores processes of community building in pre-modern times by unravelling the power of social networks in urban communities. Indebted to Barry Wellman’s sociological approach, the chapter highlights the cohesive and integrative nature of late-medieval urban citizenries. It is by analysing closely the uses of the privileges of citizenship and by understanding citizenship as a social practice that these citizenries emerge as communities of well-reputed citizens — individuals who related to each other in order to serve their own interests and necessities, while perpetuating in so doing patterns of behaviour with which to build identification with a community they all ought to serve and love.

Taking citizenship as a broad measure of urban belonging, I intend to reflect on the social imagination of medieval citizenries,2 thereby following in the footsteps of scholars such as Withington and Shepard, who claim for an approach to the ‘community question’ in proper historical and contextualised terms.3 Although a legally defined institution and an individual privilege, citizenship could also depend on the public acquiescence of a city’s inhabitants. As such, it becomes an analytical tool for the historian to penetrate the social experiences of medieval civic life.

To explore the connections among citizenship, urban community building and networks in the later Middle Ages in detail, the essay focuses on how relatives and families participated in the making of the citizen in fifteenth-century Barcelona. To this end, I use microanalysis to retrace a variety of citizenship acquisition experiences with which to evaluate the role of relatives in citizens’ civic integration.

Citizenship in late-medieval Barcelona

The city of Barcelona conserves unique and outstanding sources with which we can elaborate on the cultural meaning of medieval citizenship, completing historiographical traditions that had been more focused on its juridical value and...