



EU Values in Action

Case Studies from Member States

How are EU values translated into institutional practice, visual narratives, and public communication in higher education?

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🎯 Three Interrelated Areas

1

Core EU Values

Their representation in academic and public discourse

2

Higher Education as Value Space

A space for promoting and contesting EU values

3

Comparative Case Studies

Examples from selected EU Member States

Main Question: How are EU values translated into institutional practice, visual narratives, and public communication in higher education?



Learning Objectives

- ✓ Identify and explain the core values associated with the EU
- ✓ Distinguish between values as legal-political principles and values as discursive constructions
- ✓ Analyse how universities communicate EU-related values
- ✓ Recognise tensions between value promotion and value contestation
- ✓ Compare institutional approaches across different Member States
- ✓ Reflect on how Polish HEIs can communicate EU values credibly

Why EU Values Matter in Higher Education



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HEIs Are More Than Teaching & Research

Civic Spaces

Arenas for democratic engagement

Value-Producing Environments

Shaping normative frameworks

Sites of Inclusion/Exclusion

Determining access and belonging

Arenas of Public Debate

Facilitating contested discourse

Actors in European Integration

Contributing to cross-border cooperation and shared identity

Key Insight: EU values become visible in HEIs through both **policy** and **practice**. Universities don't just teach values—they embody, contest, and transform them through institutional design and daily operations.

★ Core EU Values

 **Human Dignity**

 **Freedom**

 **Democracy**

 **Equality**

 **Rule of Law**

 **Human Rights**

Impact Areas: Policy discourse • Institutional expectations • Funding priorities •
Communication practices • Public legitimacy

Understanding EU Values: Key Distinctions



Values vs. Policies

A value is...

A **normative principle** —an ideal or standard that guides action

A policy is...

An **instrument or framework** used to translate principle into practice

Examples:

Equality (value) → **Inclusion policy** (response)

Academic freedom (principle) → **Institutional autonomy**
autonomy (dimension)

This distinction is essential for serious analysis



Values as Discourse

EU values do not exist only in legal documents. They circulate through multiple channels:

Speeches

Public campaigns

University websites

Strategic plans

Social media

Project communication

Key Point: Values are **communicated, interpreted, negotiated, and sometimes contested** through discourse.



From Abstract to Practice

A value becomes meaningful when it is linked to:

Institutional Rules
Formal regulations and procedures

Visible Practices
Observable behaviours and routines

Curriculum Choices
What is taught and how

Student Participation
Involvement in decision-making

Symbolic Representation
Visual and narrative communication

Critical Insight: Without institutional translation, values remain abstract.



♥ Human Dignity

- ✓ Respect for students and staff
- ✓ Anti-discrimination frameworks
- ✓ Support for vulnerable groups
- ✓ Ethical research practices
- ✓ Accessible learning environments
- ✓ Accessible learning environments

Often visible indirectly through institutional design

☑ Democracy

- ✓ Student participation
- ✓ participation
- ✓ Collegial governance
- ✓ Open debate
- ✓ Transparent decision-making
- ✓ Inclusive dialogue on campus

Key: A democratic university practices participation, not just teaches it.

⚖ Rule of Law

- ✓ Predictability of procedures
- ✓ procedures
- ✓ Fairness in governance
- ✓ Transparent regulations
- ✓ Accountability
- ✓ Non-arbitrary decision-making

Less visible in marketing, crucial in practice

🕊 Freedom

- ✓ Freedom of thought
- ✓ thought
- ✓ Freedom of expression
- ✓ Academic freedom
- ✓ Freedom of inquiry

Pressures:

Political interference • Institutional control • Ideological conflict • Public polarisation

⚖ Equality & Inclusion

- ✓ Diversity statements
- ✓ Support systems
- ✓ Access policies
- ✓ Anti-bias measures
- ✓ Visual representation

Visibility ≠ Structural depth

🤝 Human Rights & Solidarity

- ✓ Support for displaced learners
- ✓ learners
- ✓ Inclusion of international students
- ✓ Ethical partnerships
- ✓ Crisis response
- ✓ Protection against exclusion

Especially visible in times of crisis



? The Representation Question

The question is not only whether a university supports EU values, but also:

- > How it presents them
- > Which values it foregrounds
- > Which narratives it uses
- > Which audiences it addresses addresses
- > Which tensions it avoids or acknowledges

Critical Insight: Representation shapes perception and legitimacy.

🌐 Visual & Narrative Communication

EU values are often communicated through:



Slogans



Branding



Photography



Iconography



Narratives



Campaigns



Testimonials



Keywords

Key Point: Values are always **mediated**, not neutral.

⚖️ Academic vs. Public Discourse

🏛️ Academic Discourse

- > More analytical
- > More qualified
- > More evidence-based
- > More conceptually precise



👥 Public Discourse

- > More concise
- > More strategic
- > More visual
- > More emotionally framed

Universities operate at the intersection of both



★ Why Higher Education Is a Key Site for EU Values



Educate Future Citizens

Shape professionals and democratic participants



Shape Public Discourse

Influence societal narratives and debates



Create Symbolic Legitimacy

Confer authority and credibility



Connect Local & European

Bridge regional and EU-wide contexts



Cross-Border Networks

Participate in European alliances



Embody or Contradict

Live values or reveal gaps

↑ Spaces of Value Promotion



Teaching

Curriculum design



Engagement

Public outreach



Mobility

Internationalisation



Support

Inclusive services



Civic Projects

Community initiatives



Communication

Institutional messaging

⚠ Spaces of Value Contestation

HEIs may become spaces where values are:



Debated

Open discussion and critique



Selectively Interpreted

Strategic framing and emphasis



Resisted

Active opposition or scepticism



Politically Reframed

Ideological reinterpretation



Why Comparative Case Studies Matter

- ✓ Move beyond slogans to substantive analysis
- ✓ Identify patterns across countries and contexts
- ✓ Understand contextual variation and nuance
- ✓ Compare implementation and representation
- ✓ Distinguish rhetoric from practice
practice

Key Insight: Case studies make abstract values concrete.

? How to Analyse a Case

Useful analytical questions include:

- 1 Which value is being foregrounded?
- 2 In what institutional context?
- 3 Through what discourse or visuals?
- 4 For which audience?
- 5 With what evidence of implementation?
- 6 Are there tensions, contradictions, or absences?

☰ Criteria for Comparing Cases

- 🏢 Institutional context
- 🗣️ Communication style
- 👁️ Visibility of values
- ⚙️ Degree of implementation
- 👥 Stakeholder participation
- ⚠️ Tensions/contestation
- ⚖️ Balance: symbolic vs. practical action

📚 Useful Sources for Analysis

- 🌐 University homepages
- 📄 Mission & strategy
- 🔗 Project pages
- 🤝 Alliance communication
- 📱 Social media accounts
- 🎨 Visual branding
- 📣 Student-facing campaign content

Insight: Materials reveal both explicit and implicit value narratives.

Case Cluster Analysis: Four Key Areas



Cluster 1: Inclusion

Comparative Focus:

How do universities communicate inclusion?

Possible Dimensions:

- > Access and participation
- > Support for vulnerable groups
- > groups
- > Internationalisation and belonging
- > Inclusive imagery
- > Student support structures
- > structures
- > Language of diversity and fairness

Key Question: Is inclusion presented as branding, policy, or lived practice?



Cluster 2: Democracy

Comparative Focus:

How do HEIs make democracy visible?

Possible Indicators:

- > Student representation
- > Public debate initiatives
- > Participatory governance language
- > Campus dialogue formats
- > Community partnerships
- > partnerships
- > Democratic values in projects

Key Question: Is participation substantial or merely symbolic?



Cluster 3: Academic Freedom

Comparative Focus:

How is academic freedom articulated and protected?

Possible Dimensions:

- > Strategic documents
- > Public statements



Cluster 4: Sustainability

Sustainability is not identical to the core value list, but it often appears in EU-oriented institutional discourse as a linked priority.

Possible Areas:

- > Green campus initiatives
- > Sustainability language in alliances

Central & Eastern European Perspectives



Context Matters

Comparative analysis should not assume that all HEIs communicate EU values in the same way. In **Central and Eastern Europe**, key factors shape how values are understood, communicated, and contested:

Historical Trajectories

Legacy of state socialism, transitions, and different paths to democracy

Institutional Transformation

Post-1989 reforms, Bologna process adaptation, adaptation, European integration

Political Pressures

Government attitudes toward EU, academic freedom concerns, polarisation

Regional Inequalities

Funding disparities, brain drain, uneven Europeanisation

Different Public Understandings of Europe

Varying levels of EU identification, historical memory, cultural narratives about European belonging

Poland in Comparative Perspective

For **Polish HEIs**, the key question is not simply whether EU values are present, but:

? **How are they framed?**
Narrative strategies and emphasis

? **How credible do they appear?**
appear?
Authenticity and consistency

? **How deeply are they institutionalised?**
institutionalised?
Structural integration vs. surface adoption

? **How are they linked to realities?**
realities?
Student and community connections







? **How are they visualised?**
Communication strategies and imagery

Discussion Prompt:

Which EU value is easiest for a university to communicate visually, and which is most difficult?










Risks of Superficial Communication

-  **Value Inflation**
Overuse dilutes meaning and impact
-  **Empty Slogans**
Rhetoric without substance
-  **Visual Tokenism**
Symbolic representation without structural change
-  **Generic Symbols**
Overuse of EU flags without contextual meaning meaning
-  **Discourse-Practice Gap**
Weak link between communication and action
-  **Unquestionable Branding**
Values as marketing rather than lived commitments

Consequence: This weakens institutional credibility.

How to Communicate Credibly

-  **Clear Definitions**
Specify what values mean in context
-  **Evidence of Implementation**
Show concrete actions and outcomes
-  **Visible Practices**
Make values observable in daily operations
-  **Realistic Claims**
Avoid inflated or unverifiable statements statements
-  **Acknowledge Tensions**
Recognise challenges and trade-offs
-  **Audience-Sensitive**
Tailor communication to different stakeholders
-  **Balance Appeal & Seriousness**
Combine visual appeal with conceptual depth



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Thank You

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