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MAXQDA and visualising historical narratives: case study on pre-modern European martial arts marketing

Traditionally, historical research made modest use of qualitative data visualisation methods, instead focusing on crafting written narrations (TOPOLSKI, 2012). However, such data storytelling strategy, albeit methodical and grounded in the sources, was directed at erudite audiences and often lacked transparency for non-specialists (ZERVANOU et al., 2014). Hence, the presented study assumed a different approach and used coding and visualising tools offered by MAXQDA to trace marketing strategies used by martial arts experts in 15th- and 16th-century Germany and Italy.
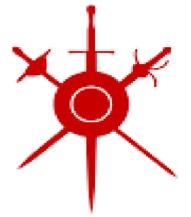
Sources and method

A sample of 16 digitised manuscript and printed fight books (*Fechtbücher*) – i.e. martial arts manuals (DEACON, 2016) – from Southern Germany and Northern Italy dated to the 15th and 16th centuries was selected from an online repository (https://wiktenauer.com) so as to include all those currently known which have dedications aimed at self-promotion of their authors.

Next, MAXQDA was used to perform qualitative coding which yielded 13 codes related to authorial intent, targetted audiences, legitimisation strategies, rhetorical devices or manipulation techniques. Then, word/code clouds, code frequencies, and codelines were used to elicit patterns and compare the two sets of sources (15th- and 16th-cent.). Finally, those and other visual tools (see below) were used to make the data storytelling more transparent and accessible.
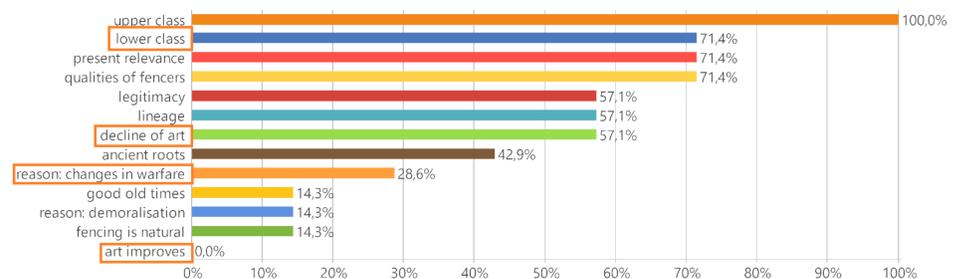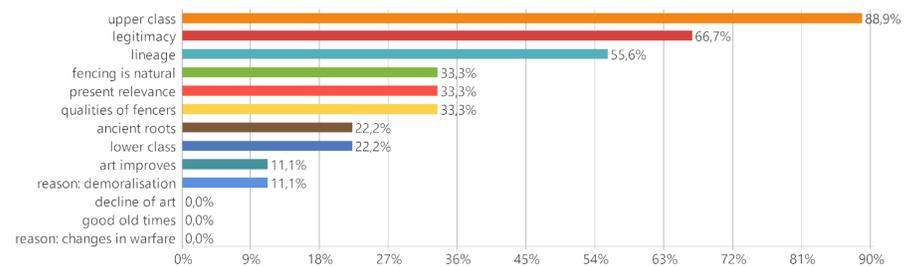

Comparison of **code frequencies** reveals a distinct shift in self-promotional narration themes between the medieval (15th cent.) and early-modern (16th cent.) periods.
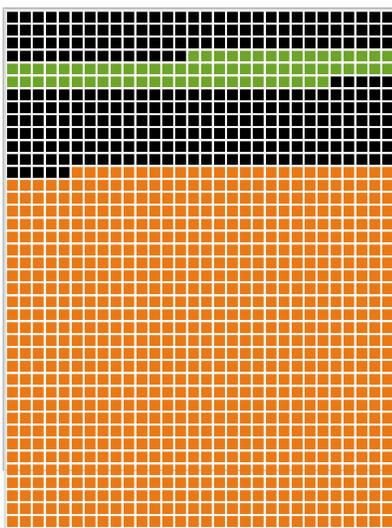
Document portraits visualise differences in both the thematic content and the rhethorical structure of the sources.

Results

- The comparative study showed a distinct shift in marketing strategies between the 15th and 16th centuries – from a competence-based self-promotion to affective marketing appealing to nostalgia after the waning „knightly art" *(Ritterliche Kunst)*
- This observation is important for modern attempts at reconstructing or evaluating historical European physical culture and discourse about corporeality, as it shows that social change brought by technological advancements of the early 16th century (wide-spread of gunpowder, printing press, political rise of the urban communities) caused a **deeply-felt rupture** in European somatic culture.
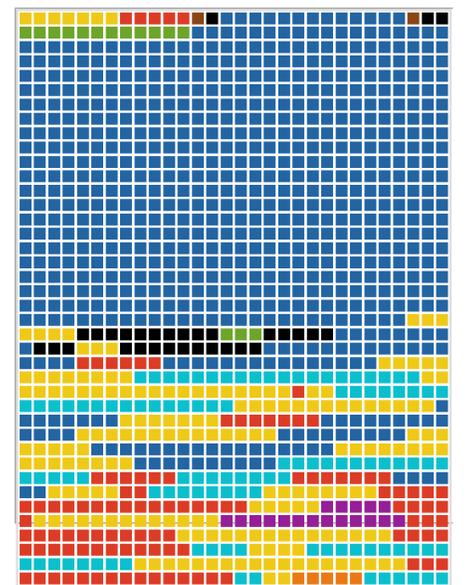
Targetted **codelines** were analysed to trace emergence of narrative themes across the sources.

Referenced works:

Deacon, J. H. (2016). Prologues, Poetry, Prose and Portrayals: The Purposes of Fifteenth Century Fight Books According to the Diplomatic Evidence. *Acta Periodica Duellatorum*, *4*(2), 69–90.
Topolski, Y. (2012). *Methodology of history* (Vol. 88). Springer Science & Business Media.
Zervanou, K., Tykhonov, V., van den Bosch, A., & van der Heijden, M. (2014). Visualisation of 700 years of Labour Conflicts in the Netherlands. In *Proceedings of the 11th ESWC LinkedUp Challenge, May 2014, Anissaras, Crete, Greece.*