

# A RESEARCH STAY AT ICOURTS: LESSONS IN EMPATHY

By A. Küçüksu

**Imagine being in the first year of writing your doctoral thesis. You thought that your Master's thesis writing experience would be an accurate proxy for what writing your PhD thesis would be like, but you are slowly coming to terms with the truth that it never was. You thought that you had a bulletproof plan for keeping on top of your work from day one, but all the conferences you've had to attend have somehow got in the way. It has now been a few months since you officially entered the world of academia, and yet you are not only spending a disproportionate amount of time struggling with fine-tuning your research question, but you are also surrounded by intellectuals of such calibre that you cannot help but feel out of place. Enter iCourts: the research centre where this intense imposter-syndrome experience is turned on its head.**



Nothing about the circumstances has changed. You are still a novice in this, your research still needs major adjustments, and you are still surrounded by people whose work you have read, admired and quoted on many occasions. Yet something feels different. All these academics that you have spent your degree revering are being very approachable and friendly towards you. They show a genuine interest in your nascent work and are generous with their constructive advice. They say that their door is always open to you should you have any questions and their promise holds true when you return to their office for a chat a second, a third, and even a fourth time. They invite you to lunch and coffee and some of them even take the chance and ask you to co-author a piece with them. You are a novice in a sea of experts, but you are allowed to forget that whilst you are at iCourts.

For those who know me, it goes without saying that I am biased towards iCourts. How could I not be? The time I spent there as a research assistant as part of the exciting 'From Dogma to Data' project provided me with a most valuable experience and the most terrific network of brilliant individuals. Applying for a research stay there during my PhD was no coincidence, as with my familiarity of the working culture at the centre, came the many reasons I wanted to go back. After all, the focal point of my research is an international court, namely the Court of Justice of the European Union, so what better place to be then there?

The cutting-edge research opportunities (which cannot be overstated) aside, iCourts is a research centre which operates on a flat organisational structure and has an open-door policy. That is to say that as part of the iCourts family (and it does feel like a family) I have felt welcome, if not encouraged, to discuss my work with all the academics there. For me, this has meant that I have received constructive feedback on my work on a weekly basis. Whether it has had to do with petty questions on structure and content or grand questions on theory or practice, no person at iCourts has ever said they were too busy to see me. Their comments and reading recommendations have enabled my thesis' organic growth into an ambitious work in progress.

The culmination of this feedback culture, so central to the workings of iCourts, was the public lunch seminar which every guest researcher is encouraged to do. In it, I was asked to hold a thirty-minute presentation on my research before an audience from the academic community, which would have made for a very intimidating event elsewhere. Yet, being faced with the constructive input of every single person present at the seminar and the detailed attention with which these academics engaged with my novice work added up to the most humbling of experiences. I realised that beyond teaching me how to be a better academic, the people at iCourts were teaching me how to be a better person: patient, curious, and empathetic.

Thank you, iCourts family, for you have taught me so much.

Thank you, GEM-STONES, for making this experience come true.



Photos:  
Copenhagen University/ Christoffer Regild  
A. Küçüksu

**Aysel Küçüksu (GEM-STONES)** is writing her thesis on “The Role of the European Court of Justice in Framing the Principles of Distributive Global Justice”, at Université de Genève (CH) and LUISS Guido Carli di Roma (IT).

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PUBLIC EVENT - 16<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2017

**Book Presentation**

«Assessing European Neighborhood Policy. Perspectives from the Literature»

**Chair:**

Aude Merlin (ULB)

**Speakers:**

Hrant Kostanyan (CEPS), Artem Remizov (LUISS & ULB)  
& Johann Wolfschwenger (UNIGE & ULB)

**Time & Location:**

16:00 - 18:00 CET

Kant Room, Institute of European Studies-ULB

39-41 Avenue Franklin Roosevelt, 1050 Brussels, Belgium



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