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Welcome to the ESELS Newsletter

As of 2024, the **European Society for Empirical Legal Studies** publishes its newsletter twice a year. The aim is to inform ESELS members about the Society's activities and conferences as well as highlight the work of ESELS members.

This fifth edition contains:

- A reminder of the extended deadline for the **ESELS 2026 Annual Conference Call for Submissions (22 February)**;
- An overview of several **pre-conference workshops** before the ESELS 2026 Annual Conference;
- A Q&A with the chairs of the new **Empirical Constitutional Studies Working Group**, Katarzyna Metelska-Szaniawska and Serkan Yolcu;
- Presenting the **new board members**, **Päivi Leino-Sandberg** (board member) and **Mathias Siems** (president);
- A recap of the **Mini-conference on Empirical Perspectives on European Law** in Umeå, Sweden in January;
- And last but not least, more **information** about the **upcoming Annual Conference**, including **keynote speakers**.

Happy reading!

Do you have ideas, suggestions or questions about this newsletter? Please contact the ESELS Newsletter editor [Lisette Velema](#).

Submissions: Extended deadline 22 February



Call for Abstracts

ESELS Annual Conference in
Ljubljana

We are excited to **invite submissions** for the **ESELS Annual Conference 2026** in Ljubljana, Slovenia (18–19 June 2026). Whether you are working with **quantitative or qualitative data** to understand the law and legal order, developing **critical approaches** as a lawyer to Empirical Legal Studies or its role in **legal education**, or want to showcase your empirical-legal **work-in-progress** with an interactive **poster presentation**: this is your chance to share your work with an engaging **European audience of legal experts**. The extended **deadline** is coming up soon (**22 February**), so **make sure to submit your work soon!**

Our conference is fully on-site (no hybrid option) and **welcomes working papers, extended abstracts, poster presentations and reflective submissions on Empirical Legal Studies in Europe**. Presenters are provided with the opportunity for valuable feedback and scholars submitting a full paper can be nominated for our Early Career Recognition 2026.

Notifications of acceptance are communicated on 15 March 2026.

[Submit your abstracts here](#)

workshops

After a highly successful first round of workshops during the pre-conference day in Toulouse in June 2025, we are more than happy to have a **full pre-conference day with (extra) workshops in Ljubljana again**. These interactive workshops provide a great opportunity for lawyers and scholars working in the legal field to **learn more about a particular empirical method** (quantitative/qualitative) from experts in the field as well as from fellow participants. The workshops (**free of charge**) typically last about 3 to 4 hours and are **organized the day before our annual conference** (fully on-site) at the School of Economics and Business University of Ljubljana.

This year, we are happy to offer **four different workshops**:

Empirical Strategies for Causal Inference in Legal Studies by Rok Spruk

For more information and registration, click [here](#).

This one-day intensive workshop introduces the core empirical strategies used to identify causal effects from observational data, with a particular focus on applications in law, legal institutions, courts, and public policy. The course is designed for lawyers and legal scholars who wish to understand, evaluate, and conduct empirical research using modern econometric tools, even without formal training in advanced mathematics or econometrics.

AI-Driven Open Science Methods for Empirical Legal Scholars by Cherifa Boukacem & Mandeep Dhani

For more information and registration, click [here](#).

The use of AI-driven research tools and adherence to open science standards represent a research culture-shift for empirical legal scholars. Currently, the field of Empirical Legal Studies is in full development when it comes to conducting scholarly research using legal data and AI-driven research tools. This interactive, half-day workshop will therefore train empirical legal scholars to use new European funded AI-driven research tools that contain European-level legal data in a way that is compatible with open science principles.

Interviewing for lawyers by Kyra Wigard

Do you want to know more about the 'best practices' behind conducting interviews? To know

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registration, click [here](#).

hands-on experience in developing your interview skills with peers, before starting off with doing qualitative research in your own field of law? In this crash course we'll offer theoretical insights on interviewing as a branch of qualitative research, good practices and pitfalls, and opportunities to interactively practice your interview skills with fellow participants.

LLMs for Empirical Legal Research by Tilmann Altwicker & Ephraim Seidenberg

For more information and registration, click [here](#).

Large Language Models (LLMs) have become increasingly relevant in empirical legal research, providing new opportunities for summarizing legal texts, analyzing arguments, and classifying data. This workshop offers an introduction to the foundations of LLMs, including tokens, word vectors, and transformers, as well as advanced prompting techniques such as Chain of Thought reasoning, zero-/few-shot prompting, and prompt chaining.

Q&A with the chairs of the new Empirical Constitutional Studies Working Group



What was both of your motivation to start a Working Group on Empirical

Constitutional Studies?

“The field of constitutional studies has been growing rapidly, particularly its comparative perspective. Much of this scholarship involves an empirical aspect, as textual, qualitative, and quantitative data on constitutions have become increasingly available. At the same time, scholarly interest in constitutions reaches far beyond the realms of traditional constitutional lawyers. To acknowledge and further foster these trends, by establishing the Working Group on Empirical Constitutional Studies within the framework of the European Society of Empirical Legal Studies (ESELS), we aim to offer a platform for cooperation among scholars with diverse backgrounds whose common interest lies in studying constitutions and constitutional law from an empirical perspective. We strongly believe that, gathered under the same roof of empirical legal studies, they can complement each other when analysing the same “constitutional object” using different methods and approaches.”

Whom would you both encourage to join the Working Group?

“The Working Group aims to support the collaboration of scholars from all disciplines whose interest focuses on constitutional studies and involves an empirical dimension. This includes, in particular, lawyers with in-depth textual knowledge of constitutions and social scholars, including economists, who strive to make robust observations within the constitutional domain. Representatives of other disciplines are, however, also welcome to join, as developing cross-disciplinary approaches and strengthening the plurality of methods used in the constitutional domain is the group’s objective. We encourage contributions from established scholars and look forward to involving early-career researchers, aiming to facilitate their scholarly development in the field. The group operates under the auspices of ESELS, so it will naturally gather European researchers, as well as those studying topics of relevance to European scholarship in constitutional law, but the Working Group remains open to members from other parts of the world so as to also enable cooperation and foster the development of empirical-constitutional studies globally.”

Which activities can we expect in the upcoming period?

“We plan to organise various Working Group events to ensure that interdisciplinary engagement remains dynamic among the members. In the near future, we plan to host online workshops focused on specific topics and organise special panels at ESELS’ annual conferences, starting this year in Ljubljana. Additionally, we intend to arrange an ESELS mini-conference focused specifically on empirical-constitutional topics in early 2028 as part of our Working Group activities. In the medium term, we also aim to provide methodological training for young researchers.”

“Predicting the short-term future of constitutionalism worldwide is challenging, if not impossible. Constitutional issues are rapidly developing, and the complexities of academic research in this field are becoming more demanding to navigate. By bringing together scholars in constitutional studies, we aim to create a strong platform to address the ongoing decline of constitutionalism globally. As data on constitutional practice expands and becomes more accessible, our insights will become more robust. Given the pressure that constitutionalism faces from various sources, reliable observations will significantly contribute to reinforcing constitutional resilience over the next five years. Therefore, we aspire to establish a trustworthy academic network that can help tackle the challenges of constitutionalism in the years to come.”

[More information about the working group](#)

Presenting the new board members Päivi Leino-Sandberg and Mathias Siems



Päivi Leino-Sandberg (Board member)

I work as Professor of Transnational European Law, University of Helsinki, and Deputy Director of the Erik Castrén Institute of International Law and Human Rights where I have led various international research projects relating to EU constitutional and institutional law, decision making and governance. My interest in empirics probably derives from the ten years I worked as a legal adviser for the Finnish government participating in numerous EU and international negotiations and Court cases. I continue to advise in particular the Parliament of Finland and various other institutions.

While I have been trained by critical international lawyers, I am interested in particular in combining the critical with qualitative empirical research, to make visible how the law and its structures actually operate. Instead of courts, I am more interested in law in the political institutions.

the use of systematic access to information and documents requests as a qualitative empirical method, and use both the internal documents received through such requests, and the process of access brokering as sources of qualitative empirical study.

In the context of such research projects, I have also challenged denial decisions in the EU Courts and the European Ombudsman - and won my cases. In addition to empirical work, have often engaged in multidisciplinary work with economists, political scientists, media scholars and neuroscientists.

While I have an interest in all empirical work, my own contribution to the work of the society would be in particular in the use and development of qualitative methods in EU and public law scholarship more broadly.



Mathias Siems (President)

I am currently Professor of Private Law and Market Regulation at the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence. After my time at the EUI, which ends in 2026, I will move to University College London (UCL) as Professor of Corporate Law. Regardless of any titles and affiliations, I am passionate about empirical legal studies. Having received a fairly conventional legal education in Germany and the UK, my initial empirical path started with a mixed-methods project on Law, Finance and Development at the University of Cambridge.

My empirical journey continued in various directions, employing both qualitative and quantitative empirical methods, often in combinations with forms of comparative legal analysis (and followed by a degree in economics a bit later). I also promote the use of various empirical methods to my many PhD students at the EUI.

It is great to see the dynamic evolution of the European Society of Empirical Studies (ESELS). Building on this success, there may be the potential to grow further in various dimensions: membership, participants of the annual conference, working groups and workshops, as well as geographic and thematic reach of empirical legal studies in Europe. There are also lessons to be learned from the evolution of ELS in the US, how to grow, but also how to avoid a narrowing of the field to certain topics or methods. Overall, empirical curiosity should be open to pursuing different types of projects, of whatever empirical flavour and legal topics one has in mind. Supporting and leading the ESELS, I would also be happy to receive suggestions in support of our joint endeavour!

MINI-CONFERENCE ON EMPIRICAL PERSPECTIVES ON

European Law in Umeå: A recap



Thank you to everyone who joined us in Umeå for the **conference Empirical Perspectives on European Law**, jointly organised by SNELS and ESELS at Umeå University. It was a pleasure to see such a diverse group of scholars and colleagues and to engage in **rich discussions on empirical approaches to European law**. A special thank you to the keynote speakers, panel chairs, presenters and participants for their thoughtful insights, conversations and contributions throughout the two days.

We hope the exchange of ideas sparked in Umeå will continue well beyond the mini-conference and continue at the **upcoming annual conference**, for which **registration opens soon**.

More information about the upcoming Annual Conference



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Ljubljana, Slovenia and will be **opened a day before the conference with a reception in the early evening on 17 June**. The event will be hosted by the **School of Economics and Business University of Ljubljana**.

Keynote speakers include **prof. dr. Jonathan Klick** (University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School), **prof. dr. Peter Grajzl** (Washington & Lee University), **Justice Heico Kerkmeester** (Supreme Administrative Court for Trade and Industry, The Netherlands), **Spela Vizjak** (President of the Chamber of Insolvency Administrators of Slovenia) and **dr. Ana Kersevan** (State Attorney General of the Republic of Slovenia) will shed their light on the **relevance of empirical-legal research in Europe today** and in the future, while judges and state attorneys take you to the **implications** and employment of empirical legal studies in courtrooms and **in daily legal practice**.

More information will follow soon on our website.

Thanks for reading!



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