
RESEARCH AREAS OF THE EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE

The areas of interest of the European University Institute (EUI) are outlined in its founding Convention: "Its work shall also be concerned with the great movements and institutions which characterise the history and development of Europe. [...] As part of the general programme of its scientific activities, the Institute shall develop interdisciplinary research programmes on the major issues confronting contemporary European society, including matters relating to the construction of Europe."

The following section provides, for each unit of the EUI, a definition of activities and ambitions in its respective field. The concepts of transnational, international, comparative and European all feature prominently in these definitions, in line with the EUI's missions.

The Department of Economics

The Department of Economics brings together leading international scholars and aims to produce theoretical and applied research, contributing both to the advancement of knowledge about the complexity of economic systems, as well as informing and guiding the policy debate on economic and social issues in the EU and beyond. As is the case for all internationally competitive PhD programmes in economics, the EUI's Department covers 'core' teaching and research in economics: micro, macro and econometrics. Within these, however, the Economics department stands out for its distinctive cross-field research agenda on topics of direct interest to the EU, such as the optimal design of monetary and fiscal institutions, competition policy and banking regulation and supervision, political economy, labour and education, health and ageing, and wage and employment inequality.

The Department of History and Civilisation

The Department of History and Civilisation (HEC) has developed an internationally recognised profile on comparative, transnational, and global history since 1450, in a disciplinary field where national traditions remain very strong. It focuses primarily on the transnational circulation of goods, people, ideas, and institutions, on comparisons between regional and national experiences, and global processes of integration and disintegration. HEC is one of the very few departments to offer a large, dedicated PhD programme in these fields. The historical perspective and the analysis of long-term trends are fundamental in providing policy-relevant insights and an understanding of the diverse and specific memories across European societies. HEC's uniquely broad geographic coverage across Eastern, Western, Southern and Northern Europe, and its sustained focus on the legacies of European nations' colonial and post-colonial entanglement with the world, is a major factor in the outstanding professional success of doctoral and postdoctoral researchers, who act as multipliers of best practice in historical research across European academia.

The Department of Law

The Department of Law is distinctive among its European peers in its commitment to contributing to a better understanding of the role that law and legal institutions play and can play at different levels in contemporary European and global society. It does so in a cosmopolitan and vibrant research environment that is uniquely situated outside the backdrop of national legal systems. The Department adopts a distinctive focus on the integrity of European and international institutions, encompassing their design, values and purposes. It provides a scientific environment where new methods of approaching legal scholarship - data and network analysis, archival and historical approaches, qualitative methods, law and economics and law in context - exist alongside more mono-disciplinary approaches. This is unparalleled in Europe and makes the Department not only outstanding but also unique in the region. The Department aims to contribute, in a leading manner, to a better understanding of the role that law plays and can play in contemporary societies, in Europe and beyond.

The Department of Social and Political Sciences

The Department of Political and Social Sciences (SPS) is one of Europe's leading centres for research and doctoral studies in comparative politics, sociology, social and political theory and international relations. Research and supervision at SPS focus on major contemporary challenges to the European Union and its Member States, such as long-term trends in socio-economic inequality, the rise in populism, tax reforms and party transformations, normative debates on citizenship and human rights, religious conflicts and international security. In this broad-ranging research programme of the Department, there is a common emphasis on integrating leading theories with empirical findings and on developing policy responses to these ongoing social and political developments within Europe at all levels, the national, the sub-national and the transnational.

The Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies

The main purveyor of policy relevant research at the EUI is the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, as its core mission over the past 25 years has been to act as the interface between policy-making and excellent research. It should be specified that 'policy-relevant' describes more a range of research areas than a specific approach to research; research outputs that can be relevant to policy making can be the result of curiosity-driven research as well as of government-commissioned research, as long as the highest standards of scientific excellence and independence are applied.

The Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies produces high quality, interdisciplinary research on major questions facing Europe internally and in the wider world, including how the shifts in global politics play out in an increasingly turbulent and multi-polar world. To do this, the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies applies its distinctive model that underpins its contribution and value added to the EUI, Europe and the wider world.

The three overarching themes that represent the Centre's academic signature raise significant political and policy challenges that have implications for the future of Europe:

- Integration, Governance and Democracy

- Regulating Markets and Governing Money
- 21st-Century World Politics and Europe

Transnational Governance

Governance is increasingly developing 'beyond the state' as a growing number of problems can no longer be effectively addressed at the national level only. The School of Transnational Governance (STG) has set up three Core Thematic Clusters: Peace and Security, Trade and Finance, and Sustainability (Climate, Migration, Welfare). To complement these, it has established four Cross-Cutting Thematic Clusters: Comparative Regional Governance; Gender in Transnational Governance; Digital Politics, Economy and Societies; and Transnational Democracy.

The STG is developing a genuinely global scope to its programming, including non-state, corporate and governmental actors, and reaching out to partners beyond Europe. With the STG, the EUI is complementing its strategy in terms of target audiences, to adapt to new needs; in doing so it builds on one of its main existing missions: building bridges between academia and policy. The research activities in this new field of knowledge will be developed with the other academic units of the EUI.

INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH CLUSTERS AT THE EUI

The EUI ambitions to further increase, through a focus on several joint themes, its strong impact on research conducted in the Social Sciences and Humanities in Europe. These themes have been elaborated in a bottom-up fashion through a collective reflection process among EUI faculty members and are structured around research clusters.

Effective interdisciplinary is rooted in disciplinary expertise and knowledge, which then converges in multiple zones of contact, some of which are outlined in the different thematic clusters which are proposed below. Economists and historians, social and political scientists and lawyers each bring complementary approaches - and complementary forms of knowledge - to the table. These can then be confronted and explored in thematic encounters around objects of common concern: re-distributional policies, climate change, populism, etc.

These research clusters meet several criteria defined by an ambition to innovate rather than replicate what is done elsewhere: they are centred around a topical societal interest; they are broad enough to allow diversity between and within disciplines; they carry substantial policy relevance. While the nature of the activities within the clusters will be focused on research, they will also ultimately irrigate teaching activities.

TOPIC 1: DEMOCRACY IN THE 21st CENTURY

Coordinated by Professors Elias Dinas (Social and Political Sciences) and Lucy Riall (History)

In the first two decades of the 21st century, the public identification with democratic values and practices – hitherto seen as unassailable – has been challenged in profound ways. While apparently

still supreme as a political principle, democracy is seen as being eroded by new economic disparities, by pressures to circumscribe the perimeter of rights, and by the weakening of its societal roots. There are widespread fears that democracy is being hollowed out, with decisions made by sheltered elites who pursue economic and functional imperatives. The tension between democratic representation and technocratic governance is unprecedented, and the very meaning of democracy is contested. At the same time, various forms of illiberal democracy, authoritarianism, and oligarchy induce many to think that they can perform better than classical liberal democracies. With the decline of most forms of political intermediation, processes of individual empowerment and mobilisation—also sustained by new technologies that reshape the context and the dynamics of political persuasion—point to the privatisation of political socialisation and participation. Combined, these factors nurture the perception that representative democracy should no longer be accepted as the gold standard for good governance.

In response to these challenges, we propose an interdisciplinary inquiry on the state of democracy in the 21st century. We will focus on several sub-themes, namely: the spaces and divisions of democracy; democratic participation and institutions; the rule of law; the development of populisms; and the role of, and consequences for, the European Union. Only a multi-disciplinary perspective can provide the vital insights European society will need to re-build the legitimacy of democratic representation, the credibility of political institutions, and the social contract that underpins its sustainability.

TOPIC 2: INEQUALITY, WELFARE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Coordinated by Professors Laura Downs (History), Anton Hemerijck (Social and Political Sciences), and Andrea Ichino (Economics)

After a long period (ca. 1900-1970s) during which economic inequalities progressively – if unevenly - narrowed, and levels of poverty fell, most OECD countries, including those of Europe, have seen a steady increase in economic inequality since ca. 1980. This has had dramatic consequences for social cohesion, prosperity, equal opportunity and democratic stability, all of which have narrowed or eroded sharply as economic inequalities have soared. The post-war era of welfare state expansion in particular helped to eradicate old-age poverty while institutionalising a series of important social citizenship rights: universal access to health care, education, social insurance against unemployment and sickness. Since the 1980s, however, progress in the realm of collective social security has seemingly come to a halt. How have the post-1980s reductions in, and reconfiguration of, social rights altered the life chances, health and well-being of citizens? Why has the modern welfare state been unable to keep pace with demographic shifts, skill-biased technological change and economic internationalisation? What are the implications for 21st-century welfare provision and democratic politics? The group uses historical and contemporary analysis to explore the contemporary crisis of inequality and to unpack the complex and constantly evolving relationships among inequality, social welfare, democracy and social justice – with a particular focus on the EU area. By linking the long history of inequalities to their economic, social and political causes - and consequences - and bringing together the complementary approaches, and complementary forms of knowledge produced by economists and historians, lawyers and political and social scientists, the group seeks to assemble a deeper, more multi-faceted understanding of what is at stake in current debates in order to make a constructive contribution to tackling the problem of inequality in rich democracies.

TOPIC 3: CRISIS OF EXPERT KNOWLEDGE AND AUTHORITY

Coordinated by Professors Peter Drahos (Law), David K. Levine (Economics), and Stéphane Van Damme (History)

Even after years of study and academic or practical experience, the consequences of most policies are at best uncertain. While agreement among experts on the soundness of a number of policy interventions is far greater than realised by the general public, there still is legitimate disagreement. Furthermore, it could not possibly be sensible for an individual - whose vote makes little difference - to invest years of effort in hopes of deciding what the best policies are. Because we cannot sensibly know ourselves what constitutes good policy we must rely on experts.

Following the financial crisis of 2008, an erosion of citizens' trust in intellectual elites has been witnessed. The leading role of experts has been questioned and reconsidered. At the same time, even those who denounce academic experts and pretend unwillingness to rely on them, nevertheless follow their own (often self-proclaimed) experts. Unfortunately, the reliance on charlatans rather than experts often has profoundly negative economic and political consequences. These issues are of particular importance to Europe and the EU. Political parties have denied expert knowledge on a range of issues from debt, growth and migration, to trade and medicine. These movements have strong popular support indicating that people are fed up with experts, and it is important to realise that they are right to distrust them as many have misbehaved.

The thematic cluster on the crisis of expert knowledge aims at addressing a number of important questions that could benefit from using an interdisciplinary set of tools. Why are experts under siege and what should be done? In order to answer such questions, an understanding of what creates and sustains credible authority is needed. Furthermore, institutions need to be developed which, in a context characterised by dispersed information, are able to produce a practical response.

TOPIC 4: TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE AND SOCIETY

Coordinated by Professors Philipp Kircher (Economics) and Giovanni Sartor (Law)

Information and communication technologies, biotechnologies, robotics, and artificial intelligence present serious challenges for modern societies. In particular, "smart" technologies change the workplace, the division of resources in society, the formation of social attitudes, the patterns and dynamic of social interactions, the allocation and exercise of power. Thus, they generate a whole set of new social, economic, ethical, and legal questions. This topic intends to address some of them.

Technological change in the workplace has already contributed to automation in manufacturing, and advances in AI and robotics are likely to exacerbate this and extend it beyond manufacturing. This raises the question how fast this will move and who gains and who loses? Digital technologies change interactions in society: on the one hand they allow for greater ability to share, acquire and process information, on the other hand they also enable increased surveillance and manipulation. They also raise ethical and legal issues, concerning how to prevent both misuse and underuse of technological developments. This requires the assessment of opportunities and risks related to transformation induced by technologies, and research aimed at translating legal/ethical requirements into prescriptions for the design of human-centred technologies, or even directives addressed to intelligent artificial systems.

Answers to these challenges demand a broad understanding across these areas, as the concerns are linked, and require interdisciplinary approaches. Dealing with social and economic impact might

require new legal regimes; changes in law will have to be backed in the political system and the way society reacts will be crucial for understanding which concerns will be at the forefront of debate. This interdisciplinary group will pursue a historical analysis of the connection between science, technology, and society, and use to anticipate future scenarios. It will also venture into unexplored scenarios in which AI becomes a pervasive, intelligent system achieving human-level or superhuman performance in several domains and delegating a large set of key tasks. How to ensure that highly developed technologies stay under human control, contribute to human well-being and autonomy, and remain responsive to human values while their development is driven by economic, political and military interests — this will be the normative focus of the inquiry.