

Research Programme European Studies 2024-2026

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1 Role and goals of research in ES

The ES research team – that since September 2023 has become responsible for research within the ES programme – is committed to developing and implementing a practice-oriented research programme, stimulating educational innovation and realising (social) innovations in and with professional practice. Considering that the ES research team, as part of the European Studies programme, is primarily based at the NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences in Leeuwarden – the capital of the Friesland region – it is committed to delivering research projects that advance future- and practice-oriented solutions in the region, for the region and with the region.

The ES research team does so with a long-term view to strengthening capacities in the region to connect with the EU –as the Brussels-based institutional arena for policy making – and the European work field – as the multilevel, Europe-wide arena where actors of various sorts interact¹.

Considering that the ES team is part of the wider ES programme, which primarily rests on education activity, it is equally committed to contribute to the further development and optimisation of the ES education (sub)programme, which is focused on the training of the European public professional. It does so in light of the long-term vision on promoting '*public leadership in the European work field*', as enshrined in the strategic framework of European Studies (ES) which brings three main lines of ES activity – education, research and internationalisation – under one heading (see: ES Strategic Framework 2024 and ES Course Document 2024). It is in this strategic context that research activities of ES are ultimately aimed at promoting '*public leadership in the European field*'.

In light of these considerations, the functions of ES research are:

1. developing and maintaining a research agenda that is responsive to trends and developments affecting capacities in the region to connect with the EU/European work field;
2. contributing to an education programme that is responsive to trends and developments affecting capacities in the European region to connect with the EU/European work field;

¹ See Chapter on ES Vision and Strategy. The 'European working field' refers to "*the common European space where various players are active – e.g. in 'mission-oriented' projects – including cities, provinces, regions, small and large companies, knowledge institutions, NGOs, national governments and the European Union (EU) as the Netherlands' fourth level of government*". (Gemeente Den Haag 2021).

3. creating a place where questions and issues concerning capacities in the European region (to connect with EU/European work field) can be addressed in an integrated and multidisciplinary manner; and
4. acquiring and making available knowledge and insights for the benefit of the 'triangle' professional field, research and education in order to strengthen capacities in the region to connect with the EU/European work field.

Key in this endeavour is 'co-creation' – as one of the principles of Design Based Research – which entails a combined effort of researchers/lecturers, practical professionals and students across disciplines and professional fields to design, conduct and evaluate research, interventions and artefacts (Metselaar et al. 2021). The principle is also underlined in NHL Report 'Vital Regions, explaining that *“by working together [...] in a multidisciplinary setting of co-makership the foundation will be laid for keeping the region vital”* (Metselaar et al. 2021: 9 cited Delies & Coenders 2018; my translation).

In sum, the ES research team is committed to setting up a community of learners – or: 'knowledge chain' – with the overall thematic focus to strengthen capacities in the region enabling it to successfully connect with the EU – as the institutional arena for policy making – and the wider European work field. Since the ES team is part of the wider ES programme that focuses on the training of the European public professional, it follows a research programme that prioritises the strengthening of regional capacities in the in the field of societal and public policy issues .

In light of these considerations, the ES research team specifies the long-term objective as follows:

By accumulating, deepening and disseminating knowledge for and with regional stakeholders, regional capacities to connect with the wider European work field can be strengthened and regional stakeholders can be better prepared for future developments in Europe.

In achieving this objective, the focus of the ES research team's activities is on the various aspects related to the regional capacity to connect with the wider European work field, while refraining from a selection specific policy areas or issues for the ES research agenda. In preventing research programme from being pinned down to a predetermined list of policy themes, the ES research teams can this way maintain a responsive research agenda that is able to adapt over time to the changing policy needs in the professional field.

The ES research team objective is in full alignment with one of the three focus areas of NHL Stenden University 'Vital Regions' (that is, further improving *“the quality of life and future of regions”*). Furthermore, in promoting European public leadership and regional capacities that ensure connection with future-

oriented, sustainable activities in the European work field, the ES research programme up with the perspective on 'broad prosperity' that has been taken up also by both the Thorbecke Academy and NHL Stenden University in their respective long-term plans. An ambition such as this also constitutes a sound point of departure for the formation of a possible lectorate with the working title 'European Public Leadership', as envisaged in the *'Inrichtingsplan Thorbecke Academie'* (NHL Stenden Hogeschool 2018: 7)

2 Connecting with Europe and its challenges

For many, Europe is an abstract concept that seems far removed from ordinary life. Yet Europe – both as an arena of Brussels-based policy making (EU) and as a broader European work field – is closely intertwined with our daily activities. This also applies for local governance in the region. Almost all European regions and local communities face more or less the same challenges: climate change, energy transition, air pollution or digitalisation. And all of them deal with related regulations and policies that result from EU decision making.

For local governance in the Netherlands, this everyday reality emerged from two long-term processes: Europeanisation and decentralisation (VNG 2022: 12). As for decentralisation, it entailed a devolution of tasks and competences from the central government to the Dutch municipalities. As for Europeanisation, local governance has become increasingly responsive to the need to connect the ‘operational field’ or local activity on their territories with ‘strategic’ activity at the EU level. This is because of the transfer of competences in various policy fields to the EU level. Like decentralisation, Europeanisation requires organisational adaptation.

For local authorities and regional stakeholders, joining in the activities in the European work field means – in addition to the importance of tackling cross-border issues through cross-border cooperation or common European policies – taking in ideas, and joining initiatives, projects or financing that accelerate innovation and sustainable economy in their region or local area. It also means bringing in a diversity of innovative ideas, region-specific insights to a European ‘unity’ consisting of sometimes very different regional interests and conditions, and vice versa (VNG 2022: 21).

For its part, the EU has invested to involve the region, local communities and urban areas more in Europe (De Rooij 2003; VNG 2022). It does so mainly through policy instruments and financial schemes that allow for active regional participation at the European level. EU funding through grants provide support for regional stakeholders, including start-ups or SMEs, to invest in sustainable value creation or create new sustainable technologies and to join forces with counterparts elsewhere in Europe. EU financing also gives authorities in the region a flexible instrument to support implementation of its various policy objectives. There are numerous European financing programmes a region can rely on.

At least 50% of European legislation and regulations – if not more – are implemented by regional authorities (see e.g. Borghetto & Franchino 2010). European legislation in areas ranging from air quality to digital security to housing requires implementation at the regional and local authority level. Also,

increasingly more municipalities, provinces and urban areas have learned to acknowledge EU's willingness – or perhaps even eagerness – to take advantage of the input for EU policy making that comes from below, from the region (VNG 2022: 13-14). This means that it has proven expedient for regional and local authorities to have a voice in EU policy and legislation and to influence it from a regional perspective.

The EU and the European work field has become “a cross-domain, multifaceted theme” that is recurring in almost all aspects of “the entire policy and administration” (Vollaard et al. 2023: 42). In short, Europe is an everyday reality that has emerged “from intensified political and economic interaction between actors at every conceivable territorial level” (Marshall 2005: 669). Europe has become an all-pervasive theme in the day-to-day business, also in the region of Friesland. Connecting with it imposes certain requirements on governance capacities of regional/local authorities and the public professional who works for it.

For many regional stakeholders across Europe, including the Friesland region, it remains a challenge to position themselves in the EU and the European work field or to bring ‘Europe’ to the region. Be it because of treaty constraints – that generally favour national above regional or local government. Be it because of insufficient resources. Or for other reasons.

Difficulties resulting from this manifest themselves in various ways. In broad outlines, these difficulties can be divided in two categories. Difficulties arise when ‘downloading’ Europe to the regional level (Marshall 2005). More than half of the municipalities and one quarter of the provinces do not consider themselves to be in a good position to implement European law (Vollaard et al. 2023). They occur when transposing and implementing EU policies and regulation at the regional level (Europa Decentraal 2016; VNG 2022; de Rooij 2003). Thus is mainly due to shortcomings in expertise and capacities (Vollaard et al. 2023).

And they occur in the bidding for European projects (VNG 2022). In this respect municipalities and provinces much too often focus on money, while it's all about it realising policy goals pursued by both the European Union and the local authorities. In that light, a strategic framework focusing on Europe prevents from bidding for European projects in an ad-hoc, incoherent fashion (Vollaard et al. 2023). Moreover, obtaining EU subsidies requires an investment in advance, which is difficult to bear for smaller municipalities with little resources.

The other category of difficulties occur in the ‘uploading’ of regional or local wishes to the European stage (Marshall 2005): for many – if not all – regional stakeholders and local authorities it is a daunting task to represent regional or local interests at the EU level of policy making, to (co)shape transitions in the European work field or to bring (innovative) ideas to this arena (Fiege 2017; VNG 2022). Engaging with this institutionally dense arena, where policy making processes can be lengthy and complex and where a multiplicity of diverse

actors with competing interests are active, can be rather challenging (Lo Bianco 2015; Risse-Kappen 1996).

More than half of the Dutch municipalities has difficulty in taking part in this arena (Vollaard et al. 2023: 6). Shortcomings that explain this underperformance not only include deficiencies in expertise and capacity, but also a lack of coordination between EU experts and field-specific experts in municipal organisation.

3 Focusing on practice-oriented research and co-creation in the region

The methodology that is used for research at ES is based on the concept of practice-oriented research. It means that leading research questions are motivated by professional practice and that the knowledge acquired directly contribute to that professional practice (Andriessen 2014: 14). As with other disciplines that have as their main subject such abstract social phenomena as policy-making, politics, policy, law(making) or public security, it is ES research team's task to focus on issues and problems that are suitable for practice-oriented research. This means that the ES research team should first and foremost see to it that issues with a intercultural or cross-border nature should always be related to questions, problems and situations that arise from the day-to-day professional field.

This does not necessarily mean that the knowledge acquired through practice-oriented research should only consist of applied knowledge that is tailored for addressing a specific problem or situation (2014: 22-23). In certain cases it is even required that knowledge acquired through practice-oriented research should be of a general and/or novel nature (e.g. a case study focusing on specific situation yields knowledge that refutes a hypothesis). Or that acquired knowledge turns out to be not so useful in a specific situation, but novel and insightful from a theoretical perspective.

Important is that practice-oriented research is driven by questions arising from the professional field and that in principle it generates knowledge and insights extending beyond a specific case or situation. Also, it is supposed to contribute to the improvement and innovation of professional practice (article 1.3.2. *Wet op het Hoger Onderwijs en Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek*). With this aim in mind, practice-oriented research intervenes – through prototyping, designing and testing – in order to change or improve practice (Andriessen 2014: 32-33).

Thus, practice/oriented research – and more particularly design-based research – is expected to develop or design applicable products, designs, services or concrete solutions for addressing practical problems. In other words, practice-oriented or design-based research should have impact on the professional practice it is examining and on the economic or societal sector as the context where the subject of research is situated. As such practice-oriented research is a multi- and/or transdisciplinary process and embedded in a range of internal and external organisational contexts, while maintaining the scientific reliability and validity of the research itself (Butter &Verhagen 2014).

With this commitment, the team is in line with the Netherlands Government's view on the role of research the university of applied sciences:

“Universities of applied sciences build a bridge between knowledge generated from research and innovation generated in professional practice. They are a natural knowledge partner for SMEs and for employers in the public sector. They can therefore make excellent contributions to research projects focused on innovation and social issues” (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap 2014: 52; my translation slb).

This entails providing an experimenting, learning and innovation environment where researchers, practitioners and students will be involved in successive cycles of design, adaptation and testing (Joore et al. 2023). Asking probing questions, evaluating (old established) routines, testing assumptions and new routines and discussing dilemmas are central in such an environment – in the form of an atelier or a field lab.

With the student in mind, the ES research team is committed to co-developing and co-maintaining a research learning pathway in the curriculum of the ES education programme. Specifically, it contributes to co-shaping learning indicators, learning outcomes and assessment criteria that fall within the definition of design-based research. This is to ensure a seamless interaction between both research and education activity of the overall ES programme.

In the professional field, the ES research team sees itself as a linking pin between external parties in the region, nationally, European and within the NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences. The team then facilitates the design process by providing guidance, advice and methodologies, and/or drawing up (interim) reports, organising focus groups or setting up learning communities. In this way, concrete action perspectives and new knowledge can be identified and/or developed that can be transferred to both professional practice and curricula.

In catering for the need of the Frisian region and the broader context of the northern Netherlands region – in connecting with the European working field – the ES research programme focuses on joint efforts with the province, municipalities, regional partnerships such as *EuropaPact Fryslân*, *InnovatiePact Fryslân*, Association of Frisian Municipalities (VFG), and Northern Netherlands Alliance (SNN), knowledge institutions (e.g. *Wetsius*) and also (Europe-oriented) enterprises and branch organisations in the regional private sector. The research programme is also mindful of the potential that the regional university network RUN-EU provides for interregional cooperation across Europe. In this context, the programme looks for possible avenues of cooperation with regional stakeholders elsewhere in Europe, in particular with partners in declining regions or shrinkage areas that face the same challenges as Friesland and/or and Northern Netherlands.

4 Setting the agenda for ES Research

Starting from the key notions and considerations stated in the previous chapters, the ES research team considers the following elements for drawing up a long-term agenda. First, practice-oriented research – rather: design-based research – is set to develop a ‘professional action perspective’ – in Dutch: *handlingsperspectief* – that addresses a professional practice gap – in Dutch: *handlingsverlegenheid*. It contributes to solving the identified shortcomings in professional practice (valorisation of research). In this case, it contributes to the development of a perspective that helps to strengthen regional capacities for connecting with the EU and the European work field.

Such capacities are related to both specific personal skills and qualities of the (Europe-oriented) professional and management and organisational capacities of the organisation where he/she works. Since the ES research team, as part of the European Studies programme of NHL Stenden, is based in the Friesland region, it starts out with shaping an agenda based addressing the professional practice gap for both the (public) professional and public organisation in the Friesland region. In time, the research agenda will expand to include questions and issues concerning stakeholder capacities (to connect with EU/European work field) in the European region in general. This will be done, for example, by organising cross border, interregional research projects.

Providing such a perspective should address questions such as what role, (organisational) capacities, skills and knowledge aspects are needed to better anticipate trends and policy developments at European level and to make achievements from the European field usable for the specific opportunities and wishes in the region. Hence, the ES research agenda follows a two-pronged approach: it caters for the needs and challenges at the individual level of the professional and those at the organisational level of governance in the region.

The section on the research agenda is structured as follows. First, it will provide an account of how the agenda has been developed. Then, it will discuss the first long-term agenda item – the first ‘focal area’ of ES research interest – **‘Regions in Europe’**. This section concludes with a discussion on the second agenda item – or ‘focal area’ – **‘Europe in the Region’**.

4.1 Shaping the ES long-term Agenda

The development of the ES research agenda started on October 5 2022, with a brainstorming session within the ES research group. During this brainstorming session, ideas and inspirations were collected and categorised into three levels where ES research can have an impact. Three levels of impact have been identified (see Chapter on ES Vision & Strategy). For the purposes of ES research,

particular consideration will be given to **three 'impact levels'**, namely: 1. the profile of the European professional - as detailed in the DBE Course Document European Studies 2020-2021; and 2. The working environment of the European professional; and 3. Developments and trends in the world and Europe. As mentioned in the overall ES Strategic Framework, the three levels simultaneously provide the impetus for the further development in the field of both education, research and internationalisation.

The impact levels were presented and discussed at an ES team meeting on 2 November 2022. From the 'core' of the European Professional, further consideration was given to properties, characteristics, developments and trends in the two outer circles (working environment of the professional and world trends). The core concept of 'public leadership in the European field' was also introduced and discussed at the meeting of 2 November.

During a study meeting on 16 January 2023, attention was drawn to a division of the research agenda into focal areas. **Two 'focal points'** for ES research were identified: 'Regions in Europe' and 'Europe in the Region'. The formulation of these 'focal points' is an explicit reference to one of the 'focus points' of the NHL Stenden research policy: 'Vital Regions'.²

Both the two focal areas and the levels of research impact were subject to discussion in the context of the work field advisory board (Werkveld Adviescommissie or 'WAC'). A first round of exchange on this subject took place on 20 March 2023.

The brainstorming on these elements has been followed up by a series of exploratory talks with several individual field experts, during the Fall period of 2023. The brainstorming on these elements for the ES research agenda in WAC setting has been rounded off in December 2023. Currently, the ES research programme – and in particular its agenda – as set out in this draft paper is subject to several rounds of review and checkpoint meetings, in the context of both talks with professionals in the field and the ES research team. In the run up to the official launch planned on 28 November 2024, it went under final review at a work field advisory board meeting on 3 July 2024. A final version of the 2023-2026 Programme has been adopted by the work field advisory board on 24 October 2024.

² In addition to 'Vital Regions', the research policy NHL Stenden also has as its focus areas 'Service Economy' and 'Smart Sustainable Industries'. With this classification, the university aims to better organise the “development of applicable knowledge around current social issues”. For more information see: *Vital regions De kracht van onderzoek en maatschappelijke verbinding* (NHL Stenden Hogeschool, 2021).

4.2 Region in Europe

Connecting ‘the operational field’ of a region in Europe with ‘strategic’ activity at the EU or Europe-wide level with, requires various sorts of (individual) knowledge, qualities, skills, practices, and (organisational) resources and capacities (for individual skills and knowledge, see Chapter ‘Beoogde leerresultaten’ of ES Course Document; see also Figuee 2017). Focus on these aspects yield research outcomes that may have impact at the individual level of professionalisation. Joining the European ranks also means alignment of strategies and activities at organisational level (Vollaard et al. 2023). It entails organisational adaptation. Focus on these aspects yield research outcomes that may have impact primarily at the intersocial level of organisational adaptation. Hence, the ES research in the domain of ‘Region in Europe’ follows a two-pronged approach. Focus of research will be distributed across the two levels of impact:

- a. promoting European expertise in the region; and
- b. promoting the embedment of ‘Europe’ in the organisation of local government.

Promoting European Expertise in the region

European expertise is a notion taken in a broad sense here. Focus on the professional who is specifically trained to perform duties in connecting the region with the European work field is but a part of it. The expertise of this kind of professional is expected to be in perfect tune with Europe and its developments. The profile of such a professional stands at the very core of the ES programme (see Chapter ‘Beoogde leerresultaten’ of this document; see also European Studies National Profile 2019).

However, there are challenges for the ‘European professional’ in a European work field that is continuously changing and where he/she is challenged staying abreast with trends and changes in transition (mission-driven) processes – be in the field of energy supply, climate control or digitisation. Broadly speaking, the following avenues of research are in this context proposed:

- a. *What trends and changes can be expected in the European work field that require the European professional to adapt to new working forms, methodologies and practices?*
- b. *What practical tools – i.e. working forms, methodologies and practices – can be (further) developed for ‘European professionals’ who are working in the continuously changing work field on transitions, regional innovation ecosystems and mission-driven innovation?*

‘European expertise’ can also be understood as a quality of those public officials with a different professional background or discipline whose working activities also include doing business in the European work field. Think of an environmental policy advisor with a background in marine biology who is working

for a municipal government and is responsible for enforcement of also EU environmental protection rules. Or think of a policy advisor in waste management, with a background in biochemical sciences, who is responsible for waste management and represents regional stakeholders' interests in consultation talks with various EU institutions and European platforms on circular economy. They also, are being continuously challenged in keeping up in cross-border mission-driven projects aimed at addressing major social issues.

Box 1: Designing EU-Fryslân Monitoring Tool

Research project content

At the request of Europa Pact Fryslân (EPF), a database is being developed that is intended to quantify and systematically map the impact of European projects in Friesland in terms of e.g.

- number and sort of regional stakeholders in the region involved in European projects;
- EU (co)financing shares in projects;
- regional stakeholders (co)financing shares in projects;
- total values of project investments per policy theme (e.g. circular economy; climate protection; sustainable water management; digitalisation), et cetera.

How it fits in the ES research agenda ('professional action perspective')

- designing a monitoring tool that helps the professional and (public) decision making in the region to stay tuned with (ongoing) developments in both the region and the European work field;
- in addition to providing a measuring and monitoring instrument ('hard control') to professional practice it is intended to also facilitate further inquiry – inc. qualitative – into factors or conditions that affect capacities in the region to connect with the European work field.

Embedding in education

- participation in research team by a student-assistant
- engagement of 6 software engineering students from 'ICT & Creative Technologies' in developing an architecture underpinning the monitoring system
- creating a protocol and hand book for an envisaged minor in ES program on quantitative data analysis and writing advisory reports;

Status of the research project

The project started on September 1, 2023. The database will be operational from January 2025. The working language of this project is Dutch..

For ES research it is interesting to investigate how professionals with a different professional background or discipline are being challenged in the context of their activities in the European work field, and what can be done to help them to find their way in the European work field. Hence, in broad outline, the following avenues of ES research:

- What trends and changes can be expected in the European work field that require both the European and the field-specific professional to adapt to new working forms, methodologies and practices?*

- b. *What can be transferred from the core set of skills, knowledge, behaviours and attitudes of the ‘European public professional’ to the various sorts of field-specific experts who do business with Europe?*
- c. *What practical tools – i.e. working forms, methodologies and practices – can be specifically developed for the field-specific experts so as to allow him/her to effectively do business with Europe?*

Promoting embedment of ‘Europe’ in local (public) organisation

Connecting the ‘operational field’ of regional or local activity with the ‘strategic’ activity at the EU level, also requires organisational adaptation in the region. Joining the European ranks requires for instance alignment of ambitions and strategies of one’s organisation. It entails, among other things, an alignment of the organisational, local or regional narrative with the European narrative. It also entails staying in tune with the continuous changes in transitions policies and changes in innovation ecosystems across the European work field.

A municipality, for instance, that has incorporated a clear and strong vision on Europe into its strategic framework is more likely to effectively connect with the European work field and the changes that invariably occur (Vollaard et al. 2023). It also requires that Europe is ingrained in the daily routines of organisation, and that there is European awareness across the board – also in terms of organisation.

Local and European policy are becoming increasingly intertwined and more and more local policy areas have therefore acquired a European dimension (VNG 2022: 12). Still, the operating of this ‘dimension’ depends on a variety of circumstances. The possibility of entering the European work field for many local governments and regional stakeholders still depends more on coincidence than on ingrained routine and structured organisation. More than often, it is the enterprising administrator or the enthusiastic civil servant or the casual affinities between a few colleagues across different departments towards a European project, that makes the organisation connect with Europe (Vollaard et al. 2023: 26). Often, ‘Europe’ appears only incidentally or in passing on the (political) agenda of local government or private enterprise (De Rooij 2003).

A structural anchoring of European affairs in the organisation of local governance seems to be an indispensable requirement for a lasting, working connection between regional and European activity. The following avenues of research touch upon the question – in broad terms the following questions provide direction on how to provide a firm and structural footing for European affairs within a regional or local organisation:

- a. *What trends and changes can be expected in the European work field that require the regional organisation to adapt to transitions or changes in innovation ecosystems?*

- b. *What organisational adaptations – be they processes, products, roles and/or services – can facilitate cooperation on European affairs within a public organisation, between services or policy departments – each with different disciplinary backgrounds and sectoral interests?*
- c. *What organisational adaptations – be they processes, products, roles and/or services – can provide a firm and structural footing for European affairs in organisation, both administrative and political?*

Box 2: ‘De EU professional in de Noord Nederlandse gemeente’

Research project content

- The focus of research is on organisational and individual-professional aspects of adaptation necessary for connection with the European professional field (Europeanisation). Research takes place in the context of a ‘community of practice’ with professionals from municipal administration in Friesland and possibly the broader context of the northern Netherlands region. The project addresses the professional practice gap (*‘handelingsverlegenheid’*) as reported in the VNG/HNP report by Hans Vollaard et al. (2023).

How it fits in the ES research agenda (‘professional action perspective’)

- The aim is to (co-)design an intervention, in the context of an interprofessional learning process, that facilitates the embedment of ‘Europe’ in the organisation and work processes of municipal administration. The intended intervention (*‘ontwerpopplossing’*) should ensure a lasting working connection of municipal organisation with the European arena.

Embedding in education

- participation in research team by a student-assistant;
- engagement of students from European Studies in organising the community of practice;
- creating a hand book intended for a minor or course on running European Affairs in municipal administration.

Status of the research project

A preliminary investigation started in October 2024. This investigation will result in a report and application for funding for follow-up research in September 2025. The working language of this project is Dutch.

4.3 Europe in the Region

One of the important fields of EU policy is improving the economic well-being of regions in the European Union and to avoid disparities between them. In fostering a more cohesive and inclusive Europe the EU provides instruments that allow regional authorities, local enterprises and communities to close the gaps in development that exist between them. At the same time, EU’s regional (or ‘cohesion’) policy strives to meet the unique needs and strengths that each single region in Europe has.

The differences in development between regions raise questions as how to tackle hindrances to cross-border and interregional cooperation that follow from these differences. And how to foster cooperation. In the same vein, the differences in regulation, taxation or procedure – both at regional and member state level – are often hindrances to deeper cooperation between regions. Also, the potential and challenges of digital technologies make it desirable or even necessary to investigate the various issues related to facilitating or securing cross-border and interregional communication and exchange.

Box 3: ‘European Values’ in higher education

Research project content

- The project aims capture unique characteristics and identities of European values within the mindsets of various RUN-EU partners. For this purpose, relevant RUN-EU stakeholders’ interpretations of “European values” are compared within the everyday practice of their respective roles in, or in relation to higher education. This will be done through a small-scale, comparative, exploratory multiple-case study.

How it fits in the ES research agenda (‘professional action perspective’)

- The objective is to formulate an up to date module by which students will be able to critically assess different concepts of identity and alternative definitions of citizenship.

Embedding in education

- The outcome of research will be translated to a module on European citizenship
- Eventually, through co-operation with other RUN EU institutions in joint projects (both in research and in education) workshops and joint assignments will be co-ordinated.

Status of the research project

The project started in December 2023. The project will be completed in July 2025 with the publication of a research paper and the delivery of an educational module. The working language of this project is English.

Promoting cross border, intraregional and interregional cooperation

There is potential in the infrastructure that the EU provides for interregional exchange and cooperation. A case in point is the possibility for local, competent authorities to establish across border of jurisdiction joint investigation teams for exchanging various sorts of legally binding decisions, documents, evidence and officials for criminal investigation (Block 2012). And so there are many other examples of cross-border and interregional cooperation facilitated by EU policy.

However, there are also challenges and risks for regional and local (public) organisations to tap this potential. One is that transfer of best practices initiated in one region cannot always be transferred to other contexts or regions (Di Nucci 2023). Differences in regulation or time-consuming procedure may also be one of the reasons why the EU infrastructure has not been fully utilised. Also, threats and risks that go along with exchange and communication – particularly in the field of cyber security – may be one of the several reasons why cross-border, interregional or intraregional cooperation for that matter may not have achieved their full potential.

Methods and approaches for investigating this domain of ES research –promoting cross border and interregional exchange and communication – can be found in the field comparative analysis. Benchmarking or (collaborative) learning processes for comparing practices, processes or performance outcomes may help to identify comparative strengths and weaknesses among regions. They can also be used for evaluating performance in one region by comparing practices with identified good practices elsewhere. Outcome of such structured exercises may serve as a basis for developing improvement in regional quality or performance. Comparative analysis may also be helpful in identifying commonalities cross-border, interregional or intraregional exchange and communication.

Box 4. 'European Union and Ukraine'

Research project content

- Developing a systematic over-view of contingencies, scenarios and/or issues that potentially play a role in the negotiation process on a possible accession of Ukraine to the EU. Simulation games will be used as a valid research tool for data collection and analysis.

Embedding in education

- the research outcome will be interpreted to a module on European citizenship
- eventually, through co-operation with other RUN EU institutions in joint projects (both in research and in education) workshops and possibly joint assignments will be co-ordinated .

Status of the research project

It is currently running (starting date: December 2023).

Against this backdrop, the following lines of ES research can be identified:

- a. How can the EU infrastructure for cross-border and interregional exchange and communication achieve its full potential?
- b. What practical tools – i.e. working forms, methodologies and practices – can be (further) developed for cross-border and interregional exchange and communication?

Promoting interregional exchange of best practices

Rather than providing avenues or lines for further investigation, this item of the long-term agenda is a resolution of the ES research team to create opportunities for exchanging and comparing practices – at both individual and organisational level of research impact. It will work to foster best practice across regions in Europe by creating or promoting platforms or joint projects for sharing best practices, experiences and insights.

5 Mapping out the way ahead

The ES research group - and with it the ES research programme – is still in its infancy. The team began to form late Spring 2023. And in the academic year of 2023-2024 it started three research projects. Looking towards the new academic year (2024-2025), it is about to start off with two new projects. This chapter sets out a roadmap on the development of the research team and its research agenda envisaged for the upcoming years.

The team staff started in September 2023 with a leading senior researcher (0.6 fte) and lecturer-researcher (0.4 fte) on a long-term basis. Another lecturer-researcher and a student assistant soon joined the ES research team (both 0.2 fte on project basis). Later, in the second quarter of the first semester of 2023-2024 another lecturer-researcher joined the team, but only for one quarter. It is anticipated that in next academic year this colleague will pick up research where he left off.

The research team reports to an ES expert team that is responsible for developing and maintaining the research learning pathway in the curriculum of the ES education programme. This expert team consists of both members of the ES research team and staff involved in the implementation of ES education programme.

In its first year (2023-2024), the ES research team has been committed to the preparation of the present ES Research Programme, building up a knowledge network, co-writing learning outcomes for the research learning pathway in the ES education curriculum, and the launching of its first research project: development of the *EU-Fryslân Monitoring Tool* (see Box 1). In addition, it produced a paper (Russian disinformation targeting EU institutions), which gives the initial incentive for a research pathway on issues concerning debunking disinformation, combating online undermining and/or promoting media literacy in EU context (Box 6). Also, a project has been started off with a project using simulation games as a valid research tool for generating a systematic overview of contingencies, scenarios and/or issues that potentially play a role in the negotiation process on a possible accession of Ukraine to the EU. The latter two projects are minor projects, but have the potential to give rise to more lasting research lines.

For the 2024-2025 academic year, the formation of the research team changed. The position of student-assistant changed from 0.2 fte to 0.1 fte in September 2024. In October 2024 the ES research team was reinforced with another senior researcher (0.2 fte on project basis). Two new projects, now under construction, are about to be launched in 2024-2025. One concerns setting up a 'community of practice' with professionals from municipal administration in Friesland (see Box 2). The focus of research in that context is on organisational and individual-professional aspects of adaptation to 'Europe'. The working title of this intended project is 'De EU professional in de Noord Nederlandse

gemeente' ((Box 2). The other project focuses on interpretations of 'European values' and their roles in in the context of higher (professional) education (Box 3).

Currently, one ongoing project is partially financed by second-flow funding (the other part being direct university funding). The aim, however, is to reach an appropriate equilibrium between direct (university) funding, research grants (second-flow), and contract research (third-flow).

To achieve this, in addition to the small-sized project concerning the development of a *EU-Fryslân Monitoring Tool*, a same-sized, start-up project is envisaged for next year. The actual building of the project with the working title 'De EU professional in de Noord Nederlandse gemeente' qualifies for this. Financing possibilities in terms of both research grants (second-flow) and contract research (third-flow) are currently being examined. Assuming an average staffing of 1.0 to 2.0 fte for a small to medium-sized project (involving two researchers and one student-assistant), this entails an additional staffing of at least one fte (on project basis) within two years from now.

In the longer run, beyond the next two years³, the aim is to achieve a research portfolio consisting of three small-sized projects with several spin-off projects for dissemination and education purposes. The long-term ambition is to set up a lectorate with the working title 'European Public Leadership', as envisaged in the 'Inrichtingsplan Thorbecke Academie' (NHL Stenden Hogeschool 2018: 7)

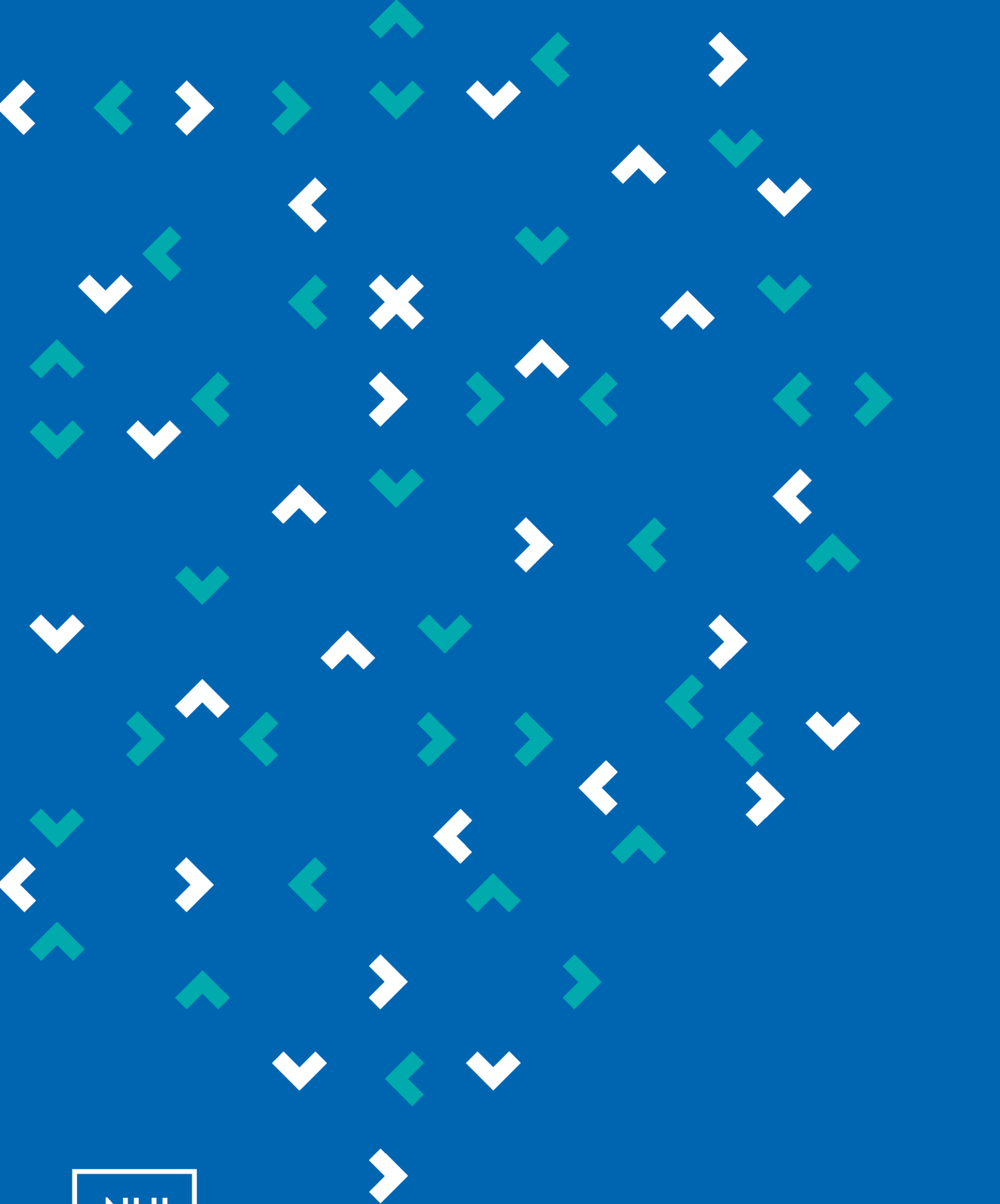
³ In Spring 2026 an audit has been planned. While this formal inspection primarily focuses on education activities of the ES programme, ES research activities will also be subject to review.

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