

PhD student: Frank Götz, RUG

Keywords: Policy analysis; Migrants; Social Cohesion; Residential segregation; Municipal policy

Project title: The Impact of Migrant-Group-Specific Policies on Social Cohesion

The PhD project is part of the cluster *Policies and Social Cohesion* within the transdisciplinary SOCION project. This cluster examines how policies can facilitate the integration of diverse social groups while maintaining social cohesion within and between groups. On the one hand, recognizing the specific challenges and needs of distinct social groups can be crucial to ensuring acknowledgement, inclusion and tailored support. On the other hand, such recognition risks reinforcing divisions and, paradoxically, promoting segregation. This creates a central tension. Under what circumstances do group-specific policies strengthen social cohesion, and when might they undermine it?

The PhD project focuses specifically on the analysis of vertical connections, (sub-)national policies and groups, in combination with analysis of horizontal connections, migrants and wider population. Governments sometimes adopt national policies aimed at particular migrant groups, for example through tax benefits for highly skilled migrants, priority in housing for refugees, or support for irregular migrants. Sometimes, local accommodation and adaptation of these policies to these groups may be more effective than a single one-size-fits-all approach. The PhD project aims to disentangle which local circumstances and practices facilitate the integration of various migrant groups targeted in national or sub-national policies while simultaneously upholding social cohesion in and between all societal groups.

The first study of the PhD will focus on the Dutch 30% rule, a tax benefit for highly skilled migrants. The policy provides a useful case because its eligibility criteria, duration, and level of benefit have changed repeatedly over time. These changes create opportunities to examine how different versions of a migrant-group-specific policy are associated with social cohesion outcomes. The study will initially investigate the relationship between the 30% rule and residential segregation via economic housing theory. Further ways of exploration are possible negative responses from not eligible groups, who might perceive the 30% rule as preferential treatment at their expense, thereby threatening social cohesion at large. One possible empirical strategy is to combine information on policy changes and local variation with CBS microdata and municipal-level indicators.

The findings from this first study will inform the subsequent direction of the PhD. Further studies may continue to examine the 30% rule in greater depth or broaden the focus to other migrant-group-specific policies and municipal responses. This could include developing a typology of local policy approaches, examining how municipalities differ in targeting specific groups versus broader categories of residents, or studying differences in the allocation of resources to group-specific and

general policies. Ultimately, the PhD aims to provide systematic evidence on conditions and mechanisms through which migrant-group-specific policies can support integration without weakening cohesion within and between societal groups.

Supervisors: Liesbet Heyse (RUG); John Tang (UU)