Mission Statement

At the Amsterdam Centre for Transformative Private Law (ACT) we explore the role of private law in the making of society, as well as the processes of private law-making in a pluriform world.

Ongoing societal challenges – for example relations of social inequality, political and economic power imbalances, and pressure on our natural environment - call for the heightened engagement of scholars, including legal scholars, in both understanding the mechanisms behind these challenges, and articulating the ways to address them. Private law plays an important role in the making and unmaking of those challenges. By providing a basic framework for engagement between private parties, private law molds social relations, shapes subjectivities, furthers values, and grants enforcement mechanisms to sustain these functions. In the context of economic globalisation, private law has even become the backbone for making the global economy. Private law, in short, is both a sustaining and transformative force in society.

ACT offers high-quality contributions to research and education on the role of private law in constituting and changing societies. We understand private law in a broad sense, encompassing both traditional areas (including contract, tort, property, family, and company law) and relative newcomers in the field (such as consumer law, labour law, insolvency law and financial law). In our research and teaching we make use of a variety of methods in order to understand the various dimensions of private law.

Our exploration of both the sustaining and the transformative power of private law is transdisciplinary. We combine thorough legal analysis with pertinent insights from fields such as political and critical theory, political economy, moral theory, behavioural sciences, and economic analysis. We deepen our understanding through active engagement with scholars from different disciplines, as well as other societal actors (both government and civil society).

Our interest in the transformative capacity of law is underscored by our acronym ACT. This acronym highlights that we realise the importance of law, and private law in particular, in the making of our political economy, as well as our responsibility to articulate how private law both serves to institute the status quo and how it can help to change it. Furthermore, the acronym expresses our understanding of our research as an act; an act that is, however, conditioned on both a plurality of perspectives and academic freedom.

ACT is a centre with a history: it builds on decades of top research in the field of European private law, within the framework of the former Centre for Study of European Contract Law (CSECL). The new name expresses the expansion of our research focus, reflecting our interest in not only Europeanisation, but also globalisation, datafication, digitalization, and sustainability. ACT inherits and builds on CSECL’s distinctive approach to the social justice dimensions of private law, the critique of dominant private law discourses, and the effective protection of vulnerable parties through private law.
Publications

ACT conducts high-quality research. Our researchers publish their articles in top international journals such as the European Law Journal, the Common Market Law Review, the Journal of Law and Society, the Journal of Consumer Policy and the European Review of Private Law. Our researchers’ books are published by leading international academic publishers including Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press, and Hart Publishing.

Social Relevance and Impact

ACT is socially relevant and impactful. We engage with stakeholders from civil society and public authorities in order to deepen our understanding and make more effective transformative proposals that further our mission. ACT researchers build on their historically strong links to actors and institutions at both the European and national level. Our researchers have acted as experts for the European Commission and the European Parliament. They have also established a prominent network of European judges, engaged in private law practice, and assisted numerous civil society organisations by providing expert knowledge.

Teaching

ACT has its own Master’s programme in European Private Law. The programme aims to educate intellectually curious lawyers from across continents with a unique mix of rigorous legal knowledge and critical thinking. The students are introduced to core European and international aspects of private law, and are invited to reflect on the economic, social and political forces driving its Europeanisation and globalisation. In an international classroom, core ACT faculty teach contextual courses including ‘Private law in a European and international context’, ‘European contract law’, ‘European company law’, ‘Consumer rights in the Digital Single Market’, ‘Human rights in private law’, ‘Finance, security and insolvency’, ‘European tort law’ and ‘Making markets beyond the state: between private law and international law’. The students are involved in experiential learning centred around EU law-making practices and outcomes in the intensive module ‘European private law in practice’.

Partners and Collaboration

ACT members collaborate nationally and internationally through a variety of research groups, networks and projects, including:

- Sustainable Global Economic Law project, together with Amsterdam Centres for European (ACELG) and International (ACIL) Law
- Amsterdam Center for European Studies
- The Ius Commune Research School
- The Faculty of Business and Economics, UvA.
- The Cooperation with Duke University (Bass Connections)
- The Common Core Project (‘Trento project’)
- The Network on Private Law Theory
- UN Harmony with Nature network
ACT Events

ACT is an active research community, with opportunities for academic exchange on weekly basis. ACT events include:

- Bi-weekly presentations by invited leading scholars from across the world (ACT or Sustainable Global Economic Law)
- Bi-weekly internal presentation and discussion of work-in-progress by one of our researchers
- Monthly informal lunch meetings
- Conferences and events organized by ACT members, including the annual conference.

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