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Beyond the idea of polarization: superdiversity as an alternative perspective for Dutch cities

Más allá de la idea de la polarización: la superdiversidad como perspectiva alternativa para las ciudades en los Países Bajos

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Abstract: Superdiversity is challenging conventional policy discourses and policy categories. Whereas legal categories and policies assume clearly demarcated groups, superdiversity helps understand the complex intersectionalities that make up today's cities. When simplistic categories and discourses meet social complexity, this can feed sentiments of crisis and polarization. This article aims to develop superdiversity as a perspective that helps understand rather than deny social complexity. It positions The Netherlands as a revelatory case study on how superdiversity is challenging conventional policy discourses and policy categories. The article shows that discourses on crisis and polarization in Dutch societies can be better understood as misinterpretations of social complexity than as actual tensions between clearly demarcated groups. A superdiverse society involves a high degree of fragmentation, as a result of the broader processes of globalization,

individualization and technologization. Migration and diversity have come to symbolize discomfort with these processes.

Keywords: superdiversity, policy categorization, social complexity, governance, polarization, crisis.

Resumen: La superdiversidad está poniendo en entredicho los discursos convencionales sobre políticas, así como las categorías utilizadas en esas políticas. Mientras que las categorías legales y las políticas asumen la existencia de grupos claramente demarcados, la superdiversidad ayuda a comprender las complejas interseccionalidades que surgen en las ciudades de hoy en día. Cuando categorías simplonas y discursos superficiales se enfrentan a complejidades sociales, pueden alimentar sentimientos de crisis y generar polarización. Este artículo pretende abordar la superdiversidad como una perspectiva que ayuda a comprender, más que a negar, la complejidad de nuestras sociedades. Presenta a los Países Bajos como un revelador caso de estudio sobre cómo la superdiversidad está cuestionando los discursos convencionales sobre políticas y las categorías que utilizan. El artículo revela que los discursos sobre la crisis y la polarización en las ciudades de los Países Bajos debieran entenderse como lecturas equivocadas de la complejidad social, más que como tensiones reales entre grupos sociales distintos. Una sociedad superdiversa implica necesariamente un alto nivel de fragmentación, como consecuencia de procesos generales de globalización, individualización y tecnologización. Las migraciones y la diversidad han pasado a representar la inquietud con este tipo de procesos.

Palabras clave: superdiversidad, categorizaciones políticas, complejidad social, gobernanza, polarización, crisis.

Introduction

Superdiversity is challenging conventional policy discourses and policy categories (Vertovec 2023). Especially at the urban level (Wessendorf 2010), where superdiversity becomes most manifest, it reveals the social complexity behind discourses on polarization, policy categories, discrimination and inclusion. Whereas legal categories and policies often assume clearly demarcated groups, superdiversity helps understand the complex intersectionalities that make up today's cities. However when simplistic categories and discourses meet social complexity, this often feeds sentiments of crisis and polarization. Therefore, the objective of this article is to develop superdiversity as a perspective that helps understand rather than deny social complexity.

The Netherlands is a revelatory case study on how superdiversity is challenging conventional policy discourses and policy categories. Diversity is not new in itself in the Netherlands, as a small country with an open economy at the crossroads of other countries, as a country with strong cultural and religious diversity domestically ('pillarization') and a country with a strong history of (de)colonization). But the nature of diversity and the degree of diversity have changed, especially in urban areas as Rotterdam, The Hague and Amsterdam. Diversity itself has become much more diverse or 'complex', no longer characterised by clearly defined groups but rather formed along multiple factors (background, religion, socio-economic status, sexuality, gender, ethnicity, legal status, etc.) that are often interrelated in complex ways. Diversity has increasingly become a characteristic of society rather than a characteristic for specific groups. In other words, the Netherlands has become a 'superdiverse society', and diversity a societal issue.

Superdiversity requires a new perspective on today's diverse cities in the Netherlands. Migration and migration-related diversity are of great importance in this respect, but in a migration society they cannot be seen separately from other forms of diversity such as socio-economic status, education, gender, etc. Policy no longer has to do with specific groups or 'minorities', but with a society with a great complexity of diversities that can come together in specific ways in individuals. Policy for the superdiverse society has therefore increasingly become general policy. For example, it is increasingly about housing and diversity, the labour market and diversity, foreign policy and diversity, neighbourhood policy and diversity, etc. This requires not only a rethinking of policy and policy categorisations, but also a different form of organisation and coordination of policy across sectors, layers

and groups. Superdiversity policy is therefore a form of complexity policy.

However, the Dutch case is also revelatory in terms of its struggles with diversity and social complexity. It is one of the countries where the idea of a migration crisis and a 'multicultural tragedy' has come to the fore most distinctly. There is a strong belief that migration and diversity are the motors behind polarization in Dutch society, which has been the single most important issue during most national parliamentary elections over the past decade or so (Scholten 2025). From a superdiversity perspective, this article challenges the idea of crisis or fragmentation due to migration and diversity; it rather argues that a crisis sensation is defined and fragmentation perceived due to a misunderstanding of social complexity in society.

This article uses the Dutch case study for developing superdiversity as a new perspective on urban policies and social categories. First, I will outline the background of superdiversity; what has changed, and what do we notice about it? Then I will look at the meaning and implications of superdiversity for society, and I will list what is known from (recent) literature. Then I will discuss more specifically the meaning of superdiversity for policy; are there policy models with policy alternatives and what do these models require in terms of policy coordination and in terms of policy language?

1. **Superdiversity**

Migration has become increasingly 'intertwined' with all kinds of other forms of diversity. Migration-related diversity is often linked in very complex ways to general processes of inclusion and exclusion that have to do with socio-economic status, education, ethnicity and gender, for example. Or consider how identity formation often has a strongly multiple character in which ethnicity, sexuality, class and other factors can play an important role. This is at odds with a social debate in which, also in politics and the media, the emphasis is often on specific migrant groups ('the Moroccans', 'the Muslims', 'the Syrians'). This creates a tendency to deny or ignore the intertwining of diversity, and to see behaviour as typical of specific groups. Such a discourse can unintentionally promote polarisation, and reduce attention for how fragmentation in a super-diverse society can indeed lead to problems due to a combination of circumstances. It is therefore important that we in a super-diverse society also develop a language to understand society and not unintentionally stir up tensions.

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1.1. *Defining superdiversity*

The migration society is just one part of a broader superdiverse society characterized by a high degree of social complexity. *Superdiversity* is a term that is increasingly used in science and beyond to indicate a fundamental change in the nature of migration and diversity and to explain why it has increasingly become a societal issue. The term originates from American anthropology, where Hollinger (1995) was one of the first to describe a post-ethnic America where diversity had become so 'diverse' that traditional ethnic forms of distinction no longer worked. The term itself was first raised by Steven Vertovec (2007), who pointed to the changing nature of diversity in the United Kingdom. In the Netherlands, the term is now used more broadly (such as by Crul and Lelie 2023, Scholten 2025), although the Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR) still opted for the related concept of 'migrationdiversity.'

Roughly speaking, superdiversity refers to three closely interrelated societal changes:

— *The broadening of diversity*. Diversity refers to an ever-increasing part of the population with increasingly different backgrounds. For example, Crul and Lelie (2023) speak of the emergence of majority-minority cities, or cities in which more than half of the population has a first- or second-generation migration background. In what the WRR calls 'new diversity', it also emerges that there are increasingly more different migrant groups; the classic migrant groups make up an increasingly smaller part of the total population with a migration background. Moreover, diversity plays a role in an ever-increasing part of society; it has long ceased to be a metropolitan issue. Diversity therefore affects society in an increasingly broader sense (see appendix A for an overview of the development of the population with a first or second migration background in the Netherlands and in a number of cities).

— *The deepening of diversity*. Diversity itself has become increasingly diverse. Distinctions based on ethnicity or culture and also the distinction between majorities and minorities have increasingly lost their meaning. That is why categorisations from the past such as 'ethnic minorities' or 'allochthones' have also become increasingly problematic. According to Vertovec (2023), diversity is characterised by a high degree of 'social complexity'

in which various backgrounds intersect, such as ethnicity and culture, but also class, education, religion, legal status, lifestyle, political preference, etc. According to Vertovec, the 'new diversity' is precisely about intersectionality, or the way in which within diversity various backgrounds overlap (or not), such as class and ethnicity.

— *The changing nature of mobility*. Migration is no longer simply a linear process in which a migrant leaves a country of origin, embarks on a migration journey, and arrives in a country of settlement and participates, integrates and assimilates there. In science, people increasingly speak of 'mobility' instead of 'migration', or even of 'liquid mobility' which involves an increasing number of different forms of mobility (Engbersen and Snel 2013). It has long been the case that, as in the time of the 'guest workers', there would hardly be any return. Migrants are indeed migrating more and more often, both back to the country of origin and on to another location. In this context, there is often a high degree of uncertainty, both among migrants themselves and in society, about the duration of their stay. Certainly, in a relatively small country like the Netherlands, we see an increasingly high degree of 'fluidity' in society, which is reflected in, among other things, rising emigration figures in addition to rising immigration figures.

1.2. *Superdiversity and policy*

Superdiversity has important implications for policy, policy discourses and legal categories used in policies. This does not only concern migration and diversity policy, or what used to be called integration policy. Superdiversity as a societal issue has implications for policy in a broad sense, across various policy sectors and across various policy levels. In fact, much migration policy is economic policy, and much 'integration policy' is precisely education policy, labour market policy, neighbourhood policy, social policy or housing policy. This is of course at odds with the tendency to portray migration and 'integration' primarily as special and separate policy areas; there is therefore a gap between the political reality and the sociological reality surrounding migration and integration. In this section, I will discuss the diversity of policy models that can be associated with superdiversity. In addition, I will look at how policy can be coordinated in the context of complex societal issues. Finally, I will look at two special issues in the

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context of superdiversity and policy; which idiom do we need to be able to interpret superdiversity, and how can one collaborate with relevant societal groups and movements in superdiversity.

The literature distinguishes between various policy models for dealing with migration-related diversity. These models are still applied in various places under various circumstances. There is an increasing amount of literature that shows how different models relate to superdiversity. In fact, the 'mismatch' between policy model and social reality of diversity is seen as one of the explanations for the often experienced 'crisis mode' in this policy area. The assumptions on which policy is based, such as the nature of mobility or diversity, are then at odds with the social reality in which migration and diversity have become societal issues. This creates a 'crisis feeling' that plays an important role in the social unease surrounding migration and diversity and can unintentionally play an important role in polarisation; 'crisis' puts relationships on edge.

In international and national literature, the following models are distinguished (see, among others, WRR 2020, Scholten 2011, Entzinger 2000, 2006, Koopmans et al. 2005):

— *Laissez faire policy:* in this model, no coordinated policy is pursued with regard to migration and diversity. Dealing with these themes is left to the market and/or society. This policy was dominant in the Netherlands until the 1970s, when it was assumed that migrants would only stay temporarily. Elements of *laissez faire* policy can still be found today, including in the Netherlands; for example, the idea that integration is an individual responsibility of those involved, and/or that integration should actually be left to the market. With regard to superdiversity, *laissez faire* also states that the government should be very reluctant to intervene with regard to specific forms of diversity, because of the risk of not properly understanding the complexity of diversity, or the idea that governments should generally refrain from intervening in the private sphere.

— *Differentialism:* in this model, policy is coordinated, but not aimed at inclusion or integration, but at 'living apart together'. This model is reminiscent of the Dutch pillarization history, where consultation via elites of communities played a key role (Scholten 2011). The beginning of the Dutch multicultural model in the 1980s shows elements of this model. The efforts of migrant parties in Dutch politics also contain elements of

differentialism. The concept of 'polarization' itself also contains aspects of differentialism, because it mainly refers to contrasts between groups or movements.

— *Multiculturalism:* this is a model that has been used and abused a lot in social and political discourse, but scientifically means that migrants emancipate and participate in society from their own community and their own identity. So integration but with preservation of identity. This is the model that is closest to the minority policy of the 1980s (see also Entzinger 2006).
— *Integrationism:* this model is also about integration, as the name suggests, but community and identity do not play a central role. Integration is mainly about how individual migrants participate in the socio-economic sphere, i.e. living, working and knowing. This is the model that the Netherlands applied in the 1990s and is also the basis for the integration policy aimed at equipping migrants to be full citizens. Integrationism shows strong similarities with universalism but focuses much more specifically on migrants who need to integrate.
— *Assimilationism:* in this model, integration has not only a socio-economic but also a socio-cultural meaning. In order to fully participate in society, one must also adopt values and norms and conform to social conventions in society. First adapt, then participate. The Netherlands has incorporated elements of this model since the 00s, for example with elements of knowledge of Dutch society as part of the integration policy.
— *Universalism:* this is a classic model in which dealing with diversity (and migration) is part of a general policy aimed at the entire diverse population (Koopmans et al. 2005, Scholten 2011). So a general policy aimed at reducing disadvantages, promoting language proficiency, developing intercultural skills, etc. Since the end of the 2010s, with the gradual dismantling of the integration policy, Dutch policy has increasingly moved in this direction.
— *Interculturalism:* finally, interculturalism deserves special attention as an increasingly prominent emerging model of diversity policy. Interculturalism focuses on creating the conditions for contact and encounter in society (Zapata-Barrero 2015). It differs from multiculturalism in that it does not focus on the promotion of the individuality of groups, but rather on contact between groups. And it differs from universalism in that it actively focuses on the promotion of contact between migrant communities and the rest of society. Internationally,

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this model is widely used by cities, including in the United Kingdom (London, Birmingham) and Spain (Barcelona).

Superdiversity is not a policy model itself, but a model of societal developments. We can, however, say something about the theoretical fit or misfit between superdiversity and the various models. Where in the Dutch context superdiversity is sometimes confused with multiculturalism, there is no fit between the focus of multiculturalism on specific and clearly defined groups and the focus of superdiversity on complexity and intersectionalities (Scholten et al. 2019). A target group policy aimed at ethnic groups would not fit in a superdiverse context (Vertovec 2023).

Several researchers also argue that superdiversity does not go well with assimilationism. Crul and Lelie (2023) argue that in a context of superdiversity it is no longer clear who should assimilate into what. Precisely because concepts such as majority and minority lose meaning in such a context. Incidentally, integrationism can go well with superdiversity, as long as attention is paid to socio-economic aspects and as long as integration on a socio-cultural level is truly a two-way process in which migrants and non-migrants mutually adapt to each other.

Superdiversity fits best with models such as universalism and interculturalism, which can be applied in various specific contexts. Superdiversity turns migration and diversity into societal issues, for which universalism is a suitable model. It aims to organize migration and diversity for the entire diverse society and across many policy areas. However, universalism runs the risk of paying too little attention to issues of social cohesion, which the literature notes are to be expected for superdiversity. It therefore seems most applicable in metropolitan settings where there is a very high degree of everyday superdiversity (Wessendorf 2010). That is why interculturalism (Abdou and Geddes 2020) is a better model for specific situations where promoting cohesion and contact between groups requires further attention. Here too, we often see that this applies at the urban or neighborhood level.

Table 1.

Institutional fit of policy models with superdiversity

Policy model	Fit with superdiversity
Laissez-Faire policy	— Risks that superdiversity reduces cohesion — Research shows that living together does not happen automatically

Policy model	Fit with superdiversity
Differentialism	— Social complexity of superdiversity makes it unclear on what basis groups should be distinguished; target group policy is impossible — Intersectionalities have become the rule rather than the exception
Multiculturalism	— Social complexity of superdiversity makes it unclear on what basis groups should be distinguished; target group policy is impossible + Attention to how different cultural backgrounds come together
Integrationism	+ Policies aimed at economic participation remain necessary — Socio-cultural dimension of integration less appropriate — Integration must be a two-way process (which is often not the case with integrationism)
Assimilationism	— Unclear who should assimilate into what — Concepts of majority and minority have lost meaning
Universalism	+ Policy aimed at the entire diverse population + Embedding in general policy — Risk of color blindness, where super diversity requires good cultural understanding
Interculturalism	+ Create space for meeting and contact + Focus on local level

2. **The Dutch case: polarization versus superdiversity**

The fact that the Netherlands has become a migration society has been a subject of societal debate for some time now. We have known for more than half a century that the Netherlands is an immigration country, which according to some is not even that new from a historical perspective (Obdeijn and Schrover 2008). However, we are now seeing more and more clearly that the transformation that the Netherlands is going through is not only related to immigration and emigration, but that it is changing society as a whole; it has become a superdiverse society. Migration and migration-related diversity have become societal issues, with important implications not only for migrants but for society. These topics are related to the organization of our economy, the way in which education is provided (think of multilingualism and citizenship education), the organization of public space (building for encounters), for art, culture, sports and so on.

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2.1. *Background of superdiversity in the Netherlands*

How the Netherlands became a superdiverse society is linked to much broader changes in our society (see also Scholten 2020). First of all, *globalization*, or an increasingly deep connection with, and therefore also dependence on, the rest of the world. This is certainly very tangible in a small country with an open economy like the Netherlands. Think of how the war in Palestine or the political struggle within Turkey now often have direct consequences for tension in Dutch society. In addition, a process of *individualization*, in which the individual has become increasingly central almost everywhere in the world, and often even comes to stand above the community. Individualization also changes the process of integration; who actually integrates into what? And finally, the process of *technologization*, in which technology has become increasingly important in our lives, and has also made new forms of mobility, contact and identification possible. Also think of how social media plays a role in spreading potentially polarizing stories about alleged actions of alleged groups, as the recent riots in the United Kingdom show. These three processes together cause an increase in societal complexity, which is characteristic of superdiversity. Superdiverse societies are not necessarily polarized societies, but rather complex societies with a high degree of fragmentation.

The perspective of superdiversity is at odds with more conventional thinking about groups, or 'pigeonholing'. For example, thinking about migration and (migration-related) diversity in the Netherlands is strongly influenced by thinking in terms of ethnic or cultural groups and speaking in terms of majorities and minorities. Almost everyone in the Netherlands will be able to name classic migration groups, such as Surinamese, Antilleans, Moroccans and Turks. Moreover, thinking in terms of minorities resonated with the deep-rooted thinking on religious and cultural pillarization in the Netherlands (Lijphart 1979), and with the need for a target group policy to be able to specifically improve the position of these groups. This is the basis of the Dutch Ethnic Minorities policy, which received a lot of international attention at the end of the last century.

This thinking about the emancipation of minorities later developed into thinking about integration. This led to an integration policy, which specifically focused on fitting into societies of people with a migration background. This policy mainly emphasized the social-economic areas for integration (work, housing, education), but from the 2000s onwards it increasingly also had a socio-cultural approach. Integration

meant that migrants had to become part of Dutch society. This was often described as a two-sided process, but in practice it mostly meant that migrants had to integrate and Dutch society had to help them with this and also had to leave room for integration (Schinkel 2018).

Since the 2000s, this was increasingly targeted in particular at Muslim migrants in the Netherlands. Increasingly, public and political debate on integration became conflated with debate on Islam (Obdeijn and Schrover 2008). In 2002, the Pim Fortuyn Party became part of a government coalition, on a political party program that focused on the struggle 'against the islamisation of society.' Also for the Freedom Party of Geert Wilders, the integration debate was in particular about 'protecting' Dutch society from the influences of Islam. This is also manifested in policy proposals suggested by the Freedom Party (currently the largest party in the Netherlands) against any form of muslim immigration, but also for putting fines on owning a Quran or entering a mosque. These plans never made it into policy, but are still part of the Freedom Party's official party program.

Thinking in terms of oppositions between groups is not only a common thread between thinking about minorities, integration and Islam in particular, but also with the terminology of 'polarization'. Polarization assumes increasing oppositions between groups that are generally recognizable and well demarcated. In a complex and superdiverse society, this is, despite the undiminished symbolic significance of specific identities, often much less the case. This does not mean that there are no oppositions and conflicts in a superdiverse society; however, these are better described as fragmentation than as polarization.

Finally, superdiversity does not manifest itself in the same way everywhere; there is no single superdiverse model. As Engbersen and Scholten (2018) and the WRR (2020) show, superdiversity can manifest itself in very different ways in different cities or even in different neighbourhoods. In a post-industrial city like Rotterdam, the various diversities such as class, ethnicity and residence status come together in a very different way than in a middle-class city like Hilversum. There are very different types of urban diversity configurations. Superdiversity therefore brings a high degree of complexity.

2.2. *Societal implications of superdiversity*

The literature on the implications of superdiversity is still developing and far from unambiguous. However, a broad picture is already

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emerging, including the implications for migrants themselves, for cohesion in society, and (part of the next section) for policy.

If we look at the migrant himself, superdiversity places the position of migrants much more in the perspective of individualisation. Migrants are no longer approached as members of a specific group or community (not only by policy but also by society). On the one hand, this does justice to the often very versatile and multiple ways in which people identify themselves. For someone of the second or third generation of Moroccan migrants in the Netherlands, the Moroccan identity may still be important to a certain extent and especially in certain contexts. But this also applies to many other aspects of one's own identity. For example, research shows that young people of a Moroccan or Turkish background increasingly identify locally rather than with their country of origin or settlement (Entzinger and Dourleijn 2008). Emphasising multiple identities prevents migrants from being locked up in their community through an 'ethnic lens', as it were, and from having their ethnic identity imposed on them as dominant outside of their own choice.

On the other hand, this superdiverse approach to identities is at odds with the still (and perhaps increasingly) important role that ethnic and religious identities in particular play in the social debate. In everyday racism, apart from the sociological analysis of identity formation, more visible and simple forms of diversity are emphasized, such as color and religion. And even apart from racism, ethnic identity is still important to many migrants, which is certainly possible within the image of superdiversity. Superdiversity does not mean that groups or communities would or could no longer play a role, but it does put an end to the assumption that diversity can always be captured in terms of clearly defined groups. This also does not mean that ethnicity and religious diversity cannot play an important symbolic role in social polarization; superdiversity does offer a perspective to deconstruct this symbolism and to understand the broader social background of polarization. For example, how ethnic polarization, such as in the banlieues of Paris, often in fact reflected the increased socio-economic inequality in such neighborhoods, or the inequality in access to good public services, housing and education. Researchers on the rise of political support for anti-migrant parties also show that such support is often related to fear of globalization, and the feeling that individualization makes certain people less able to rely on the community.

Superdiversity also has various broader implications for society. The WRR (2020) shows, based on broader research, that superdiverse neighbourhoods are generally associated with a lower degree of

cohesion. For example, in superdiverse neighbourhoods one sees what the WRR describes as 'feelings of loss', the longing for cohesion from the past. One also sees a lower sense of safety (which is not the same as actually lower safety) and a lower sense of home. According to the WRR, the concept of 'public familiarity' plays an important role in this; it is not so much about a lot going wrong, it is about a feeling of less familiarity with the neighbourhood. In addition, Van der Meer and Tolsma (2014) show that an increase in diversity is also associated with a decrease in social capital; so the more superdiverse a neighbourhood, the less social capital.

Recent research by Crul and Lelie (2023) offers a somewhat more specific picture. They show that, especially among the somewhat higher educated population, there are somewhat more positive views on diversity, and that it also matters a lot how diversity was discussed in one's own family and what experience one had with diversity at a young age at school. They also see that people with a negative view on diversity often also experience a high degree of distance from policy and politics; it is therefore related to broader dissatisfaction.

Both the WRR (2020) and Crul and Lelie (2023) show that living together in a superdiverse context does not happen automatically. Superdiversity is a de facto transformation in our society but is certainly not always 'super' in the sense that it is all without challenges. Researchers disagree to what extent this has only to do with migration and diversity themselves. Vertovec (2023) argues that superdiversity and declining social cohesion are a manifestation of two much broader societal transformations: individualization and globalization. People move much more loosely from communities and social structures and over greater distances than before, which causes the traditional cohesion within more homogeneous communities to decline. According to Vertovec, dealing with superdiversity is actually about dealing with social complexity in a broader sense; certain parts of the population are better at dealing with this, and also benefit more from it, than others.

Finally, there is emerging research showing temporal effects in attitudes towards superdiversity; it shows that over time people seem to get used to superdiversity (Vertovec 2019). In fact, research on voter behaviour in Rotterdam has shown that acceptance of diversity seems to increase in neighbourhoods in the city centre with a long tradition of diversity, while resistance to superdiversity seems to increase in neighbourhoods more on the outskirts where diversification is more recent. In this way, acceptance of diversity

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would radiate like a 'halo' to the suburbs. This somewhat resonates findings from other research showing that voters for populist parties such as the Freedom Party (initially) mainly came from regions with relatively few migrants (Harteveld et al. 2022). Although more research on this halo effect is needed, the initial findings may have important implications for how we might understand the increased resistance to diversification in the Netherlands. It would offer a perspective in which superdiversity increasingly becomes normal in an increasing number of neighbourhoods and cities in the Netherlands, and attention will shift to those areas (suburbs, medium-sized cities) where dealing with diversity has only recently received attention.

3. **Superdiversity as a new perspective for policy and categorisations**

The Dutch case helps understand how superdiversity challenges policy models and policy categories. It shows how conventional ways of perceiving diversity contribute to sensations of crisis and polarization, whereas the social complexity of superdiversity is especially manifested in intersectionalities and multiple overlapping 'fragmentations' in often strongly contextualized ways. There is no 'one size fits all.' Actually, not fitting a situation, or forcibly imposing a policy model, can reinforce the 'crisis' feeling that plays such an important role in social discontent and polarization in this area. Developing the superdiversity perspective further, based on the Dutch case, several important analytical contributions can be made on how to respond to superdiversity in a way that does not produce such crisis sensation. This includes how policies are coordinated, how policy categorisations are used, and how policy engagement or forms of cooperations are shaped.

3.1. *Policy complexity and superdiversity: Horizontal and vertical policy coordination*

Positioning superdiversity in the world of policy models does not say everything about 'how' this policy should be developed and implemented. Precisely because different policy models can be applied in different situations of superdiversity, the coordination of policy is important.

Horizontal policy coordination is of great importance, precisely to ensure that superdiversity as a societal issue actually receives the attention it needs across various policy areas. In the literature on public administration, this is also called mainstreaming (Scholten 2020), as it is also applied to gender mainstreaming and climate mainstreaming. Various studies show that, for example, education is a core sector when it comes to dealing with migration-related diversity. In the Netherlands, for example, consider citizenship education, in which dealing with diversity is increasingly seen as a so-called '21st century skill' is being developed. But also consider, for example, the discussion on the internationalisation of higher education, or migration-related discussions in the field of housing and the labour market. Access to the labour market is still an important condition for inclusion (WRR 2020). The same applies to access to affordable housing, but also to housing planning that promotes rather than discourages encounters and contact between groups.

Dealing with migration-related diversity can therefore no longer be a policy silo. That would also give the impression that it is not a societal theme, but a problem specific to migrants. This also applies to migration policy, where there is still much less mainstreaming. In fact, migration is determined to a very large extent by a country's economic policy, and to some extent also by social and labour market policy. What we now call migration policy is in fact only the final link in a chain of migration management, and often too late or too limitedly effective to have much influence.

However, the instruments for horizontal policy coordination are very limited. In the Netherlands, there is no structure or culture for horizontal policy coordination, which makes the mainstreaming of superdiversity extremely complex or difficult. Knowledge and information, as produced by the Social and Cultural Planning Office, traditionally play an important role as a coordination instrument; figures show to what extent the social position of migrants in specific sectors requires further attention. But here the problem is increasingly occurring that diversity is increasingly difficult to capture in clearly defined groups. In addition to knowledge, political-administrative leadership is an important instrument for horizontal coordination. It would be good not to isolate the responsibility for migration and diversity in a separate portfolio (so no superdiversity minister or alderman), but to make it part of a broad dossier of someone with authority over multiple portfolios. Think of how integration was previously assigned to a deputy prime minister, or how in many cities the mayor plays a central role in keeping a vision on diversity together. In Rotterdam, the horizontal coordination of policy is also being

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promoted by means of a city marine on discrimination, who must work across various policy areas and levels.

In addition to horizontal coordination, *vertical policy coordination* in superdiversity requires special attention. We see that studies clearly point in the direction of local government as the appropriate level for policy aimed at superdiversity. Precisely because superdiversity is not a 'one size fits all', customisation at city or even district level must provide a solution. This coherence at district and city level is experienced as much more important than coherence at, for example, national level (WRR 2020). That is why researchers have long been talking about a 'local turn' in policy and diversity (Engbersen and Scholten 2018, Zapata et al. 2017), which represents an important trend break in the long, mainly national history of policy in this area. We also see this very clearly in the Netherlands, where not only large cities such as Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht and The Hague, but also medium-sized municipalities such as Eindhoven, Enschede, Leeuwarden and Tilburg are very emphatically manifesting themselves with their own unique approach in the area of migration and diversity. Think of the specific approach to expats and highly educated migration in Eindhoven or the strong emphasis on disadvantaged policy in cities such as Enschede and Leeuwarden.

An important development in this context is also the shift of emphasis to district level or city district level. There are many examples of integral approaches at sub-city level in which migration, diversity and polarisation/fragmentation are placed in a broader perspective on district development. Think of the national programmes for Rotterdam South, The Hague South West, or Amsterdam New West. Such programmes hold the promise of more customisation in which superdiversity is a subject but is not presented as a central problem. Moreover, such programmes bring together the most important actors, both 'vertically' and 'horizontally'.

It is therefore important to look closely at how policy is coordinated in complex societal issues such as superdiversity. We know from research that policy coordination that goes horizontally across policy sectors and vertically across policy layers often functions with difficulty. The national programmes are a very promising form of integrated working at sub-urban level.

3.2. *Categorisations and policies; towards a plural idiom for superdiversity*

Another important aspect of superdiversity and policy concerns the use of social categorisations, in policy as well as in legal contexts. We

know from the literature that the way in which affected groups are described can have important implications, for policy as well as for affected groups themselves (Ingram et al. 2019). Language is not neutral. And it is precisely on this subject that a number of important changes have already occurred in the Netherlands in recent years.

Until the 1970s, the term migrant or immigrant was carefully avoided, because it would create the illusion that migrants would stay. The intention at that time was not for the Netherlands to become an immigration society. That is why people spoke of 'guest workers' or even of 'international commuters', to emphasise the temporary nature. Moluccans were also defined on the basis of their ethnicity, to prevent their Dutchness from being emphasised. The term 'repatriates' was often used with regard to migrants from the former Dutch East Indies, even when it concerned 'Dutchmen' who had lived in the East for generations, or even Indonesians who had never been to the Netherlands but had worked with the Dutch. It is clear that even at this time, the idiom with regard to migrants was mainly dictated by the policy perspective. This was at odds with a reality in which many guest workers showed signs of settling, and Moluccans had sometimes been in the Netherlands for decades.

The idiom of ethnic and cultural minorities that was used in the 1980s also mainly arose from the policy perspective that prevailed at the time. Minority policy benefited from the construction of clearly demarcated groups, and these groups sometimes responded to this by developing their own organisations. This was, even in the 1980s, at odds with the high degree of diversification within the groups (think of the large differences between Moroccans from different regions, or the large political and religious differences in the Turkish community).

In the 1990s, with the strong rise of individualism in Dutch society, a more individualistic idiom for migrants emerged; 'allochtonen', or literally 'not from here'. Just like minorities, the concept of allochtoon also became part of the social discourse of speaking about migrants. It did reduce the emphasis on communities, but it did increase the emphasis on the otherness of migrants. This in turn was at odds with the rapidly advancing diversification of those years, especially when it came to second and third generation 'migrants' who were born in the Netherlands and in most cases had by then also simply had Dutch citizenship.

Once again, the Scientific Council for Government Policy played a very important role in rethinking the idiom for migration and diversity. In 2016, a special working group issued an authoritative recommendation

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advising to no longer use the term allochthon, and instead to speak of Dutch people with or without a migration background (2016). The stigmatizing effect of the term 'allochthon' was one of the motivations cited in the report. With the new designation, the Netherlands is conforming to a categorisation that is already used in a number of neighboring countries, such as Germany, where people speak of Germans *'mit oder ohne migrationshintergrund'*. It is also important that the Netherlands continues to distinguish itself from a country like France, where migration background is not considered at all, but only place of birth; what is relevant is whether or not someone was born in France. Second or third generations are not monitored at all in France; after all, they have not migrated either.

WRR advice from 2016 for superdiversity has received little attention, and no follow-up in policy. In the report, the WRR advocates a 'multiple idiom' in which migration background would be relevant or not depending on the situation. This is an important change in starting point, especially in a situation of social complexity where there is often a tangle of intersectionalities, for example between class and religion, or ethnicity and residence status. In the literature on public administration, this is also called the use of 'proxies' (Scholten 2020). Instead of starting with someone's ethnic status or migration background and looking at what goes right or wrong, one starts with an actual problem situation and then looks at who is affected and for what reasons.

A multiple idiom is therefore mainly driven by specific problems or needs; 'problem or needs-based'. In such a multiple idiom, it can be important for specific problem situations, such as racism, to map someone's ethnic origin, colour and migration background across multiple generations. But in the case of unemployment or educational achievements, for example, it may be important to look at completely different factors, such as class, parents' level of education, quality of education, and so on. In addition to important practical reasons, this also has an important ethical motive; by not starting from someone's migration background, it is prevented that this migration background is almost automatically problematised.

Paying attention to precision in idiom is also important with a view to preventing (unintentional or intentional) reinforcement of polarization and discomfort. Language is important for the 'framing' of a situation and can intensify a situation. Even in very thorny incidents such as the defacing of synagogues or mosques, there can be a tendency in politics and the media to frame the same terms of groups that are opposed to each other. This can happen, but it can

also be the case that there is more incidental vandalism or mischievous behavior. This does not detract from the seriousness of the situation, but it does ensure precision and prevent unnecessary implications. Social media, as stated earlier, also play an important role in this. The recent riots in the United Kingdom are an important example of how careless wording of a situation, and the uncontrolled dissemination of 'alternative facts' via social media, can let a situation get completely out of hand.

Furthermore, an important constitutional note on the use of migration idiom is that in the Netherlands data on migrants are not collected on the basis of self-reporting, but on the basis of data from official state registers. This is a very important difference with countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States where data are collected on the basis of a census. In the UK, if someone reports that he or she belongs to a specific ethnic community, then that is the personal choice of the person concerned. In countries such as the Netherlands and Germany, it is the government that determines whether someone is classified as a migrant based on the person's place of birth and their parents. Certainly in the context of superdiversity, this can have major consequences for the interpretation of data in the Netherlands, such as the figures that the Social and Cultural Planning Office regularly publishes on various migrant groups in the Netherlands. Behind these figures lies the assumption that, for example, when figures are published on the average unemployment among Moroccans, one is talking about an actually existing group.

3.3. *Collaborating in superdiversity*

Superdiversity and the multiple idioms we need to interpret superdiversity also have implications for the way in which we collaborate with social groups and movements. As noted earlier, the Netherlands has a strong tradition of consultation with relevant groups and their organisations, based on a deeply embedded history of pillarisation. This was the case, for example, in the strongly institutionalised consultation that was known in the Netherlands with minority organisations, the National Consultation of Minorities (disbanded in 2015). In the LOM, central consultation took place with organisations of Surinamese, Turks and Moroccans, for example. The Contact Body for Muslims and Government is another, still existing, example of a body intended for central consultation with specific groups.

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On the one hand, a superdiversity perspective questions collaboration with group-specific organizations. An argument that superdiversity researchers often use is that exclusive collaboration with such organizations can unintentionally reinforce an 'ethnic lens' or 'religious lens', thus problematizing ethnicity and religion (Vertovec 2023). Not because ethnicity or religion do not play a role, but because they are often not the only factors. Such an ethnic lens can actually hinder the view of superdiversity as a societal issue. In addition, questions are often raised about the demarcation of such ethnic or religious organizations; to what extent are they representative of their supposed constituency.

On the other hand, it is of great importance to note that from the perspective of superdiversity, one can indeed cooperate with ethnic or religious organisations, but that the criticism is expressed in exclusive cooperation. Research shows that criticism of the role of ethnic organisations has often led to a complete cessation of cooperation with such organisations; such as the dissolution of the LOM. Instead, policies aimed at societal issues should promote cooperation with organisations along a broad spectrum of societal categories, including but not limited to ethnic or religious organisations. So a broader cooperation with, for example, neighbourhood organisations, youth organisations, social organisations / NGOs, sports institutions and cultural institutions, etc.

Again, reference can be made here to the national programmes for specific urban areas, such as The Hague South West, where such a more integral cooperation with a large range of organisations is indeed getting off the ground. One can argue that such programmes are the successor to more centrally coordinated consultations with specific groups.

An important point of attention here, and an important criticism in the literature, is that superdiversity can unintentionally lead to a blind spot for the importance of specific forms of inequality. Racism is an important example of a subject that can easily fade into the background when superdiversity is confused with colour blindness. It is therefore good that specific anti-discrimination organisations (and agencies) are also increasingly being found in broader social initiatives where racism can play a role, such as in neighbourhood policy. Finding connections with new and still relatively limited organised groups, categories or interests can also be a point of attention and concern. Think of how with the arrival of relatively new and unknown migrant groups there is often a bridging period until these groups are sufficiently involved, such as with Ukrainian migration and with the Syrians a few years ago.

Conclusions

Dutch cities have become superdiverse. This development is the subject of fierce social debate, but it is an undeniable social fact; it is there, whether people like it or not. However, it has important implications for how policy is made in a superdiverse society, what policy categories and legal categories are used, with whom this policy is made, how the policy is coordinated and how people talk about the policy.

This article shows that discourses on crisis and polarization in Dutch societies can be better understood as misinterpretations of social complexity in policy discourses, policy categories and policy coordination, than as actual tensions between clearly demarcated groups. It develops a superdiversity perspective on policies that also has important implications for politics, public debate and legal processes in the area of migration. A superdiverse society is characterized by a high degree of fragmentation, especially as a result of the much broader processes of globalization, individualization and technologization. Migration and diversity have come to symbolize discomfort with these processes. And as a result of these processes, old forms of connection have been lost, which is accompanied by feelings of loss. This requires attention. But it also requires a realistic approach to superdiversity; policies that deny or ignore societal complexity can only contribute further to discomfort and to a sense that policy is in 'crisis'.

Based on the (rapidly developing) literature on superdiversity, a number of central propositions can be derived:

— Migration and diversity are societal issues and require a whole-society approach. Migration and diversity policy are general policy and should not be seen separately from, for example, education policy, labor market policy, housing policy, etc.
— In a superdiverse society, there is often no polarization between groups, but fragmentation along a great diversity of dividing lines; socio-economic status, color, education level, background, status, ethnicity, etc.
— Superdiversity challenges conventional policy categorisations and legal categorisations. Too rigid categorisation of groups can inadvertently promote polarization and fuel discomfort.
— There is no one-size-fits-all for policy and superdiversity; dealing with superdiversity requires customization and flexibility.
— Dealing well with superdiversity requires policy that cuts across policy sectors and administrative levels, and that adequately

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connects with a broad range of social organizations. It requires a form of 'network governance', with the right instruments and leadership.

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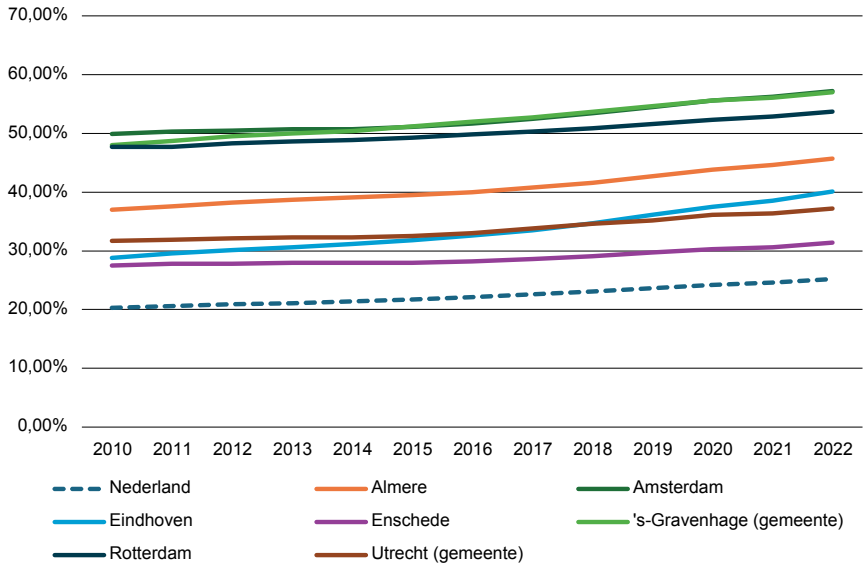
Appendix A.

Development of the population with a first or second generation migration background in the Netherlands and in a number of cities



Source: CBS Statline.

Beyond the idea of polarization: superdiversity as an alternative perspective for Dutch cities

Más allá de la idea de la polarización: la superdiversidad como perspectiva alternativa para las ciudades en los Países Bajos

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Abstract: Superdiversity is challenging conventional policy discourses and policy categories. Whereas legal categories and policies assume clearly demarcated groups, superdiversity helps understand the complex intersectionalities that make up today's cities. When simplistic categories and discourses meet social complexity, this can feed sentiments of crisis and polarization. This article aims to develop superdiversity as a perspective that helps understand rather than deny social complexity. It positions The Netherlands as a revelatory case study on how superdiversity is challenging conventional policy discourses and policy categories. The article shows that discourses on crisis and polarization in Dutch societies can be better understood as misinterpretations of social complexity than as actual tensions between clearly demarcated groups. A superdiverse society involves a high degree of fragmentation, as a result of the broader processes of globalization,

individualization and technologization. Migration and diversity have come to symbolize discomfort with these processes.

Keywords: superdiversity, policy categorization, social complexity, governance, polarization, crisis.

Resumen: La superdiversidad está poniendo en entredicho los discursos convencionales sobre políticas, así como las categorías utilizadas en esas políticas. Mientras que las categorías legales y las políticas asumen la existencia de grupos claramente demarcados, la superdiversidad ayuda a comprender las complejas interseccionalidades que surgen en las ciudades de hoy en día. Cuando categorías simplonas y discursos superficiales se enfrentan a complejidades sociales, pueden alimentar sentimientos de crisis y generar polarización. Este artículo pretende abordar la superdiversidad como una perspectiva que ayuda a comprender, más que a negar, la complejidad de nuestras sociedades. Presenta a los Países Bajos como un revelador caso de estudio sobre cómo la superdiversidad está cuestionando los discursos convencionales sobre políticas y las categorías que utilizan. El artículo revela que los discursos sobre la crisis y la polarización en las ciudades de los Países Bajos debieran entenderse como lecturas equivocadas de la complejidad social, más que como tensiones reales entre grupos sociales distintos. Una sociedad superdiversa implica necesariamente un alto nivel de fragmentación, como consecuencia de procesos generales de globalización, individualización y tecnologización. Las migraciones y la diversidad han pasado a representar la inquietud con este tipo de procesos.

Palabras clave: superdiversidad, categorizaciones políticas, complejidad social, gobernanza, polarización, crisis.

Introduction

Superdiversity is challenging conventional policy discourses and policy categories (Vertovec 2023). Especially at the urban level (Wessendorf 2010), where superdiversity becomes most manifest, it reveals the social complexity behind discourses on polarization, policy categories, discrimination and inclusion. Whereas legal categories and policies often assume clearly demarcated groups, superdiversity helps understand the complex intersectionalities that make up today's cities. However when simplistic categories and discourses meet social complexity, this often feeds sentiments of crisis and polarization. Therefore, the objective of this article is to develop superdiversity as a perspective that helps understand rather than deny social complexity.

The Netherlands is a revelatory case study on how superdiversity is challenging conventional policy discourses and policy categories. Diversity is not new in itself in the Netherlands, as a small country with an open economy at the crossroads of other countries, as a country with strong cultural and religious diversity domestically ('pillarization') and a country with a strong history of (de)colonization). But the nature of diversity and the degree of diversity have changed, especially in urban areas as Rotterdam, The Hague and Amsterdam. Diversity itself has become much more diverse or 'complex', no longer characterised by clearly defined groups but rather formed along multiple factors (background, religion, socio-economic status, sexuality, gender, ethnicity, legal status, etc.) that are often interrelated in complex ways. Diversity has increasingly become a characteristic of society rather than a characteristic for specific groups. In other words, the Netherlands has become a 'superdiverse society', and diversity a societal issue.

Superdiversity requires a new perspective on today's diverse cities in the Netherlands. Migration and migration-related diversity are of great importance in this respect, but in a migration society they cannot be seen separately from other forms of diversity such as socio-economic status, education, gender, etc. Policy no longer has to do with specific groups or 'minorities', but with a society with a great complexity of diversities that can come together in specific ways in individuals. Policy for the superdiverse society has therefore increasingly become general policy. For example, it is increasingly about housing and diversity, the labour market and diversity, foreign policy and diversity, neighbourhood policy and diversity, etc. This requires not only a rethinking of policy and policy categorisations, but also a different form of organisation and coordination of policy across sectors, layers

and groups. Superdiversity policy is therefore a form of complexity policy.

However, the Dutch case is also revelatory in terms of its struggles with diversity and social complexity. It is one of the countries where the idea of a migration crisis and a 'multicultural tragedy' has come to the fore most distinctly. There is a strong belief that migration and diversity are the motors behind polarization in Dutch society, which has been the single most important issue during most national parliamentary elections over the past decade or so (Scholten 2025). From a superdiversity perspective, this article challenges the idea of crisis or fragmentation due to migration and diversity; it rather argues that a crisis sensation is defined and fragmentation perceived due to a misunderstanding of social complexity in society.

This article uses the Dutch case study for developing superdiversity as a new perspective on urban policies and social categories. First, I will outline the background of superdiversity; what has changed, and what do we notice about it? Then I will look at the meaning and implications of superdiversity for society, and I will list what is known from (recent) literature. Then I will discuss more specifically the meaning of superdiversity for policy; are there policy models with policy alternatives and what do these models require in terms of policy coordination and in terms of policy language?

1. **Superdiversity**

Migration has become increasingly 'intertwined' with all kinds of other forms of diversity. Migration-related diversity is often linked in very complex ways to general processes of inclusion and exclusion that have to do with socio-economic status, education, ethnicity and gender, for example. Or consider how identity formation often has a strongly multiple character in which ethnicity, sexuality, class and other factors can play an important role. This is at odds with a social debate in which, also in politics and the media, the emphasis is often on specific migrant groups ('the Moroccans', 'the Muslims', 'the Syrians'). This creates a tendency to deny or ignore the intertwining of diversity, and to see behaviour as typical of specific groups. Such a discourse can unintentionally promote polarisation, and reduce attention for how fragmentation in a super-diverse society can indeed lead to problems due to a combination of circumstances. It is therefore important that we in a super-diverse society also develop a language to understand society and not unintentionally stir up tensions.

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1.1. *Defining superdiversity*

The migration society is just one part of a broader superdiverse society characterized by a high degree of social complexity. *Superdiversity* is a term that is increasingly used in science and beyond to indicate a fundamental change in the nature of migration and diversity and to explain why it has increasingly become a societal issue. The term originates from American anthropology, where Hollinger (1995) was one of the first to describe a post-ethnic America where diversity had become so 'diverse' that traditional ethnic forms of distinction no longer worked. The term itself was first raised by Steven Vertovec (2007), who pointed to the changing nature of diversity in the United Kingdom. In the Netherlands, the term is now used more broadly (such as by Crul and Lelie 2023, Scholten 2025), although the Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR) still opted for the related concept of 'migrationdiversity.'

Roughly speaking, superdiversity refers to three closely interrelated societal changes:

— *The broadening of diversity*. Diversity refers to an ever-increasing part of the population with increasingly different backgrounds. For example, Crul and Lelie (2023) speak of the emergence of majority-minority cities, or cities in which more than half of the population has a first- or second-generation migration background. In what the WRR calls 'new diversity', it also emerges that there are increasingly more different migrant groups; the classic migrant groups make up an increasingly smaller part of the total population with a migration background. Moreover, diversity plays a role in an ever-increasing part of society; it has long ceased to be a metropolitan issue. Diversity therefore affects society in an increasingly broader sense (see appendix A for an overview of the development of the population with a first or second migration background in the Netherlands and in a number of cities).

— *The deepening of diversity*. Diversity itself has become increasingly diverse. Distinctions based on ethnicity or culture and also the distinction between majorities and minorities have increasingly lost their meaning. That is why categorisations from the past such as 'ethnic minorities' or 'allochthones' have also become increasingly problematic. According to Vertovec (2023), diversity is characterised by a high degree of 'social complexity'

in which various backgrounds intersect, such as ethnicity and culture, but also class, education, religion, legal status, lifestyle, political preference, etc. According to Vertovec, the 'new diversity' is precisely about intersectionality, or the way in which within diversity various backgrounds overlap (or not), such as class and ethnicity.

— *The changing nature of mobility*. Migration is no longer simply a linear process in which a migrant leaves a country of origin, embarks on a migration journey, and arrives in a country of settlement and participates, integrates and assimilates there. In science, people increasingly speak of 'mobility' instead of 'migration', or even of 'liquid mobility' which involves an increasing number of different forms of mobility (Engbersen and Snel 2013). It has long been the case that, as in the time of the 'guest workers', there would hardly be any return. Migrants are indeed migrating more and more often, both back to the country of origin and on to another location. In this context, there is often a high degree of uncertainty, both among migrants themselves and in society, about the duration of their stay. Certainly, in a relatively small country like the Netherlands, we see an increasingly high degree of 'fluidity' in society, which is reflected in, among other things, rising emigration figures in addition to rising immigration figures.

1.2. *Superdiversity and policy*

Superdiversity has important implications for policy, policy discourses and legal categories used in policies. This does not only concern migration and diversity policy, or what used to be called integration policy. Superdiversity as a societal issue has implications for policy in a broad sense, across various policy sectors and across various policy levels. In fact, much migration policy is economic policy, and much 'integration policy' is precisely education policy, labour market policy, neighbourhood policy, social policy or housing policy. This is of course at odds with the tendency to portray migration and 'integration' primarily as special and separate policy areas; there is therefore a gap between the political reality and the sociological reality surrounding migration and integration. In this section, I will discuss the diversity of policy models that can be associated with superdiversity. In addition, I will look at how policy can be coordinated in the context of complex societal issues. Finally, I will look at two special issues in the

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context of superdiversity and policy; which idiom do we need to be able to interpret superdiversity, and how can one collaborate with relevant societal groups and movements in superdiversity.

The literature distinguishes between various policy models for dealing with migration-related diversity. These models are still applied in various places under various circumstances. There is an increasing amount of literature that shows how different models relate to superdiversity. In fact, the 'mismatch' between policy model and social reality of diversity is seen as one of the explanations for the often experienced 'crisis mode' in this policy area. The assumptions on which policy is based, such as the nature of mobility or diversity, are then at odds with the social reality in which migration and diversity have become societal issues. This creates a 'crisis feeling' that plays an important role in the social unease surrounding migration and diversity and can unintentionally play an important role in polarisation; 'crisis' puts relationships on edge.

In international and national literature, the following models are distinguished (see, among others, WRR 2020, Scholten 2011, Entzinger 2000, 2006, Koopmans et al. 2005):

— *Laissez faire policy:* in this model, no coordinated policy is pursued with regard to migration and diversity. Dealing with these themes is left to the market and/or society. This policy was dominant in the Netherlands until the 1970s, when it was assumed that migrants would only stay temporarily. Elements of *laissez faire* policy can still be found today, including in the Netherlands; for example, the idea that integration is an individual responsibility of those involved, and/or that integration should actually be left to the market. With regard to superdiversity, *laissez faire* also states that the government should be very reluctant to intervene with regard to specific forms of diversity, because of the risk of not properly understanding the complexity of diversity, or the idea that governments should generally refrain from intervening in the private sphere.

— *Differentialism:* in this model, policy is coordinated, but not aimed at inclusion or integration, but at 'living apart together'. This model is reminiscent of the Dutch pillarization history, where consultation via elites of communities played a key role (Scholten 2011). The beginning of the Dutch multicultural model in the 1980s shows elements of this model. The efforts of migrant parties in Dutch politics also contain elements of

differentialism. The concept of 'polarization' itself also contains aspects of differentialism, because it mainly refers to contrasts between groups or movements.

— *Multiculturalism:* this is a model that has been used and abused a lot in social and political discourse, but scientifically means that migrants emancipate and participate in society from their own community and their own identity. So integration but with preservation of identity. This is the model that is closest to the minority policy of the 1980s (see also Entzinger 2006).
— *Integrationism:* this model is also about integration, as the name suggests, but community and identity do not play a central role. Integration is mainly about how individual migrants participate in the socio-economic sphere, i.e. living, working and knowing. This is the model that the Netherlands applied in the 1990s and is also the basis for the integration policy aimed at equipping migrants to be full citizens. Integrationism shows strong similarities with universalism but focuses much more specifically on migrants who need to integrate.
— *Assimilationism:* in this model, integration has not only a socio-economic but also a socio-cultural meaning. In order to fully participate in society, one must also adopt values and norms and conform to social conventions in society. First adapt, then participate. The Netherlands has incorporated elements of this model since the 00s, for example with elements of knowledge of Dutch society as part of the integration policy.
— *Universalism:* this is a classic model in which dealing with diversity (and migration) is part of a general policy aimed at the entire diverse population (Koopmans et al. 2005, Scholten 2011). So a general policy aimed at reducing disadvantages, promoting language proficiency, developing intercultural skills, etc. Since the end of the 2010s, with the gradual dismantling of the integration policy, Dutch policy has increasingly moved in this direction.
— *Interculturalism:* finally, interculturalism deserves special attention as an increasingly prominent emerging model of diversity policy. Interculturalism focuses on creating the conditions for contact and encounter in society (Zapata-Barrero 2015). It differs from multiculturalism in that it does not focus on the promotion of the individuality of groups, but rather on contact between groups. And it differs from universalism in that it actively focuses on the promotion of contact between migrant communities and the rest of society. Internationally,

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this model is widely used by cities, including in the United Kingdom (London, Birmingham) and Spain (Barcelona).

Superdiversity is not a policy model itself, but a model of societal developments. We can, however, say something about the theoretical fit or misfit between superdiversity and the various models. Where in the Dutch context superdiversity is sometimes confused with multiculturalism, there is no fit between the focus of multiculturalism on specific and clearly defined groups and the focus of superdiversity on complexity and intersectionalities (Scholten et al. 2019). A target group policy aimed at ethnic groups would not fit in a superdiverse context (Vertovec 2023).

Several researchers also argue that superdiversity does not go well with assimilationism. Crul and Lelie (2023) argue that in a context of superdiversity it is no longer clear who should assimilate into what. Precisely because concepts such as majority and minority lose meaning in such a context. Incidentally, integrationism can go well with superdiversity, as long as attention is paid to socio-economic aspects and as long as integration on a socio-cultural level is truly a two-way process in which migrants and non-migrants mutually adapt to each other.

Superdiversity fits best with models such as universalism and interculturalism, which can be applied in various specific contexts. Superdiversity turns migration and diversity into societal issues, for which universalism is a suitable model. It aims to organize migration and diversity for the entire diverse society and across many policy areas. However, universalism runs the risk of paying too little attention to issues of social cohesion, which the literature notes are to be expected for superdiversity. It therefore seems most applicable in metropolitan settings where there is a very high degree of everyday superdiversity (Wessendorf 2010). That is why interculturalism (Abdou and Geddes 2020) is a better model for specific situations where promoting cohesion and contact between groups requires further attention. Here too, we often see that this applies at the urban or neighborhood level.

Table 1.

Institutional fit of policy models with superdiversity

Policy model	Fit with superdiversity
Laissez-Faire policy	— Risks that superdiversity reduces cohesion — Research shows that living together does not happen automatically

Policy model	Fit with superdiversity
Differentialism	— Social complexity of superdiversity makes it unclear on what basis groups should be distinguished; target group policy is impossible — Intersectionalities have become the rule rather than the exception
Multiculturalism	— Social complexity of superdiversity makes it unclear on what basis groups should be distinguished; target group policy is impossible + Attention to how different cultural backgrounds come together
Integrationism	+ Policies aimed at economic participation remain necessary — Socio-cultural dimension of integration less appropriate — Integration must be a two-way process (which is often not the case with integrationism)
Assimilationism	— Unclear who should assimilate into what — Concepts of majority and minority have lost meaning
Universalism	+ Policy aimed at the entire diverse population + Embedding in general policy — Risk of color blindness, where super diversity requires good cultural understanding
Interculturalism	+ Create space for meeting and contact + Focus on local level

2. **The Dutch case: polarization versus superdiversity**

The fact that the Netherlands has become a migration society has been a subject of societal debate for some time now. We have known for more than half a century that the Netherlands is an immigration country, which according to some is not even that new from a historical perspective (Obdeijn and Schrover 2008). However, we are now seeing more and more clearly that the transformation that the Netherlands is going through is not only related to immigration and emigration, but that it is changing society as a whole; it has become a superdiverse society. Migration and migration-related diversity have become societal issues, with important implications not only for migrants but for society. These topics are related to the organization of our economy, the way in which education is provided (think of multilingualism and citizenship education), the organization of public space (building for encounters), for art, culture, sports and so on.

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2.1. *Background of superdiversity in the Netherlands*

How the Netherlands became a superdiverse society is linked to much broader changes in our society (see also Scholten 2020). First of all, *globalization*, or an increasingly deep connection with, and therefore also dependence on, the rest of the world. This is certainly very tangible in a small country with an open economy like the Netherlands. Think of how the war in Palestine or the political struggle within Turkey now often have direct consequences for tension in Dutch society. In addition, a process of *individualization*, in which the individual has become increasingly central almost everywhere in the world, and often even comes to stand above the community. Individualization also changes the process of integration; who actually integrates into what? And finally, the process of *technologization*, in which technology has become increasingly important in our lives, and has also made new forms of mobility, contact and identification possible. Also think of how social media plays a role in spreading potentially polarizing stories about alleged actions of alleged groups, as the recent riots in the United Kingdom show. These three processes together cause an increase in societal complexity, which is characteristic of superdiversity. Superdiverse societies are not necessarily polarized societies, but rather complex societies with a high degree of fragmentation.

The perspective of superdiversity is at odds with more conventional thinking about groups, or 'pigeonholing'. For example, thinking about migration and (migration-related) diversity in the Netherlands is strongly influenced by thinking in terms of ethnic or cultural groups and speaking in terms of majorities and minorities. Almost everyone in the Netherlands will be able to name classic migration groups, such as Surinamese, Antilleans, Moroccans and Turks. Moreover, thinking in terms of minorities resonated with the deep-rooted thinking on religious and cultural pillarization in the Netherlands (Lijphart 1979), and with the need for a target group policy to be able to specifically improve the position of these groups. This is the basis of the Dutch Ethnic Minorities policy, which received a lot of international attention at the end of the last century.

This thinking about the emancipation of minorities later developed into thinking about integration. This led to an integration policy, which specifically focused on fitting into societies of people with a migration background. This policy mainly emphasized the social-economic areas for integration (work, housing, education), but from the 2000s onwards it increasingly also had a socio-cultural approach. Integration

meant that migrants had to become part of Dutch society. This was often described as a two-sided process, but in practice it mostly meant that migrants had to integrate and Dutch society had to help them with this and also had to leave room for integration (Schinkel 2018).

Since the 2000s, this was increasingly targeted in particular at Muslim migrants in the Netherlands. Increasingly, public and political debate on integration became conflated with debate on Islam (Obdeijn and Schrover 2008). In 2002, the Pim Fortuyn Party became part of a government coalition, on a political party program that focused on the struggle 'against the islamisation of society.' Also for the Freedom Party of Geert Wilders, the integration debate was in particular about 'protecting' Dutch society from the influences of Islam. This is also manifested in policy proposals suggested by the Freedom Party (currently the largest party in the Netherlands) against any form of muslim immigration, but also for putting fines on owning a Quran or entering a mosque. These plans never made it into policy, but are still part of the Freedom Party's official party program.

Thinking in terms of oppositions between groups is not only a common thread between thinking about minorities, integration and Islam in particular, but also with the terminology of 'polarization'. Polarization assumes increasing oppositions between groups that are generally recognizable and well demarcated. In a complex and superdiverse society, this is, despite the undiminished symbolic significance of specific identities, often much less the case. This does not mean that there are no oppositions and conflicts in a superdiverse society; however, these are better described as fragmentation than as polarization.

Finally, superdiversity does not manifest itself in the same way everywhere; there is no single superdiverse model. As Engbersen and Scholten (2018) and the WRR (2020) show, superdiversity can manifest itself in very different ways in different cities or even in different neighbourhoods. In a post-industrial city like Rotterdam, the various diversities such as class, ethnicity and residence status come together in a very different way than in a middle-class city like Hilversum. There are very different types of urban diversity configurations. Superdiversity therefore brings a high degree of complexity.

2.2. *Societal implications of superdiversity*

The literature on the implications of superdiversity is still developing and far from unambiguous. However, a broad picture is already

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emerging, including the implications for migrants themselves, for cohesion in society, and (part of the next section) for policy.

If we look at the migrant himself, superdiversity places the position of migrants much more in the perspective of individualisation. Migrants are no longer approached as members of a specific group or community (not only by policy but also by society). On the one hand, this does justice to the often very versatile and multiple ways in which people identify themselves. For someone of the second or third generation of Moroccan migrants in the Netherlands, the Moroccan identity may still be important to a certain extent and especially in certain contexts. But this also applies to many other aspects of one's own identity. For example, research shows that young people of a Moroccan or Turkish background increasingly identify locally rather than with their country of origin or settlement (Entzinger and Dourleijn 2008). Emphasising multiple identities prevents migrants from being locked up in their community through an 'ethnic lens', as it were, and from having their ethnic identity imposed on them as dominant outside of their own choice.

On the other hand, this superdiverse approach to identities is at odds with the still (and perhaps increasingly) important role that ethnic and religious identities in particular play in the social debate. In everyday racism, apart from the sociological analysis of identity formation, more visible and simple forms of diversity are emphasized, such as color and religion. And even apart from racism, ethnic identity is still important to many migrants, which is certainly possible within the image of superdiversity. Superdiversity does not mean that groups or communities would or could no longer play a role, but it does put an end to the assumption that diversity can always be captured in terms of clearly defined groups. This also does not mean that ethnicity and religious diversity cannot play an important symbolic role in social polarization; superdiversity does offer a perspective to deconstruct this symbolism and to understand the broader social background of polarization. For example, how ethnic polarization, such as in the banlieues of Paris, often in fact reflected the increased socio-economic inequality in such neighborhoods, or the inequality in access to good public services, housing and education. Researchers on the rise of political support for anti-migrant parties also show that such support is often related to fear of globalization, and the feeling that individualization makes certain people less able to rely on the community.

Superdiversity also has various broader implications for society. The WRR (2020) shows, based on broader research, that superdiverse neighbourhoods are generally associated with a lower degree of

cohesion. For example, in superdiverse neighbourhoods one sees what the WRR describes as 'feelings of loss', the longing for cohesion from the past. One also sees a lower sense of safety (which is not the same as actually lower safety) and a lower sense of home. According to the WRR, the concept of 'public familiarity' plays an important role in this; it is not so much about a lot going wrong, it is about a feeling of less familiarity with the neighbourhood. In addition, Van der Meer and Tolsma (2014) show that an increase in diversity is also associated with a decrease in social capital; so the more superdiverse a neighbourhood, the less social capital.

Recent research by Crul and Lelie (2023) offers a somewhat more specific picture. They show that, especially among the somewhat higher educated population, there are somewhat more positive views on diversity, and that it also matters a lot how diversity was discussed in one's own family and what experience one had with diversity at a young age at school. They also see that people with a negative view on diversity often also experience a high degree of distance from policy and politics; it is therefore related to broader dissatisfaction.

Both the WRR (2020) and Crul and Lelie (2023) show that living together in a superdiverse context does not happen automatically. Superdiversity is a de facto transformation in our society but is certainly not always 'super' in the sense that it is all without challenges. Researchers disagree to what extent this has only to do with migration and diversity themselves. Vertovec (2023) argues that superdiversity and declining social cohesion are a manifestation of two much broader societal transformations: individualization and globalization. People move much more loosely from communities and social structures and over greater distances than before, which causes the traditional cohesion within more homogeneous communities to decline. According to Vertovec, dealing with superdiversity is actually about dealing with social complexity in a broader sense; certain parts of the population are better at dealing with this, and also benefit more from it, than others.

Finally, there is emerging research showing temporal effects in attitudes towards superdiversity; it shows that over time people seem to get used to superdiversity (Vertovec 2019). In fact, research on voter behaviour in Rotterdam has shown that acceptance of diversity seems to increase in neighbourhoods in the city centre with a long tradition of diversity, while resistance to superdiversity seems to increase in neighbourhoods more on the outskirts where diversification is more recent. In this way, acceptance of diversity

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would radiate like a 'halo' to the suburbs. This somewhat resonates findings from other research showing that voters for populist parties such as the Freedom Party (initially) mainly came from regions with relatively few migrants (Harteveld et al. 2022). Although more research on this halo effect is needed, the initial findings may have important implications for how we might understand the increased resistance to diversification in the Netherlands. It would offer a perspective in which superdiversity increasingly becomes normal in an increasing number of neighbourhoods and cities in the Netherlands, and attention will shift to those areas (suburbs, medium-sized cities) where dealing with diversity has only recently received attention.

3. **Superdiversity as a new perspective for policy and categorisations**

The Dutch case helps understand how superdiversity challenges policy models and policy categories. It shows how conventional ways of perceiving diversity contribute to sensations of crisis and polarization, whereas the social complexity of superdiversity is especially manifested in intersectionalities and multiple overlapping 'fragmentations' in often strongly contextualized ways. There is no 'one size fits all.' Actually, not fitting a situation, or forcibly imposing a policy model, can reinforce the 'crisis' feeling that plays such an important role in social discontent and polarization in this area. Developing the superdiversity perspective further, based on the Dutch case, several important analytical contributions can be made on how to respond to superdiversity in a way that does not produce such crisis sensation. This includes how policies are coordinated, how policy categorisations are used, and how policy engagement or forms of cooperations are shaped.

3.1. *Policy complexity and superdiversity: Horizontal and vertical policy coordination*

Positioning superdiversity in the world of policy models does not say everything about 'how' this policy should be developed and implemented. Precisely because different policy models can be applied in different situations of superdiversity, the coordination of policy is important.

Horizontal policy coordination is of great importance, precisely to ensure that superdiversity as a societal issue actually receives the attention it needs across various policy areas. In the literature on public administration, this is also called mainstreaming (Scholten 2020), as it is also applied to gender mainstreaming and climate mainstreaming. Various studies show that, for example, education is a core sector when it comes to dealing with migration-related diversity. In the Netherlands, for example, consider citizenship education, in which dealing with diversity is increasingly seen as a so-called '21st century skill' is being developed. But also consider, for example, the discussion on the internationalisation of higher education, or migration-related discussions in the field of housing and the labour market. Access to the labour market is still an important condition for inclusion (WRR 2020). The same applies to access to affordable housing, but also to housing planning that promotes rather than discourages encounters and contact between groups.

Dealing with migration-related diversity can therefore no longer be a policy silo. That would also give the impression that it is not a societal theme, but a problem specific to migrants. This also applies to migration policy, where there is still much less mainstreaming. In fact, migration is determined to a very large extent by a country's economic policy, and to some extent also by social and labour market policy. What we now call migration policy is in fact only the final link in a chain of migration management, and often too late or too limitedly effective to have much influence.

However, the instruments for horizontal policy coordination are very limited. In the Netherlands, there is no structure or culture for horizontal policy coordination, which makes the mainstreaming of superdiversity extremely complex or difficult. Knowledge and information, as produced by the Social and Cultural Planning Office, traditionally play an important role as a coordination instrument; figures show to what extent the social position of migrants in specific sectors requires further attention. But here the problem is increasingly occurring that diversity is increasingly difficult to capture in clearly defined groups. In addition to knowledge, political-administrative leadership is an important instrument for horizontal coordination. It would be good not to isolate the responsibility for migration and diversity in a separate portfolio (so no superdiversity minister or alderman), but to make it part of a broad dossier of someone with authority over multiple portfolios. Think of how integration was previously assigned to a deputy prime minister, or how in many cities the mayor plays a central role in keeping a vision on diversity together. In Rotterdam, the horizontal coordination of policy is also being

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promoted by means of a city marine on discrimination, who must work across various policy areas and levels.

In addition to horizontal coordination, *vertical policy coordination* in superdiversity requires special attention. We see that studies clearly point in the direction of local government as the appropriate level for policy aimed at superdiversity. Precisely because superdiversity is not a 'one size fits all', customisation at city or even district level must provide a solution. This coherence at district and city level is experienced as much more important than coherence at, for example, national level (WRR 2020). That is why researchers have long been talking about a 'local turn' in policy and diversity (Engbersen and Scholten 2018, Zapata et al. 2017), which represents an important trend break in the long, mainly national history of policy in this area. We also see this very clearly in the Netherlands, where not only large cities such as Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht and The Hague, but also medium-sized municipalities such as Eindhoven, Enschede, Leeuwarden and Tilburg are very emphatically manifesting themselves with their own unique approach in the area of migration and diversity. Think of the specific approach to expats and highly educated migration in Eindhoven or the strong emphasis on disadvantaged policy in cities such as Enschede and Leeuwarden.

An important development in this context is also the shift of emphasis to district level or city district level. There are many examples of integral approaches at sub-city level in which migration, diversity and polarisation/fragmentation are placed in a broader perspective on district development. Think of the national programmes for Rotterdam South, The Hague South West, or Amsterdam New West. Such programmes hold the promise of more customisation in which superdiversity is a subject but is not presented as a central problem. Moreover, such programmes bring together the most important actors, both 'vertically' and 'horizontally'.

It is therefore important to look closely at how policy is coordinated in complex societal issues such as superdiversity. We know from research that policy coordination that goes horizontally across policy sectors and vertically across policy layers often functions with difficulty. The national programmes are a very promising form of integrated working at sub-urban level.

3.2. *Categorisations and policies; towards a plural idiom for superdiversity*

Another important aspect of superdiversity and policy concerns the use of social categorisations, in policy as well as in legal contexts. We

know from the literature that the way in which affected groups are described can have important implications, for policy as well as for affected groups themselves (Ingram et al. 2019). Language is not neutral. And it is precisely on this subject that a number of important changes have already occurred in the Netherlands in recent years.

Until the 1970s, the term migrant or immigrant was carefully avoided, because it would create the illusion that migrants would stay. The intention at that time was not for the Netherlands to become an immigration society. That is why people spoke of 'guest workers' or even of 'international commuters', to emphasise the temporary nature. Moluccans were also defined on the basis of their ethnicity, to prevent their Dutchness from being emphasised. The term 'repatriates' was often used with regard to migrants from the former Dutch East Indies, even when it concerned 'Dutchmen' who had lived in the East for generations, or even Indonesians who had never been to the Netherlands but had worked with the Dutch. It is clear that even at this time, the idiom with regard to migrants was mainly dictated by the policy perspective. This was at odds with a reality in which many guest workers showed signs of settling, and Moluccans had sometimes been in the Netherlands for decades.

The idiom of ethnic and cultural minorities that was used in the 1980s also mainly arose from the policy perspective that prevailed at the time. Minority policy benefited from the construction of clearly demarcated groups, and these groups sometimes responded to this by developing their own organisations. This was, even in the 1980s, at odds with the high degree of diversification within the groups (think of the large differences between Moroccans from different regions, or the large political and religious differences in the Turkish community).

In the 1990s, with the strong rise of individualism in Dutch society, a more individualistic idiom for migrants emerged; 'allochtonen', or literally 'not from here'. Just like minorities, the concept of allochtoon also became part of the social discourse of speaking about migrants. It did reduce the emphasis on communities, but it did increase the emphasis on the otherness of migrants. This in turn was at odds with the rapidly advancing diversification of those years, especially when it came to second and third generation 'migrants' who were born in the Netherlands and in most cases had by then also simply had Dutch citizenship.

Once again, the Scientific Council for Government Policy played a very important role in rethinking the idiom for migration and diversity. In 2016, a special working group issued an authoritative recommendation

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advising to no longer use the term allochthon, and instead to speak of Dutch people with or without a migration background (2016). The stigmatizing effect of the term 'allochthon' was one of the motivations cited in the report. With the new designation, the Netherlands is conforming to a categorisation that is already used in a number of neighboring countries, such as Germany, where people speak of Germans *'mit oder ohne migrationshintergrund'*. It is also important that the Netherlands continues to distinguish itself from a country like France, where migration background is not considered at all, but only place of birth; what is relevant is whether or not someone was born in France. Second or third generations are not monitored at all in France; after all, they have not migrated either.

WRR advice from 2016 for superdiversity has received little attention, and no follow-up in policy. In the report, the WRR advocates a 'multiple idiom' in which migration background would be relevant or not depending on the situation. This is an important change in starting point, especially in a situation of social complexity where there is often a tangle of intersectionalities, for example between class and religion, or ethnicity and residence status. In the literature on public administration, this is also called the use of 'proxies' (Scholten 2020). Instead of starting with someone's ethnic status or migration background and looking at what goes right or wrong, one starts with an actual problem situation and then looks at who is affected and for what reasons.

A multiple idiom is therefore mainly driven by specific problems or needs; 'problem or needs-based'. In such a multiple idiom, it can be important for specific problem situations, such as racism, to map someone's ethnic origin, colour and migration background across multiple generations. But in the case of unemployment or educational achievements, for example, it may be important to look at completely different factors, such as class, parents' level of education, quality of education, and so on. In addition to important practical reasons, this also has an important ethical motive; by not starting from someone's migration background, it is prevented that this migration background is almost automatically problematised.

Paying attention to precision in idiom is also important with a view to preventing (unintentional or intentional) reinforcement of polarization and discomfort. Language is important for the 'framing' of a situation and can intensify a situation. Even in very thorny incidents such as the defacing of synagogues or mosques, there can be a tendency in politics and the media to frame the same terms of groups that are opposed to each other. This can happen, but it can

also be the case that there is more incidental vandalism or mischievous behavior. This does not detract from the seriousness of the situation, but it does ensure precision and prevent unnecessary implications. Social media, as stated earlier, also play an important role in this. The recent riots in the United Kingdom are an important example of how careless wording of a situation, and the uncontrolled dissemination of 'alternative facts' via social media, can let a situation get completely out of hand.

Furthermore, an important constitutional note on the use of migration idiom is that in the Netherlands data on migrants are not collected on the basis of self-reporting, but on the basis of data from official state registers. This is a very important difference with countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States where data are collected on the basis of a census. In the UK, if someone reports that he or she belongs to a specific ethnic community, then that is the personal choice of the person concerned. In countries such as the Netherlands and Germany, it is the government that determines whether someone is classified as a migrant based on the person's place of birth and their parents. Certainly in the context of superdiversity, this can have major consequences for the interpretation of data in the Netherlands, such as the figures that the Social and Cultural Planning Office regularly publishes on various migrant groups in the Netherlands. Behind these figures lies the assumption that, for example, when figures are published on the average unemployment among Moroccans, one is talking about an actually existing group.

3.3. *Collaborating in superdiversity*

Superdiversity and the multiple idioms we need to interpret superdiversity also have implications for the way in which we collaborate with social groups and movements. As noted earlier, the Netherlands has a strong tradition of consultation with relevant groups and their organisations, based on a deeply embedded history of pillarisation. This was the case, for example, in the strongly institutionalised consultation that was known in the Netherlands with minority organisations, the National Consultation of Minorities (disbanded in 2015). In the LOM, central consultation took place with organisations of Surinamese, Turks and Moroccans, for example. The Contact Body for Muslims and Government is another, still existing, example of a body intended for central consultation with specific groups.

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On the one hand, a superdiversity perspective questions collaboration with group-specific organizations. An argument that superdiversity researchers often use is that exclusive collaboration with such organizations can unintentionally reinforce an 'ethnic lens' or 'religious lens', thus problematizing ethnicity and religion (Vertovec 2023). Not because ethnicity or religion do not play a role, but because they are often not the only factors. Such an ethnic lens can actually hinder the view of superdiversity as a societal issue. In addition, questions are often raised about the demarcation of such ethnic or religious organizations; to what extent are they representative of their supposed constituency.

On the other hand, it is of great importance to note that from the perspective of superdiversity, one can indeed cooperate with ethnic or religious organisations, but that the criticism is expressed in exclusive cooperation. Research shows that criticism of the role of ethnic organisations has often led to a complete cessation of cooperation with such organisations; such as the dissolution of the LOM. Instead, policies aimed at societal issues should promote cooperation with organisations along a broad spectrum of societal categories, including but not limited to ethnic or religious organisations. So a broader cooperation with, for example, neighbourhood organisations, youth organisations, social organisations / NGOs, sports institutions and cultural institutions, etc.

Again, reference can be made here to the national programmes for specific urban areas, such as The Hague South West, where such a more integral cooperation with a large range of organisations is indeed getting off the ground. One can argue that such programmes are the successor to more centrally coordinated consultations with specific groups.

An important point of attention here, and an important criticism in the literature, is that superdiversity can unintentionally lead to a blind spot for the importance of specific forms of inequality. Racism is an important example of a subject that can easily fade into the background when superdiversity is confused with colour blindness. It is therefore good that specific anti-discrimination organisations (and agencies) are also increasingly being found in broader social initiatives where racism can play a role, such as in neighbourhood policy. Finding connections with new and still relatively limited organised groups, categories or interests can also be a point of attention and concern. Think of how with the arrival of relatively new and unknown migrant groups there is often a bridging period until these groups are sufficiently involved, such as with Ukrainian migration and with the Syrians a few years ago.

Conclusions

Dutch cities have become superdiverse. This development is the subject of fierce social debate, but it is an undeniable social fact; it is there, whether people like it or not. However, it has important implications for how policy is made in a superdiverse society, what policy categories and legal categories are used, with whom this policy is made, how the policy is coordinated and how people talk about the policy.

This article shows that discourses on crisis and polarization in Dutch societies can be better understood as misinterpretations of social complexity in policy discourses, policy categories and policy coordination, than as actual tensions between clearly demarcated groups. It develops a superdiversity perspective on policies that also has important implications for politics, public debate and legal processes in the area of migration. A superdiverse society is characterized by a high degree of fragmentation, especially as a result of the much broader processes of globalization, individualization and technologization. Migration and diversity have come to symbolize discomfort with these processes. And as a result of these processes, old forms of connection have been lost, which is accompanied by feelings of loss. This requires attention. But it also requires a realistic approach to superdiversity; policies that deny or ignore societal complexity can only contribute further to discomfort and to a sense that policy is in 'crisis'.

Based on the (rapidly developing) literature on superdiversity, a number of central propositions can be derived:

— Migration and diversity are societal issues and require a whole-society approach. Migration and diversity policy are general policy and should not be seen separately from, for example, education policy, labor market policy, housing policy, etc.
— In a superdiverse society, there is often no polarization between groups, but fragmentation along a great diversity of dividing lines; socio-economic status, color, education level, background, status, ethnicity, etc.
— Superdiversity challenges conventional policy categorisations and legal categorisations. Too rigid categorisation of groups can inadvertently promote polarization and fuel discomfort.
— There is no one-size-fits-all for policy and superdiversity; dealing with superdiversity requires customization and flexibility.
— Dealing well with superdiversity requires policy that cuts across policy sectors and administrative levels, and that adequately

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connects with a broad range of social organizations. It requires a form of 'network governance', with the right instruments and leadership.

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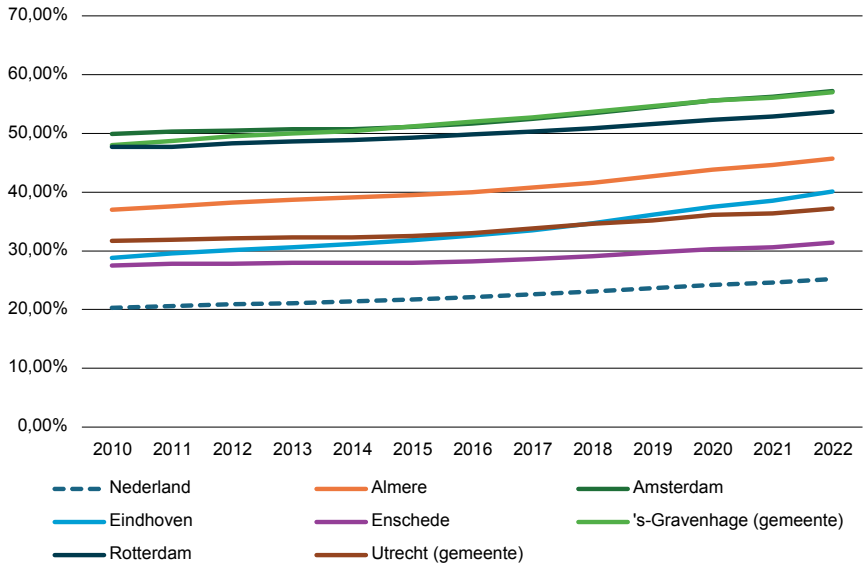
Appendix A.

Development of the population with a first or second generation migration background in the Netherlands and in a number of cities



Source: CBS Statline.