



EU Values in Action, Contestation & Local Narratives

Module 3 CaseLab

Visualizing the EU: Enhancing Public Awareness of European Policies, Values, and Initiatives at Polish HEIs



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Lecture Overview



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07 Critical Reflection

Avoiding propaganda, common analytical mistakes, and what makes strong CaseLab output

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CEE perspectives, student voices, and the gap between official discourse and lived realities

Central Question

"How can EU values be analysed and communicated critically, comparatively, and credibly in higher education without reducing them to slogans?"

From Winter School to Summer School



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Winter School Foundations

Core EU values – Understanding the normative framework

Higher education as communication space – HEIs as strategic sites for value transmission

Comparative case studies – Selected Member State examples

Summer School Critical Turn

Contestation – Values as sites of disagreement and negotiation

Ambiguity – Multiple interpretations and selective appropriation

Institutional tensions – Gaps between rhetoric and practice

Case-gallery design – Visual and comparative methodology

Local voices – Student perspectives and discursive nuance

Learning Objectives

Analyse value promotion/contestation · Distinguish symbolic from grounded practice ·
Design comparative visual case galleries · Work with qualitative data ethically ·
Communicate without oversimplification



The Central Question

"How can EU values be analysed and communicated critically, comparatively, and credibly in higher education without reducing them to slogans?"

This question guides our shift from descriptive to analytical engagement with EU values in institutional contexts.

Why a CaseLab? Values as Practice, Discourse, and Conflict



EU Values Are Not Only Declared

A CaseLab moves from abstract principle to analyzable evidence. EU values in higher education are:

Interpreted – Differently across institutional contexts

Negotiated – Through stakeholder engagement and conflict

Implemented unevenly – With varying degrees of institutional depth

Visualised selectively – Through strategic communication choices

Challenged in practice – By political, economic, and social pressures

Narrated differently – By various actors with distinct perspectives

Without contestation, the analysis remains too flat. A serious comparative approach must address disagreement over meaning, conflict over implementation, and tension between institutional rhetoric and lived experience.

Three-Level Analytical Framework

1 Normative Principles

Values as declared in treaties, institutional documents, and policy statements—democracy, human dignity, freedom, equality, rule of law

2 Institutional Practices

Values as enacted through policies, programs, governance structures, and resource allocation—what institutions actually do

3 Discursive & Visual Constructions

Values as represented in communication, imagery, narratives, and symbolic displays—how values are framed and perceived

Why Contestation Matters

Contestation involves different understandings of inclusion, democracy, or academic freedom, and local reinterpretation of European priorities. It does not automatically mean rejection.

Values Under Pressure: HE Contexts & Regional Partnerships



Where Values Become Visible

EU values manifest not only inside universities but across multiple interconnected domains:

Regional cooperation – Cross-border academic partnerships

Alliances and networks – European Universities Initiative

Public-facing projects – Community engagement and outreach

Community partnerships – Local stakeholder collaboration

Institutional branding – Visual identity and positioning

Digital communication – Websites, social media, campaigns

Stakeholder engagement – Governance and consultation processes

HEIs are strategic sites for multi-level value communication where values are promoted, contested, or reinterpreted across institutional, regional, and European scales.



Pressures Shaping Value Communication

Political conflict – National debates affecting institutional autonomy

Economic constraints – Resource limitations on implementation

Unequal institutional capacity – Varying ability to engage with EU frameworks

Public distrust – Skepticism toward European institutions

Symbolic compliance – Without structural change

Internationalisation tensions – Between global engagement and local realities

These pressures shape **how values are communicated and lived**, creating gaps between declared commitments and everyday institutional experience.

From Institutional Declarations to Empirical Cases



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The Methodological Shift

A case should **not** begin with assumptions such as "the value is present." Instead, it should ask:

- ? **Where is the value visible?** – In which documents, spaces, or practices?
- ? **Through what practices?** – Concrete actions or symbolic gestures?
- ? **Through what language or imagery?** – Discursive and visual framing
- ? **For which audiences?** – Internal, external, or specific stakeholders?
- ? **With what evidence?** – Documentary, visual, or narrative sources?
- ? **With what tensions or contradictions?** – Gaps and ambiguities

This shift is methodologically important. It moves analysis from confirmation to investigation, from description to critical examination.

What Counts as a Case?

In this module, a case may include any of the following concrete, bounded, evidence-based instances:

University Initiative

Internal programs, policies, or strategic actions

Alliance Project

Cross-institutional partnerships and networks

Inclusion Measure

Accessibility, diversity, or equity interventions

Communication Campaign

Visual and discursive value promotion

Civic Engagement Format

Public dialogue and community participation

Policy-Related Response

Institutional reactions to external developments

Comparative Analysis: Criteria, Axes & Why Comparison Matters



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Criteria for Selecting Strong Cases

A strong case should be selected according to multiple interconnected criteria:

Relevance to EU values – Direct connection to one or more core values

Clear institutional context – Specific organizational and regional setting

Availability of evidence – Textual, visual, or narrative sources accessible

Analytical comparability – Can be assessed alongside similar cases

Visibility of contestation – Tensions, ambiguities, or contradictions apparent

Educational usefulness – Suitable for teaching and discussion in VISUAL-EU hub

Why Comparison Is Necessary

Comparison is not decorative. It is analytical.

Comparison helps detect patterns and differences, avoid single-case overgeneralisation, identify context-specific constraints, compare rhetoric with institutional depth, and see how EU values travel across settings.



Comparative Axes for Analysis

Cases may be compared across multiple explicit dimensions:

Value Focus

Which EU values are emphasized?

Communication Style

How are values framed and presented?

Implementation Visibility

Are practices visible beyond rhetoric?

Audience Orientation

Who is the intended recipient?

Stakeholder Involvement

Who participates in value construction?

Institutional Depth

Structural change or symbolic gesture?

Tensions & Ambiguities

What contradictions or gaps are visible?



Visual Case Galleries: Structure & Pedagogical Purpose

What Is a Visual Case Gallery?

A visual case gallery is a **structured set of cases presented in a visually coherent format**. Its purpose is to:

- ✓ **Make comparison easier** – Side-by-side analytical viewing
- ✓ **Organise evidence clearly** – Systematic presentation of materials
- ✓ **Combine text and image** – Multimodal communication
- ✓ **Support teaching** – Facilitate discussion and analysis
- ✓ **Create reusable outputs** – For VISUAL-EU hub dissemination

Why Use Visual Case Galleries?

Visual case galleries are useful because they:

- **Make abstract values concrete** through tangible examples
- **Reduce cognitive overload** via structured presentation
- **Encourage pattern recognition** across multiple cases
- **Support teaching and workshops** as interactive tools
- **Move from narrative to structure** – analytical progression

A gallery is **both an analytical and pedagogical tool**.

Core Structure of a Case Card

Each case card should include consistent elements to enable meaningful comparison:

1 Case Title

Clear, descriptive name

2 Country & Institution

Geographic and organizational context

3 Value Focus

Which EU value(s) are addressed

4 Context

Situational background

5 Main Actors

Who is involved

6 Evidence Analysed

Materials and sources

7 Communication Style

How values are framed

8 Implementation Note

Practice beyond rhetoric

9 Key Tension

Ambiguities or contradictions

10 Short Conclusion

Analytical synthesis

This structure keeps comparison consistent across different cases while allowing for context-specific detail.



Case Clusters: Democracy & Academic Freedom



Cluster 1: Democracy & Participation

Possible cases may examine:

- **Student participation structures** – Governance bodies, representative councils
- **Deliberative forums** – Town halls, consultation processes
- **Dialogue initiatives** – Cross-stakeholder engagement formats
- **Public debate culture** – Open discussion spaces and events
- **Campus governance communication** – Transparency and decision-making visibility

Analytical Question

"Is democracy represented as a real practice or only as a value label?"

This question probes the gap between symbolic commitment and institutionalized participation.



Cluster 2: Academic Freedom & Autonomy

Possible cases may examine:

- **Strategic statements** – Official positions on academic freedom
- **Public communication around controversy** – Responses to external pressure
- **Research and teaching autonomy** – Curricular and inquiry independence
- **Institutional responses to external pressure** – Political or economic challenges
- **How academic freedom is named or avoided** – Discursive presence or absence

Analytical Question

"How visible is academic freedom in institutional discourse and practice?"

This question examines whether academic freedom is proclaimed, protected, or problematically absent.

These clusters serve as entry points, not exhaustive categories. Cases may span multiple values, and the analytical questions should guide rather than constrain investigation. The goal is critical examination, not confirmation of assumed value presence.



Case Clusters: Inclusion & Solidarity



Cluster 3: Inclusion, Diversity & Equality

Possible cases may examine:

- **Accessibility and support measures** – Physical and digital inclusion
- **Diversity communication** – Representation in institutional messaging
- **Participation of underrepresented groups** – Equity in engagement
- **Visual representation in campaigns** – Who is depicted and how
- **Links between rhetoric and structures** – Policy-to-practice alignment

Analytical Question

"Is inclusion communicated credibly and operationally?"

This question assesses whether inclusion is substantive intervention or symbolic performance.

Democracy

Practice vs. label

Academic Freedom

Visibility in discourse



Cluster 4: Solidarity, Dignity & Support

Possible cases may examine:

- **Support for displaced learners** – Refugee and migrant student initiatives
- **Welfare and community initiatives** – Student support services
- **Social responsibility projects** – Institutional civic engagement
- **Institutional responses to crisis** – Emergency support and adaptation
- **Regional cooperation through solidarity** – Cross-border support frameworks

Analytical Question

"How does solidarity move from moral language to practical action?"

This question investigates whether solidarity is enacted through resources, structures, and sustained commitment.

Inclusion

Credibility & operations

Solidarity

Language to action

Local Narratives & Central Eastern European Perspectives



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Why Local Narratives Matter

Institutional communication alone is insufficient. We need to understand how values are perceived, interpreted, and experienced by:

Students – Recipients of communication, participants in engagement

Staff – Implementers and interpreters of institutional policy

Community partners – External stakeholders in value construction

Local stakeholders – Regional actors affected by institutional decisions

Local narratives help reveal the gap between official discourse and lived realities.

What Is a Local Narrative?

A local narrative may appear in various forms of discursive evidence:

- **Short interviews** – Structured conversations with stakeholders
- **Written reflections** – Personal or institutional testimonies
- **Comments and feedback** – Responses to public communication
- **Student testimonials** – Experience-based accounts
- **Discussion excerpts** – From workshops or focus groups
- **Public-facing responses** – Reactions to institutional messaging

These offer **discursive evidence, not just personal opinion.**

Poland as Anchor Case

Reference point for both integration and local specificity

Student Perspectives

Central actors who experience values directly

Qualitative Data

Small-scale but meaningful insight



Central & Eastern European Perspectives

A comparative approach **must not assume one uniform European narrative.** In CEE, case interpretation may be shaped by:

Historical transformations – Post-communist transitions and their legacies

Institutional reform trajectories – Different paths of European integration

Political polarisation – Domestic debates over European orientation

Uneven resources – Structural disparities in institutional capacity

Regional security concerns – Geopolitical pressures and anxieties

Different public understandings – Varied conceptions of "Europe"

Context changes meaning. The same value may be interpreted differently depending on historical experience and institutional position.

Avoiding Propaganda & Analytical Mistakes



Major Risks in Communicating EU Values

One major risk is turning values into :

Empty slogans – Repeated without substantive meaning

Decorative branding – Visual symbols without institutional depth

Unquestioned virtue language – Assumed rather than examined

Symbolic visuals without evidence – Images detached from practice

Simplistic "positive-only" narratives – Excluding tension and complexity









A stronger approach allows complexity and tension to remain visible.

Common Analytical Mistakes

- Choosing cases only because they look positive
- Confusing communication with implementation
- Relying on one type of evidence only
- Ignoring national or regional context
- Overgeneralising from one case
- Using quotations without analysis
- Treating values as self-evident rather than constructed

These weaken both academic and educational value.

What Makes a Strong CaseLab Output?

- 
Clearly Focused
 Specific value, context, and analytical question
- 
Evidence-Based
 Multiple sources: textual, visual, narrative
- 
Visually Coherent
 Clear structure supporting comparison
- 
Comparative
 Positioned alongside other cases
- 
Context-Sensitive
 Aware of national, regional, institutional factors
- 
Analytically Cautious
 Avoids overgeneralisation, acknowledges limits
- 
Useful for Teaching
 Supports discussion and critical engagement
- 
Transparent About Limitations
 Acknowledges scope, gaps, and uncertainties

Key Takeaways & Suggested Follow-up



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Today's Main Conclusions

- 1 Multi-Level Analysis**
 EU values should be analysed not only as principles, but also as practices, narratives, and sites of contestation
- 2 Comparative Value**
 Comparative case galleries help reveal both similarities and structural differences across Member States
- 3 Local Depth**
 Local narratives and student perspectives add necessary depth to institutional analysis
- 4 Credible Communication**
 Credible communication requires evidence, context, and caution against simplification
- 5 Balanced Output**
 A strong CaseLab output balances visual clarity with analytical seriousness

Discussion Question: Which is more dangerous in institutional communication: silence about EU values or superficial celebration of them? Consider trust, credibility, audience perception, political sensitivity, and institutional responsibility.



Suggested Follow-up Activity

Mini-task for participants: Prepare a two-case comparison for the VISUAL-EU hub.

Include:

- **One case** where an EU value is clearly implemented
- **One case** where the same value is contested, ambiguous, or only partially visible
- **One visual case card** for each case
- **One short comparative note**
- **One local narrative** or student perspective linked to the comparison

This task operationalizes the lecture's methodological framework and prepares participants for hub contribution.



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Thank You for Your Attention

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Levels of Analysis

4

Case Clusters

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Perspectives

"From abstract principle to analyzable evidence"