

# 2025 Annual Conference of the Dutch-Flemish Law & Society Association

## Dates and Venue

The 2025 Annual Conference of the Dutch-Flemish Law & Society Association (VSR) will be hosted by the **Van Vollenhoven Institute for Law, Governance and Society**. It will take place on **Thursday 30 and Friday 31 January 2025**, in **Leiden, The Netherlands**.

## Conference Theme

The theme of the 2025 VSR Annual Conference is **The Socio-Legal Imagination**.

The idea of a socio-legal imagination builds on both the legal imagination and the sociological imagination. [\*The Legal Imagination\*](#) (White, 1973) stands at the origins of law and literature scholarship. It proposes to read legal texts as literary texts in order to uncover the narratives therein. Additionally, it argues that law is a language of power that gives expression to culture, its values, its sense of what counts as reason and the manner in which it regards the social world. When following this line of reasoning, law then is an expression of thought, of imagination and, subsequently, open for re-imagining. [\*The Sociological Imagination\*](#) (Mills, 1959) is considered one of the [most important sociological works of the 20<sup>th</sup> century](#). In a nutshell, it calls for a perspective that can see the links between seemingly private problems and the social patterns and structural arrangements in which individuals find themselves. To this end, it calls for an external perspective, to imagine viewpoints that are different from one's own. The Socio-Legal Imagination, with the aim to combine these two seminal works, refers to understanding law as an articulation of the society in which it acts and understanding law as operating between individual biographies and society at large. Additionally, it includes imagination as the intellectual activity of transcending concrete experiences and imagining alternative realities.

Against this backdrop, the 2025 VSR Annual Conference theme The Socio-Legal Imagination invites participants to the conference to engage with one or more of the following considerations:

- What are the narratives enclosed in law? In other words, how is law reflective of conscious and unconscious beliefs held by society? And what is the power of the language of law?
- How does law impact social patterns, individual biographies, and the relation between the two? What happens in the transition from law-on-the-books to law-in-action? What role does law play in the current myriad of perspectives on important social issues?
- How can conventional understandings of present problems be reimagined? How can (a legal, sociological, socio-legal or other mode of) imagination help shape responses to the key challenges of our times?

## Call for Abstracts and Proposals

The conference invites the submission of individual papers and full panels. Moreover, this year several panels have been pre-formed that invite submissions on their topics. The panels are listed below with their titles and organizers. The panel descriptions can be found in the annex (below). Upon submitting an abstract of an individual paper via the designated link (see below) you will be offered the option of indicating a panel to which you wish to submit. The main language of the conference will be English and all communications are set up in English, but please note that it is absolutely also possible to submit papers and panels in Dutch.

For submitting an individual paper, we ask you to submit a title and an abstract (circa 200 words). It is not compulsory to submit to a specific panel, individual papers can also be submitted on their own accord. In all cases, the conference organizers decide on the final allocation of papers in specific panels. For full panel submissions, we ask you to submit the title of the panel session, the designated chair of the panel and at least three abstracts of participants.

The submission link for individual panels is here:

<https://www.formdesk.com/universiteitleiden/VSR2025>

For the submission of panels please mail to [2025VSR@law.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:2025VSR@law.leidenuniv.nl)

**The deadline for both individual paper and panel submissions is 24 November 2024.**

You will be informed about your submission mid-December.

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Pre-formed panels calling for individual paper proposals:

**# Law & Governance in the Anthropocene**

[Phillip Paiement](#) & [Lieselotte Viaene](#)

**# Digital Governance & Vulnerability**

[Gianclaudio Malgieri](#) & [Linnet Taylor](#)

**# The Legal Profession**

[Adriaan Bedner](#) & [Ole Hammerslev](#)

**# Community Justice in the Global North and Global South**

[Janine Ubink](#) & [Rogier Hartendorp](#)

**# A more 'public' Law & Society?**

[Maartje van der Woude](#) & [Alison Fischer](#)

## **# Crossroads of Life and Law: Navigating Birth, Marriage, and Death in Migration Contexts**

[Nadia Sonneveld](#) & [Ellen Desmet](#)

## **# Decision making by street-level bureaucrats**

[Paulien de Winter](#) & (tbc)

## **# Law, Food Systems, and Agrarian Struggles**

[Matt Canfield](#) & [Marta Morvillo](#)

## **# New Methodological Approaches to Socio-Legal Research**

[Sanne Taekema](#) & [Danielle Chevalier](#)

## Registration for the Conference

Registration for the conference is through a portal run by Leiden Law Academy. The link for registration will open by the end of October 2024 and remain open till the start of the conference.

The conference fee is € 125,- for both days, including coffee, tea and lunches. There is an optional dinner on the first day of the conference, at € 70,-. There are limited seats available for the dinner and tickets will be issued at a first come first serve basis.

Please note that PhDs also attending the VSR x ELS pre-conference PhD school are offered a reduced conference rate. Mail to [2025VSR@law.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:2025VSR@law.leidenuniv.nl) for the required code.

## Contact

In case of questions or remarks on anything related to the conference, please email [2025VSR@law.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:2025VSR@law.leidenuniv.nl)

## Annex: Full description of pre-formed panels

### # Law & Governance in the Anthropocene

[Phillip Paiement](#) & [Lieselotte Viaene](#)

We invite submissions of papers which speak to the challenges posed by the Anthropocene to the fields of (socio-)legal and governance scholarship. Comprised of the overlapping crises of climate change, pollution, biodiversity and large-scale transformations in the ownership and uses of land and natural resources, the Anthropocene provocatively confronts us with law's problematic position in creating and maintaining these crises, in addition to its potential role in contributing to more just and sustainable worlds. We encourage submissions which engage with Anthropocene's disruption of settled conceptual dichotomies at the foundation of legal modernism, including the distinctions between: social and natural worlds, local and global sites of legal and governance action, Euro-western and other (Indigenous, Black, peasant,...) legal knowledge systems, and public and private categories of actors, institutions and interests. Projects related to environmental and climate justice, environmental human rights, law and the more-than-human, etc., are all very welcomed, including methodological projects that attempt to innovate socio-legal methods to address the new onto-epistemological frontiers of the more-than-human.

### # Digital Governance & Vulnerability

[Gianclaudio Malgieri](#) & [Linnet Taylor](#)

Digital governance frequently focuses on understanding and preventing harm, and on issues of vulnerability and marginalization amongst those affected by technologies. Vulnerability is often based on dependence and power imbalances (generated by Big Tech dominant platforms, unfairly intensive data collection, but also by social privileges and marginalization). For legal scholars in this area there is much to learn from the history of participatory action research, which centers on affected people's own knowledge and seeks to understand how the targets of research can be informed by people's lived experience of technologies. Moving beyond the classic trope of 'citizen participation', this panel invites contributions that explore how participatory methods can produce more accurate problem definitions and more relevant and impactful legal research.

### # The Legal Profession

[Adriaan Bedner](#) & [Ole Hammerslev](#)

The legal profession is a classic theme in law and society scholarship. Over the years studies have examined the roles legal professionals play in shaping legal systems and how these professionals operate, with special attention for their role in maintaining the rule of law and providing access to justice. While the initial focus of this scholarship was lawyers and judges in the Global North, studies have expanded to look at all regions in the world and to legal scholars, notaries, legal drafters and others. The current changes in politics, law and technology confront these legal professionals with enormous challenges. What does legal tech mean for the operation of law firms, courts, universities

and other places? And how do legal professionals respond to the rise of illiberalism, the corresponding attacks on the rule of law, and social inequality? We invite papers for this panel to explore such issues.

### **# Community Justice in the Global North and Global South**

[Janine Ubink](#) & [Rogier Hartendorp](#)

In the Global South, non-state justice systems, like customary courts, have a long tradition. These systems give marginalized groups access to justice. Recently, various forms of community justice have been developed in countries in the Global North, such as *wijkrechtspraak* in The Netherlands. Community justice is considered a way to improve access to justice for vulnerable groups and to respond better to their needs. Both customary justice and other forms of community justice raise questions about legitimacy, the relation to traditional court systems and the protection of rights. In this panel we will discuss these questions for customary justice and community justice and try to learn from research into community justice systems in different geographical contexts.

### **# A more 'public' Law & Society?**

[Maartje van der Woude](#) & [Alison Fischer](#)

Law & Society scholars have long debated how to engage with broader societal discourses. With populism and nationalism on the rise, and democratic institutions across the world eroding, it can often seem like the only phenomenon growing faster than societal inequality and insecurity is the polarization of public discourse. How then do we position ourselves as scholars, and balance academic responsibilities with moral imperatives? When addressing topics like economic inequality, mass incarceration, or immigrations should we intervene in policy-making, or maintain academic distance? What do those interventions look like? This panel invites scholars to critically engage with these and related notions of public scholarship. Given Law & Society's interdisciplinary nature and its connection to real-world issues, this discussion is not only timely but essential for understanding and addressing the legal and social challenges of today's world.

### **# Crossroads of Life and Law: Navigating Birth, Marriage, and Death in Migration Contexts**

[Nadia Sonneveld](#) & [Ellen Desmet](#)

Life events such as marriage, birth, and death have profound effects universally, and this impact is even more pronounced in migration contexts. In this panel, we invite contributions exploring how family law, migration law, private international law, human rights law and non-state normative orders interact to address these events, including but not limited to formal birth registration and family reunification. We welcome submissions addressing various migratory contexts, movements (Global North–Global North, Global South–Global South, Global North–Global South, Global South–Global North) and perspectives (migrants, state institutions, civil society actors etc.).

### **# Decision making by street-level bureaucrats**

[Paulien de Winter](#) & (tbc)

Street-level bureaucrats are essential to the implementation of government policy. These front-line professionals operate across various organizations, for example the police, immigration services (IND), municipalities, and the UWV. In similar situations, they make decisions that directly impact citizens' lives. This panel explores how street-level bureaucrats arrive at their decisions, the factors influencing these choices, and the role that rules play in their decision-making processes. We invite abstracts that investigate these themes, offering empirical or theoretical insights into the discretion of street-level bureaucrats in practice.

### **# Law, Food Systems, and Agrarian Struggles**

[Matt Canfield](#) & [Marta Morvillo](#)

In 2023, farmers across Europe mobilized against national and European policies they believed were undermining their livelihoods. Yet, agrarian struggles are not confined to Europe. Farmer protests in India and Mexico have also recently highlighted the critical role of food producers, whose voices are often overshadowed by economic and environmental experts advocating for efficiency and sustainability. This panel delves into the legal conflicts spanning diverse regulatory fields—from biotechnology to agrochemicals—and examines the politics of navigating conflicting values and interests in the pursuit of a sustainable food system transformation.

### **# New Methodological Approaches to Socio-Legal Research**

[Sanne Taekema](#) & [Danielle Chevalier](#)

The field of Law & Society has a long tradition of engaging with empirical research methods to study law in action. Consecutive to the traditional repertoire of methods, the field is seeing a rise of new methodological approaches being used, including visual methods, using art and drama, serious gaming, Q-methodology and more. This panel invites papers on new methodologies and new methodological approaches that research socio-legal issues through a novel lens. It seeks to instigate discussion on both the practice and the theory of such novel approaches, and the specific opportunities and challenges they offer when applied to studying law in action.