

## Research Strategy ERMechS 2026-2030

### MISSION

Our mission is to operate as a centre of excellence for research into the fascinating yet complex relationships between media, culture, history and society. We seek to attract and nurture a diverse, international faculty and student body. Our approach is interdisciplinary, theory-driven and empirical, situated at the crossroads of the social sciences and humanities. By enhancing cross-fertilization between these fields, we aim to advance theories and methods and address major societal challenges at the local, national and international level. We seek to generate meaningful impact for a variety of stakeholders around the world and to foster strong connections between our research and teaching.

### *Our objectives*

1. to lead a cutting-edge interdisciplinary research agenda that contributes to media and communication studies, arts and culture studies, and history, as well as to the EUR strategic goals.
2. to contribute to the solution of (new) global societal challenges and to advance research collaborations with academic and societal partners around the world.
3. to play an active role in the democratization and dissemination of scientific knowledge through research transparency, stakeholder involvement, societal engagement, and public debate.

### VISION FOR 2026-2030

During the previous strategic period, significant progress was made in building a faculty-wide research organization, resulting in the establishment of the ERMechS research institute, twelve interdepartmental research clusters, and a fully-fledged Research Office. We have created a flourishing, collaborative research institute with strong expertise and leading research teams in the interrelated fields of media and communication, arts and culture, and history. Between 2021-2025, ERMechS observed a significant increase in successful research grant applications. Annual funding increased from €2.8 million in 2021 to €3.7 million in 2025. ERMechS researchers have emerged as leading applicants within EUR for Horizon Europe, resulting in multiple successful applications. Moreover, we have extended our interdisciplinary and societal collaborations and increased our research output.

In the coming years, the disciplines represented within ERMechS - media and communication studies, arts and culture studies, and history - will continue to evolve in close interaction with rapidly changing societal challenges, including digitalization and AI, sustainability transitions, growing social inequalities and political tensions at both global and local level. Addressing these complex, multi-scalar challenges increasingly requires internationally oriented research that crosses disciplinary boundaries and integrates insights from multiple perspectives and contexts. ERMechS therefore sees its interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary character not only as a defining feature of its research profile, but also as a necessary condition for producing high-quality, socially relevant, and impactful research in the years ahead.

Against this backdrop, the current strategic period is aimed at consolidating and further strengthening both the achievements of recent years and the strategic direction we have set, in particular our commitment to interdisciplinary and interdepartmental collaboration. However, consolidating the current research organization is not a given. The academic landscape has changed sharply since 2024: budget cuts and declining student numbers are leaving their mark on our faculty and have also resulted in a shrinking budget for research. It is necessary to develop smart strategies that allow us to achieve a similar or, where possible, even higher level of quality in 2030 with fewer resources.

A central role is reserved here for the *acquisition of external research funding*: research grants enable us to ensure our output, to make a large-scale impact with our research and to maintain our dynamic research culture, with a large group of PhD students and postdocs and with cross-disciplinary research projects. We will achieve this goal by 1) focusing our research support on acquiring research grants, 2) developing a talent programme together with ERS, 3) being more strategic with (time investment in) grant acquisition, 4) setting up a seed-money program together with ERS for promising individual and program-related applications, 5) identifying and drawing attention to a number of emerging research themes, and 6) exploring alternative sources of funding, such as contract research, private donations or patronages.

Alongside the acquisition of external funding, we will place increased emphasis on *harvesting and disseminating the fruits of our research* in the coming strategic period. We will revise our publication strategy to prioritize quality over quantity, fostering more publications in leading journals in the relevant fields. We will also evaluate the implementation of the publication strategy more closely to ensure the effective use of research time within our institute. PhD students will receive better guidance and more formal milestones in starting to write their dissertation chapters early and completing their programs on time. Finally, science communication will be further professionalized to ensure that our research outcomes reach a broader audience. As part of this, we will brand our institute stronger and strengthen the visibility and profile of ERMeCHS.

In sum, securing our research funding and promoting the quality of our research will allow us to fulfil our mission in the next strategic period, and make a long-term impact on science and society.

## **POSITIVE SOCIETAL IMPACT THROUGH RESEARCH**

ERMeCHS fosters unbounded and curiosity-driven research and encourages researchers to develop research lines and projects independently and in collaboration with one another. At the same time, our mission is to contribute to addressing contemporary societal challenges through rigorous scientific research, often in partnership with societal stakeholders. For the years 2026-2030, we identify the following key impact domains for our research. These domains have been formulated in tandem with the strategic priorities of the Erasmus University and the ESHCC, and refer to specific areas of society where our research expertise will deliver a significant and positive impact.

### ***Impact domain 1: Digital citizenship and human centred AI***

Media, digital platforms, and data-driven technologies play a pivotal role in shaping contemporary societies, influencing communication, governance, work, education, and everyday life. In the coming years, artificial intelligence (AI) will further transform these domains, raising profound questions about creativity, authorship, knowledge production, power, ethics, and social inequality.

ERMeCHS builds on its strong expertise in mediated communication and its cultural and historical dimensions to position itself as a leading interdisciplinary hub for research on mediatization, digitalization, and AI. Research in this domain explores the societal and cultural implications of AI-driven

systems, including algorithms, generative AI, datafication, and automation, with particular attention to transparency, bias, accountability, regulation, and public trust.

***Impact domain 2: Culture, identity and wellbeing***

Culture plays a fundamental role in shaping identities, experiences of belonging, and individual and collective wellbeing. In societies characterized by diversity, digitalization, and rapid social change, questions of meaning, participation, and quality of life have become increasingly urgent.

Together with its societal and academic partners, ERMeCHS contributes to understanding and improving the diverse relationships between culture, identity, and wellbeing, also in historical perspective. Research addresses how cultural practices, media, sport, arts, heritage, and everyday forms of expression shape identity formation and influence mental, social, and emotional wellbeing across different social groups and life stages.

***Impact domain 3: Sustainability in the media, arts and creative sectors***

The cultural, creative and media industries are key drivers of innovation and economic value, and have impacts on social cohesion, well-being and equity. At the same time, these sectors are increasingly challenged to operate in economically, socially and environmentally sustainable ways. Economic precarity, the emergence of generative AI, and societal polarization all affect these sectors' capacity to integrate creativity, innovation, and sustainability.

ERMeCHS is internationally recognised for its comparative and interdisciplinary research on the creative industries, art worlds, media and cultural heritage. In the coming years, this expertise will be consolidated by further integrating questions of economic, social and environmental sustainability into research on creative labour, organizations, business and markets, while paying due attention to the role of digitalization, AI and the climate crisis.

***Impact domain 4: Resilient communities and social transformation***

Global challenges — including climate change, public health crises, polarization, inequality, and economic uncertainty — are reshaping societies worldwide and demand resilience and transformative change. Communities in urban, diverse, and vulnerable contexts, across both the Global North and the Global South, face mounting pressures affecting social cohesion, democratic participation, and economic stability. These developments unfold within long-term global interdependencies shaped by power relations, governance regimes, and transnational cooperation. At the same time, present vulnerabilities reflect historical trajectories of industrialization, colonial entanglements, financial crises, and institutional development.

ERMeCHS analyses how communities respond to these pressures by examining the role of heritage, arts practices, media representations, communicative dynamics, and cultural narratives in shaping adaptive capacity and collective action. By integrating cultural and historical perspectives on political and economic transformation, it approaches resilience as a multidimensional process spanning local, national, and global scales.

***Impact domain 5: Diversity and inclusion in a globalizing world***

Globalization continues to reshape cultural, social, and economic relations across the globe, intensifying interconnectedness while also exposing and, in some cases, exacerbating structural inequalities. In the coming years, these dynamics will be increasingly shaped by geopolitical shifts, migration flows, digital infrastructures, and uneven access to resources, rights, and mobility. At the same time, questions of diversity, equity, and inclusion have become central to understanding how the consequences of globalization are experienced differently across social groups and regions, and over time.

At ERMeCHS, we aim to deepen our understanding of the historical, cultural, and socio-economic dimensions of globalization, with explicit attention to how global processes intersect with issues of diversity, inclusion, and social justice. We focus on how identities, power relations, and inequalities related to race, ethnicity, gender, class, citizenship, and ability are produced and negotiated in globalized cultural and institutional contexts, now and in the past. Digitalization plays a crucial role in these processes, both as a driver of exclusion and as a potential tool for empowerment and transnational solidarity.

### **STRATEGIC GOALS 2030**

Here we list our strategic goals for 2030, resulting from our Vision on the strategic period as outlined in the sections above. The list starts with goals related to the internal organization of ERMeCHS and gradually shifts towards the institute's impact on the outside world. Each goal is briefly introduced and followed by a list of concrete, measurable and time-specific targets.

#### ***Research time***

High-quality, curiosity-driven, and interdisciplinary research depends on sufficient protected research time. To fulfil our mission as a research-intensive institute and to safeguard the quality, visibility, and societal impact of our research, we are therefore firmly committed to maintaining the 40% research time of our assistant, associate, and full professors. At the same time, financial challenges related to government policies and shrinking student numbers may require rethinking this allocation. Before making such a fundamental step, we will first explore other opportunities to solidify our research finances. As part of faculty budget plans for 2026-2027, we will implement the following measures related to research time:

- Externally funded research time will no longer be fully deducted from teaching obligations. In the event of a successful research funding acquisition, the external funds will be used to partly finance the 40% standard research time (policy implemented in February 2026)
- We will develop a new faculty-wide policy for conference budgets (2026)

#### ***Research funding acquisition***

Sustaining a vibrant, interdisciplinary research culture and generating societal impact at scale requires a strong and diverse portfolio of external research funding. As mentioned above, external grants enable ERMeCHS to support ambitious research projects, maintain a dynamic research environment with PhD candidates and postdoctoral researchers, and strengthen international and societal collaborations. We therefore remain fully committed to upholding our current high level of external funding acquisition.

This will be done by:

- Continuing the high-quality grant support (2026-2030)
- Organizing workshops and trainings for Horizon EU, NWO and NWA funding programs at least once a year (2026-2030)
- Smoothing the grant application procedure for researchers and diminishing the administrative burden, amongst others, through the implementation of the project and portfolio management project Vidatum (2026)
- Developing talent programmes together with ERS (2027)
- Investing in our commitment to alternative funding streams and opportunities for contract research. Together with EUR-central we will develop standard procedures for contract research (2027)

- Monitoring and improving the financial yields of projects and outsourced researchers, and adjusting our grant acquisition policy in line with these findings. For example, we will continue to encourage grant programmes such as Horizon Europe, which combine strong societal impact potential with a financially healthy overhead (2026).
- Instructing all supervisors to use time for writing research grants more strategically, e.g. by making multi-year plans for grant acquisition with supervisees (2026-2030)
- Setting up a seed-money program together with ERS for promising individual and program-related applications (2026)
- Training for PIs aimed at enhancing insight into the financial and HR dimensions of externally funded projects (2026).

### ***Research quality assessment***

Research quality at ERMeCHS is understood as the production of rigorous, original, and relevant research that contributes to the advancement of knowledge in the humanities and social sciences and is recognized by peers within the relevant scholarly communities. Research quality is primarily assessed through qualitative evaluation and peer review, taking into account the diversity of research practices, outputs, and career stages. In line with the principles of responsible research assessment, ERMeCHS values a broad range of high-quality research outputs and activities, including publications, collaboration, leadership, and societal engagement, while avoiding overreliance on quantitative metrics. We will monitor and safeguard the quality of our research by:

- Implementing a new system for evaluating individual research output and activities (2026)
- Developing a balanced publication strategy that align academic output with societal impact, in tandem with the [ESHCC Impact Strategy](#), [ERMeCHS Research Quality Assessment System](#) and Recognition and Rewards program (2026)

### ***Research clusters***

Research clusters form the structural backbone of ERMeCHS's interdisciplinary research culture. They provide platforms for collaboration across disciplines, stimulate joint funding applications, and contribute to the visibility and impact of our research. Organized in a bottom-up manner, clusters enable researchers to initiate and develop thematic collaborations based on shared interests and emerging societal challenges. The Research Cluster Leads collectively constitute the Scientific Research Council, ensuring close alignment between grassroots initiatives and strategic governance.

To further strengthen the role of research clusters towards 2030:

- We will evaluate and, where necessary, refine the system of cluster membership to ensure openness, flexibility, and inclusivity (2026).
- We will review the procedures for initiating new clusters to safeguard dynamism while maintaining strategic coherence (2026).
- We will stimulate clusters to further develop their outward-facing role in funding acquisition, dissemination, and societal engagement.

This process will be carried out jointly by the Research Management Board and the Scientific Research Council.

### ***PhD community***

PhD candidates play a central role in the vitality, continuity, and innovation of ERMeCHS's research culture. They contribute significantly to the institute's research output, interdisciplinary collaboration, and international visibility, while also forming the next generation of scholars and research

professionals. We therefore cherish the strong and active PhD community at ERMeCHS and remain committed to facilitating the work and development of these early-career researchers in multiple ways:

- Continuing dedicated PhD support structures (2026-2030)
- Continuing the educational training for starting PhDs (2026-2030)
- Setting up PhD supervisors intervision meetings (2026-2030)
- Developing, implementing and monitoring guidelines for PhD project planning (including a clear standard for milestones and deliverables), to improve timely completion rates (2026)
- Improving PhD supervision quality through *mandatory* PhD Supervision training for starting supervisors and refresher courses for senior supervisors (2027)
- Proposing the establishment of a university-wide, dedicated ombudsperson for PhD students, as advised by our PhD community and the external assessment committee (2026)
- Implementing the new PhD manuscript guidelines (2026)
- Ensuring sustained research funding acquisition to support a yearly intake of approximately 12 new PhD candidates and 10 dissertations per year (2026-2030)

### ***Open and Responsible Science***

Open and responsible research practices are essential for ensuring research quality, transparency, and trust in science.<sup>1</sup> For ERMeCHS, openness and responsibility are closely connected to our commitment to societal engagement, ethical research conduct, and the careful stewardship of data, methods, and collaborations. We will therefore implement the key objectives of the Open and Responsible Science Action Plan, including:

- Ensuring broad accessibility to research outputs, such as publications, data, and software (2026-2030)
- Continuing the high open access publishing rate whilst moving from ‘green’ to ‘diamond’ open access (2026-2030)
- Organizing workshops for action research and citizen science (2027)
- Strengthening the role of Cultuur & Campus Putselaan as a centre of expertise in citizen science (2027-2030)
- Establishing one integrated policy for RDM, privacy, and ethics based on EUR principles, and streamline the related processes (2028)

### ***Embedding AI: making our researchers more AI-savvy***

As outlined above, the further development of artificial intelligence (AI) has far-reaching implications for the domains we study. At the same time, AI is profoundly reshaping the research landscape itself, transforming several core processes of academic research. These developments bring clear opportunities, but also entail significant risks that require critical reflection and responsible governance.<sup>2</sup> ERMeCHS will embed AI in research workflows where appropriate, evaluating how AI can make processes more effective and impactful. Use will be grounded in data protection and privacy, transparency, fairness, and environmental sustainability. Together with the EUR we will build an AI-aware research ecosystem across methods and disciplines through targeted training and critical reflection. Through our research, we will contribute to broader discussions on how AI is shaping our world. Concrete goals are:

---

<sup>1</sup> See for example the [Work Programme 2026-2027](#) of Open Science NL, the [Ambition Document 2030](#) of the National Open Science Programme and the [Open Science programme](#) of UNESCO.

<sup>2</sup> Compare these [living guidelines](#) on the responsible use of generative AI in research, published on the European Research Area Platform.

- Provide AI training and critical reflection workshops to build AI literacy and practice, also in collaboration with the ESHCC educational programs (2026-2030)
- Acquire internal and/or external funding for experimental AI tools for research (2026-2027)
- Integrate an AI risk questionnaire into existing ethics, privacy, and data management processes within ESHCC (2026)
- In connection with EUR developments, create an ESHCC specific AI Tooling Registry for common SSH tasks (e.g., transcription, qualitative coding, literature synthesis, visualisation) (2027)
- Publish open, reproducible guidelines and checklists for responsible AI use in SSH research, aligned with EUR developments (2027)
- Pilot and evaluate explainable archival/corpus analysis tools that maintain context and mitigate bias (2027-2028)

### **Internal collaboration**

Interdisciplinary and interdepartmental collaboration is a defining feature of ERMeCHS and a key driver of innovative, high-quality research. Building on our grassroots research culture, we remain committed to nurturing collaborations between researchers across disciplines and departments within our faculty, amongst other by:

- Further improving the internal communication about events and projects within ERMeCHS to ensure our researchers are aware of each other's research and opportunities for exchange and collaboration. This involves the promotion of an integrated event calendar (2026).<sup>3</sup>
- Continuing the financial support of our research clusters. Based on the annual evaluations in 2025, small adjustments might be made to the research clusters' organization in 2026, this in close collaboration with the Scientific Research Council (SRC) (2026-2030).
- Continuing the organization of faculty-wide Research Days. Each year we will have at least one ERMeCHS Research Day (2026-2030).

### **External collaboration**

Addressing complex societal challenges and strengthening the quality and relevance of our research requires sustained collaboration beyond the boundaries of ERMeCHS. Through strategic partnerships with academic peers and societal stakeholders, ERMeCHS enhances its research capacity, visibility, and impact. This will be done by:

- Promoting collaborations within EUR, Convergence, LDE, and UNIC (2026-2030)
- Promoting collaboration within the SSH Sector Plan Networks "*Cultural heritage and the creative industries, media & popular culture*", "*Responsible design and use of AI applications, digitization & technology*" and "*The Influence of Digitalisation on Work, Prosperity and Entrepreneurship*", resulting in a positive mid-term review (2026).
- Strengthening our engagement in the (research activities) of LDE centers, the Convergence, the [NWA](#) (National Research Agenda), [KIC](#) (Knowledge and Innovation Covenant), and the National SSH Sector Plan networks (2026-2030)
- Identifying and prioritizing key external collaborations and stakeholders to strengthen our scientific and societal impact (2027)
- Promoting our researchers for board positions at NWO, ERC, KNAW, NWA
- Due to financial constraints, we will pause the ERMeCHS visiting professor program (2026-2027). Instead, we will extend the number of endowed professors by building on our extensive societal network (2026-2030)

---

<sup>3</sup> Check the online [ESHCC Events Calendar](#).

### ***Branding our research institute***

A clear and distinctive profile is essential for strengthening the visibility, recognition, and competitiveness of our research institute in an increasingly crowded academic landscape. Enhancing the external identity of ERMeCHS supports our ability to attract talent, secure research funding, and engage effectively with academic and societal partners. In line with the recommendations of the external research assessment committee, we will therefore:

- Explore alternative names for our research institute and discuss these options with the full research community. The new name will be ‘unboxed’ during the annual Research Day (2026)
- Enhance external communication (create logo, template PPT and letter), as well as guidelines for affiliation use.

### ***Science communication***

Science communication plays a key role in making research accessible and meaningful to audiences beyond academia. For ERMeCHS, professional science communication supports the translation of research insights into broader societal contexts and facilitates engagement with diverse publics. We therefore aim to further strengthen science communication by building professional support structures for researchers. Potential measures are:

- Organizing yearly Science communication workshops for the entire faculty. The workshops will provide science communication support for staff and will ensure we maintain and increase visibility and reputation of our research (2026-2030)
- Although budgetary space is currently limited, we will actively look for opportunities to provide professional support in the field of science communication (2027-2030)
- Increasing public awareness of ESHCC research activities by placing one relevant research project in the spotlight, every two months. We will establish an expert group from within the faculty that comes together each month to discuss most suitable science communications channels to do this, e.g. ‘explainer videos’, a podcast, a faculty message on LinkedIn (2026-2030)
- Keeping the website up-to-date (2026-2030)

### ***Impact and societal partners***

Addressing complex societal challenges requires sustained, reciprocal collaboration between academic research and societal partners. For ERMeCHS, societal impact is not understood as one-way knowledge transfer, but as a process of co-creation in which academic and societal expertise are brought together to generate relevant and responsible insights. Our [Impact Strategy](#) therefore aims to further strengthen long-term partnerships with societal actors and to embed stakeholder engagement structurally within our research portfolio. We will undertake the following actions:

- We will create a faculty-wide board composed of societal partners and members from staff and professional services to oversee our ongoing research and research goals. The board will strategically ensure that the research initiatives we undertake remain relevant for wider society, and it will provide advice on likely future directions and opportunities (2027)
- We will develop five long term strategic alliances with partners, through which we build transdisciplinary research networks. We will seek collaboration with the educational programs of our faculty as well as collaboration with other faculties at the university to participate in this (2027)
- We will develop guidelines that outline principles for ethical and effective partnerships with societal partners, while also safeguarding the independence of our research (2028)

Figure 1: Impact domains and ERMeCHS Research Clusters

Impact domain	ERMeCHS Research Clusters
Digital citizenship and human centred AI	Responsible Engagement with AI, Culture and Technology (REACT) Journalism, Information Technologies and Media Use (JIM) Research in Digital Humanities (Hum-Andr010d) Virtual Environments, Games and Society (VEGAS) Responsible Organizations: Communication, Change and Society (ROCCS) The Visual in Media, Culture, Society & History (VISUAL)
Culture, identity and wellbeing	Heritage and Identity (HI) Rotterdam Popular Music Studies (RPMS) The Visual in Media, Culture, Society & History (VISUAL) Virtual Environments, Games and Society (VEGAS) Popular Culture and Inequalities (PCI) Values in the Creative Economy (ViCE)
Sustainability in the media, arts and creative sectors	Values in the Creative Economy (ViCE) Rotterdam Popular Music Studies (RPMS) Sustainable Transitions in Culture & Societies (STiCS) Virtual Environments, Games and Society (VEGAS) Responsible Engagement with AI, Culture and Technology (REACT)
Resilient communities and social transformation	Sustainable Transitions in Culture & Societies (STiCS) Responsible Organizations: Communication, Change and Society (ROCCS) Heritage and Identity (HI) Popular Culture and Inequalities (PCI)
Diversity and inclusion in a globalizing world	Global Futures, Colonial Pasts (GFCP) Heritage and Identity (HI) Popular Culture and Inequalities (PCI)