



# Perception of Social Cohesion in Maastricht

Exploring how the Dutch Civic Integration Act of 2021 shapes perceptions of social cohesion among locals and political parties

## Introduction

- ✓ **Social cohesion** refers to the connectedness, trust, & solidarity among groups within a society.
- ✓ The **Dutch Civic Integration Act (2021)** is a policy aimed at fostering social cohesion through language, education, & employment programs.

## Context & Gap

- ✓ Despite a strong policy focus on integration, little is known about **how refugees and locals in Maastricht perceive social cohesion**.
- ✓ Additionally, there is a **limited understanding** of how **political discourse & local policies** shape these perceptions.



## Research Question

How is social cohesion perceived by locals and local political parties in the context of the Dutch Civic Integration Act?

## Methodology

### 1) Interviews

- 2 interviews with professionals from the **Refugee Project Maastricht**
- 1 expert interview with a **city councilor**
  - Focus on personal **experiences** & views on **integration** and **policies**.

### 2) Qualtrics survey (N = 35)

- Likert-scale items measuring **social cohesion**, **economic** & **psychological** factors, & perceptions of the **Civic Integration Act**.

### 3) Critical discourse analysis

- Language use by **SPM, GroenLinks, D66, CDA, VVD, & PvdA**.
- Examining how **political discourse constructs** social cohesion.

### 4) Socio-legal methodology

- **Socio-political implications** of the **normative** frameworks set up by the Act.

Full **APA references** available via QR code:



## Results & Discussion

### Qualtrics survey

- **Older** generations perceived **lower** social cohesion.
- People who found the DCIA effective reported **high social trust, civic engagement, & belonging**, but **low openness & tolerance & political engagement**.
- There was an **“in-group”** versus **“out-group”** attitude towards the Dutch and immigrants.



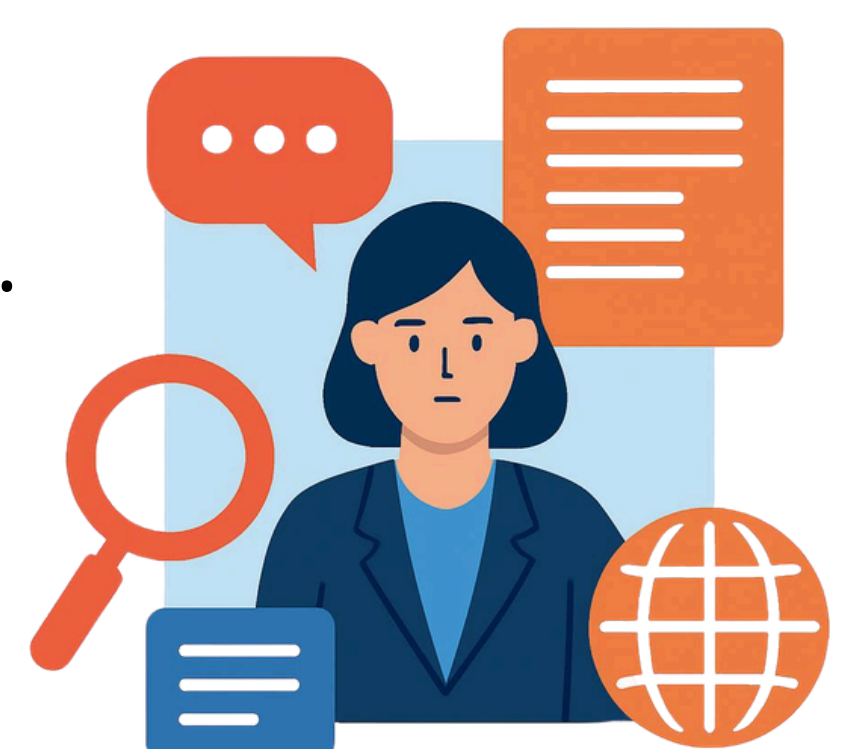
### Socio-legal methodology

- Analyses the **normative** framework of the Dutch Civic Integration Act within the Dutch **socio-political context**.
- Evaluates the **impact** of the Act on the perception of **social cohesion** among locals.



### Critical discourse analysis

- The **Dutch language & labor integration** are the **core** of social cohesion.
- The **DCIA** places the **responsibility of integration** on **individuals & municipalities**.
- **Framing** in political discourse **results in** not only an **“othering”** process between **locals & migrants**, but also between migrants themselves.
- **DCIA** may reinforce these **divisions** through its categorization of migrants, which can unintentionally lead to exclusion rather than fostering unity.



## Practical solutions

### Recommendation 1

#### Improve Dutch language courses

#### ⚠ Challenges:

- Too repetitive & not engaging
- Little real-life practice
- Limited contact with locals

Effects **language development & integration** into society



#### Solutions:

- More **interactive & engaging** learning
- Focus on **everyday Dutch** use
- Allow **language support**

### Recommendation 2

#### Strengthen Intergroup Interaction

#### ⚠ Challenges:

- **Limited informal interaction** with Dutch locals
- Existing **initiatives exist** but are **underused**

#### Solutions:

- Recognize individuals **beyond labels**
- **Increase interaction** between groups
  - **Neighborhood-level activities, Smaller & informal** settings
  - **Buddy programs**



## Conclusion

- ✓ **Social cohesion** in Maastricht is shaped by **individual perceptions, political narratives, & policies**, and can be strengthened by improved **language courses & meaningful interactions**.