

The aim of my paper is to critically examine the practices of the first Polish police institutions in the second half of the 18th century. I argue that the ongoing "fight against vagabonds" was highly ineffective (both at the logistical and economical level) and should be understood in biopolitical terms.

My main argument is based on both qualitative and statistical analysis of 90 interrogations from Warsaw (1787-1794). The usage of biographical methods (D. Bertaux) enables to reconstruct the life-cycles and highly heterogeneous identities of the people usually referred to as a "social margin". On the other hand, the statistical interpretation of the main correlations in my database (between age, gender, social origin, number of migrations and conflicts with law) allows me to draw a conclusion that the people caught by the early modern penal institutions in Poland did not differ significantly from a normal population. Furthermore, I will also briefly discuss the main institutional projects that aimed at using vagabonds as an asset (Warsaw's prison and a couple of the manufactures supported by the state). I argue that these projects had a biopolitical character.

The paper will contribute to a more detailed understanding of the "modernization" process in the peripheral context, as my analysis will hopefully prove, that the Polish police institutions were not fighting against "social margin" – they were in fact actively producing it.