“Why values? Whose values?”
A brief account of the ValEUR project
François Foret (ULB)

UCSIA/ CHAIR IN EUROPEAN VALUES
LECTURE SERIES, Antwerp, 4/3/2020
A non-normative approach of values: Not in search for the good, the true or the ugly values, but who pulls the trigger of which values, for which purposes.

Values are deeply cultural in a double sense. They are mental representations of what is worth being appreciated and not facts of nature; they are collective representations that cannot be reduced to individual opinions. They vary constantly across time and space.

Focus on political values = cultural representations enshrined in law, asserted by institutions and instrumentalized in practices and discourses of actors to compete for power, influence, resources and/or recognition.
How to studies values at large and European values in particular

- **European Values (EV)** = cultural representations enshrined in treaties and asserted by European institutions in their discourses. Main focus on human dignity, rule of law and democracy

- **Where**: in social representations; political discourses; party manifestos; media and social networks; public policies…

- **Who**: no champion, no owner, many users, mainstream players and challengers

- **What**: values as open signifiers likely to backlash. Multiples meanings and counter-effects.

- **Effects of EV**: diffuse, weak accountability and occurrences as instruments rather than ends

- **Values as gate-keepers**: between Self and Other; between unity- or dissent-making; between internal and external affairs; between market and law; between public and private spheres
European values: the mouse hiding the elephant in the room?

- Crises of values and values as answers to the crises
- EV as **proxy or substitute for something else**: identity, legitimacy, democracy…
- EV as go-between and compromise between two narratives: ‘grand récit’ of nation-building and justification by the outputs. **Advantages**: flexibility, modest ambition; market-friendly ethos;
- The example of human dignity as shortcut to Europeanness, with diverging interpretations
- References to values may have three incentives.
- 1/ a call to identity, memory and communicative resources in a *quest for legitimization* (**governing through values**)
- 2/ necessity to deal with ethical issues calling for normative policy choices (**governing values**)
- 3/ Values may cause legal and political conflicts and challenge established balances of powers and regulation (**governed by values**).
Values as *legitimization* (governing through values) and values as *issues* (governing values)
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The example of morality issues in the EU. 
A model of European morality politics (EMP)?

- **Case studies**: prostitution, surrogacy, abortion (with Fabio Bolsonar and Lucrecia Rubio Grundell)

- **Specific features of EMP**: 
  - organised around *European values* enshrined in the treaties rather than *religious values*
  - predominance of *de-politicisation* patterns through the regulation of normative choices by experts, but expertise is not value-free…
  - *regulatory inertia* due to impossible consensus? Frequently true, but not always. Policy shift towards abolitionism on prostitution as counter-example. Importance of soft law, circulation of best practices and jurisprudence of European judges to alter the policy context rather than the substance of political choice
“Values in Japan and Europe: a comparative historical, socio-cultural and political perspective”
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VALUES IN EUROPEAN AND JAPANESE POLITICS
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- François Foret (ULB), Airo Hino (Waseda), “Values in Japan and Europe: a comparative historical, socio-cultural and political perspective”

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