Inclusivity Norms to Counter Polarization in European Societies (INCLUSIVITY)

Aim of the project

Many European societies have become increasingly divided and polarized [1-3], in part due to the financial crisis, migration-related issues, and increased disinformation in social media. Evidence of widening cleavages and conflicts between groups can be found along multiple lines, such as ethnicity, social class, religion, sexual and political orientation. This *polarization,* broadly defined here as a process by which society is increasingly divided into groups with contrasting opinions, beliefs about social issues, and conflictual behavior, often results in adverse feelings (e.g., dislike or hatred) and avoidance. In Europe, polarization is accompanied by serious societal and political challenges, such as the rise of populist leaders, growing anti-EU sentiments [4], and an increase in hate speech and hate crimes [5]. Polarization hampers dealing effectively with the societal challenges Europe is facing and undermines democracy [3].

Despite much research on conflicts and intolerance between groups, few studies have examined how to reduce these pernicious consequences of polarization. This project will fill this gap by systematically studying the transmission of and conformity to **social norms that promote equality-based respect**, **dialogue**, **and unity**, which are expected to increase tolerance and the willingness to interact and collaborate with opposing groups, and ultimately to decrease conflict between these groups. We call these norms **inclusivity norms**. Our project rigorously examines the potential of inclusivity norms to increase contact and collaboration between opposing groups and thereby decreasing polarization consequences and avoiding new polarization. We use a novel interdisciplinary approach, which combines a cross-European survey, laboratory (network) experiments, mixed-method social network designs, and an intervention in schools to study inclusivity norms' influence on individuals' attitudes and behavior toward (members of) opposing groups.

We expand previous research in four ways. First, we go beyond prior literature that acknowledges the power of social norms to solve interpersonal conflicts in social dilemmas [6], by studying norms capable of crossing group divides in polarized social contexts. Second, we define inclusivity norms based on interdisciplinary theory and empirical insights. Third, while norms and their perceptions are typically studied on an individual level, our project will provide unique insight into how these norms diffuse in social networks (e.g., in the contexts of family, friendships, work, neighborhood, or schools) and how this diffusion impacts tolerance, contact, and collaboration between groups. Finally, experimental field intervention studies, a powerful methodology for assessing the effectiveness of an intervention, are rare [7]. Our project examines evidence-based ways to reduce polarization consequences in natural settings.

Research questions

The project poses three research questions:

- RQ1: To what degree, when, and why do inclusivity norms increase tolerance and willingness to come into contact and collaborate with members of other groups in polarized settings?
- RQ2: How are inclusivity norms adopted and spread in polarized social networks?
- RQ3: How can a network intervention transmitting inclusivity norms increase contact and collaboration between groups in polarized settings?

Theoretical background

In diverse societies, conflicts between groups are often politicized struggles for recognition [8, 9]. To sustain dialogue and collaboration on different levels (e.g., within and between organizations, neighborhoods, countries), and thereby reduce and avoid polarization, it is critical that societal (e.g., ethnic, political, and religious) groups are encouraged to recognize other groups as (different) equals. This recognition is not about liking groups with different opinions or beliefs, but about toleration of others' attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and customs **Project INCLUSIVITY** 1

[10]. This mutual equality recognition has important benefits, aiding individuals to feel included in society and leading to more harmonious intergroup relations (i.e., more harmonious interactions between groups, both on an individual and collective level) [8]. An effective way to increase tolerance is to promote social norms that emphasize equality-based respect [10]. Such norms should also stress the importance of dialogue between groups and unity (*i.e.*, members of different subgroups being part of the same superordinate group), while highlighting acceptance of being a part of a specific subgroup (*e.g.*, individuals' identification with *both* the European and the national identity; *e.g.*, [11]) to increase both tolerance and willingness to come into contact with others, and to collaborate for the common good [12, 13, 14].

Social norms describe or prescribe appropriate behaviors and their power has long been a theme in the social sciences [15, 16]. Inclusivity norms are *group* norms, meaning they are representations of how members of one's own group behave (*i.e., descriptive norm*; *e.g.,* equality-based respect is commonly displayed among peers) and should behave (*i.e., injunctive norm*; *e.g.,* equality-based respect *should* be commonly displayed among peers; [17]). Preliminary evidence indicates that social norms indeed bring diverse groups together. Inclusive peer norms increase interest in and actual contact with members of other groups [18, 19], and recognition as equals between members of people's own group (the *ingroup*) and members of other groups (the *outgroups*) leads to mutual respect and tolerance of previously disapproved others [8, 20, 21].

Despite this promising preliminary research, knowledge is lacking on the most effective design of inclusivity norms (i.e., the specific combination of different aspects of such norms) and on the degree to which inclusivity norms can causally improve intergroup relations in polarized contexts. Prior research has not examined whether these norms can improve relations between groups that oppose each other, and whether such improvements may hold across multiple group divides (e.g., not only ethnic, but also religious and political groups) and multiple attitudinal and behavioral outcomes (e.g., not only intergroup attitudes and tolerance, but also intergroup contact and cooperative behavior). Thus, a comprehensive insight into the effects of inclusivity norm in polarized social contexts is missing. Finally, prior studies have not examined the relational nature of inclusivity norms and the diffusion of such norms in social networks, which is especially important to better understand how inclusivity norms can be spread effectively throughout the wider community. The interdisciplinary area of social network analysis has set clear antecedents in studying the diffusion of information and innovations in social networks, which we draw on to examine norm transmission. We depart from two (mutually compatible) social network models (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Illustration of the social referent model (left) and the complex contagion model (right). Note: The nodes represent persons and the edges relationships. In the left-hand model, particular referents, e.g., the popular one, such as the orange node, are expected to be particularly influential in setting group norms (the highlighted dotted edges indicate this influence). In the right-hand model, each individual (here, we only focus on the two grey nodes)

receives a different social influence depending on the composition (indicated by node color, in this case two groups) and the network structure.

The first model targets so-called **social referents** [23] for interventions. Social referents can be popular and well-connected individuals (*e.g.*, they have the most friends in the network, or others communicate most with them), and thus, they are repeatedly observed by others across situations and time [13, 15]. Alternatively, referents may be persons who occupy a brokerage position in the network structure, connecting various otherwise disconnected network cliques. In social networks, social referents may spread new information more quickly through networks (*e.g.*, spreading rumors, [16]) and may disproportionally influence norm perception [24, 25].

The second is the *complex contagion model*, based on the theoretical mechanism of social reinforcement. At its simplest, it stipulates that if an individual has direct relations to a sufficiently high number of individuals who have already adopted an innovation, such as a social norm, they are likely to adopt that norm, too [22]. Individual exposure to this norm depends on the *network structure* (the relationships they have with others) and *composition* (whether these others have adopted a certain norm).

Recent work on network interventions has integrated these two network models by targeting both social referents and complex social reinforcement over time. Such research has shown that this approach can effectively decrease interpersonal conflicts in adolescence [23]. However, little is known about the potential role of the social network structure in transmitting inclusivity norms in polarized networks: for example, whether individuals adopt certain norms depends in part on how many, to what degree, and how consistently their family, friends, colleagues and others adopt these norms. We build and further integrate this recent work with research on social norms and intergroup relations into a novel model.

Figure 2 summarizes our conceptual model. The core of our model is the **adoption of perceived inclusivity norms**. Adoption minimally entails **conformity** (WPs 2, 4, and 5; see below). Higher thresholds of norm adoption are **internalization** and **active promotion or enforcement**, which involve longer learning processes that nonetheless typically start with conformity. WP1 and 3 distinguish these different thresholds. In our model, social networks (social referents and complex contagion) and boundary conditions (*i.e.,* the contextual and personality conditions under which norms affect adoption and how) shape the perception of inclusivity norms and their effect on adoption. While we focus on social networks as sources of normative information, we will also examine non-network sources such as media, institutional signals (*e.g.,* policies), and other individuals' behavior [26] in WP1.



Figure 2. Conceptual Model.

Methodological approach

We use an innovative interdisciplinary approach to examine our theoretical model. The work is organized in **five Work Packages (WPs)**, each directed by one of the Principal Investigators (PIs; see Table 1). The first two WPs will address to what degree, when, and why inclusivity

norms increase tolerance and willingness to come into contact and collaborate with members of other groups in polarized settings (RQ1). In WP1, the PIs will jointly create and implement a large cross-national European survey (with a focus on individual, situational, contextual, and network processes), while in WP2, a controlled experimental approach will be implemented to systematically examine RQ1. Furthermore, by combining various network methods, namely exploratory network analysis (WP3), network laboratory experiments (WP4), and a network field intervention (WP 5), our methodology will empirically show how norms spread and are adopted in social networks, and to what degree social referents may have an outsized influence on these processes (RQ2). An experimental network intervention in the field will provide insight into how to practically promote inclusivity norms in a sample susceptible to these norms and for whom intergroup relations hold important developmental significance, namely among middle adolescents (RQ3). Finally, all PIs will then jointly work on a theoretical integration of the five WPs' results.

Research question		
RQ1	RQ2	RQ3
WP1	WP3	WP5
WP2	WP4	
	RQ1 WP1 WP2	RQ1RQ2WP1WP3WP2WP4

Table 1. Relation of work packages to research question and type.

Work Package 1: Cross-national survey (coordinated by PI Christ; involving all other PIs and Early Career Researchers (ECRs))

WP1 will be the first critical step for the project, providing fundamental insights needed for all other WPs. We will conduct a large cross-national survey (16 European countries¹ covering all EU regions plus UK, see Figure 3; using representative samples of N=1,000 per country, covering ages 14-75) to examine (a) the relation between inclusivity norms and different attitudes and behaviors (*e.g.*, tolerance, willingness to collaborate), (b) the most effective (combination of) ingredients of inclusivity norms (*e.g.*, mutual respect plus dialogue plus unity), (c) sources of normative information (e.g., social network sources, institutional signals), (d)

boundary conditions (*i.e.*, individual, situational, social network, and contextual moderators) for the effectiveness of such norms, and (e) to test the invariance of the effects and ingredients of inclusivity norms across European countries. The web survey (20 minutes) will be conducted by multinational survey companies and include short measures for all central variables.

Moreover, available objective data on the country level will further inform our cross-country comparison. These include indicators of the economic situation, living standards, inequality (*e.g.*, [Inequalityadjusted] Human Development Index), and indices concerned with the state of democracy (Democracy Index) or tolerant versus intolerant migrant integration policies (Migration Integration Policy Index).



Figure 3: Selected survey countries

¹ Austria, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Republic of Cyprus, Romania, Spain, Sweden, UK.

The other WPs will expand on WP1's results. WP2 tests the effectiveness of inclusivity norms and boundary conditions systematically in experimental settings. WP3 and WP4 offer a detailed account of how inclusivity norms spread in social networks. WP1 offers first results about the effectiveness of inclusivity norms among youths targeted in the intervention (WP5).

Work Package 2: Experiments with inclusivity norms (PIs Bukowski and Christ)

WP2 aims to test RQ1 in a controlled, experimental setting. While WP1 examines the association between perceived inclusivity norms and different outcome measures, experimental studies allow us to test the causal effect of inclusivity norms. WP2 also tests the most effective way to change social norm perceptions and examines individual and situational characteristics that inhibit or boost the effectiveness of inclusivity norms. WP2 develops three lines of studies that build upon each other. Altogether, we plan two correlational pilot studies and ten experimental studies. All studies will be pre-registered. Sample sizes of the experiments were predetermined using priori power analyses (medium effect size f = .25; α = .05; 1- β = .90).

In the first line of studies, we will run two **correlational pilot studies** (studies 1a and 1b; N = 500 each) – one in Hagen and the other in Krakow to replicate the results – that will inform the design of the experimental manipulations of inclusivity norms, adapted to the intergroup context in Germany and Poland. Since WP1 cannot include detailed measures due to response time restrictions, these studies offer the opportunity to use elaborate, multiple-item measures for perceived (descriptive and injunctive) inclusivity norms and key outcomes (*e.g.*, social perceptions of outgroups, tolerance, willingness to collaborate). Moreover, we will add other variables, including individual-level moderators such as sense of personal and sociopolitical control and need for cognitive closure. Based on the results of WP1 and these two pilots, we will design and pretest the experimental studies in Lines 2 and 3. We plan to use carefully constructed, realistic vignettes to manipulate perceived inclusivity norms (cf. [27]).

Line 2 will systematically test the effectiveness of inclusivity norms in promoting tolerance, dialogue, and willingness to collaborate, both in adult and adolescent samples. In experimental Study 2a (German adult sample; N=280) and 2b (Polish adult sample; N=280), we test the most effective (combination of) ingredients of inclusivity norms on tolerance, contact, and collaboration. We will contrast four experimental conditions (condition 1: norms promoting tolerance; condition 2: norms promoting tolerance and dialogue; condition 3: norms promoting tolerance, dialogue, and unity; condition 4: baseline, no norm manipulation). In Study 2c (N=280), we will replicate this experiment using a sample of German adolescents, which is the population targeted in WP5. In Study 3a (German adult sample; N=252) and 3b (sample of German adolescents; N=252), we will test inasmuch the sources of normative information and strength of identification with the ingroup and the superordinate category influences the effectiveness of inclusivity norms [26]. We will manipulate the source of normative information (ingroup vs. outgroup vs. superordinate level source). Finally, in Study 4a (German adult sample; N=280) and Study 4b (sample of German adolescents; N=280), we will test and assess the effectiveness of descriptive and injunctive inclusivity norms comparing four experimental conditions (condition 1: descriptive norm; condition 2: injunctive norm; condition 3: descriptive plus injunctive norm; condition 4: baseline).

In Line 3, we conduct three experimental studies that focus on **situational and personal factors (such as social threats and personal motives) that modulate conformity to inclusivity norms**. In Study 5 (*N*=500), we assess the impact of experimentally manipulated inclusivity norms on perceptions of and attitudes towards outgroup members as well as behavioral intentions (*e.g.*, willingness to collaborate with outgroup members). Intergroup relations will be assessed regarding polarizing social issues (*e.g.*, abortion law, attitudes towards the EU). As a moderating (*i.e.*, boundary) variable, we will assess perceived threat to basic social motives (*e.g.*, belonging, control, certainty). A pilot study will be administered to identify the context, which imposes a vivid threat to personal motives (*e.g.*, threats experienced as the aftermath of the pandemic; see [28]). Based on previous research [29, 30]), we predict that high threat can enhance conformity to inclusivity norms. In Study 6 (*N*=360), we plan to manipulate experimentally the salience of inclusivity norms and the **Project INCLUSIVITY** 5

salience of social threats, in a 2 (norm vs. no norm conditions) × 2 (threat salience: high vs. low) study design. Threat saliency manipulation will be administered using fictitious vignettes (articles describing high vs. low threat related to present social events identified in the previously administered pilot study). The key outcome variables as defined in the pilot studies will be assessed. We predict that norm conformity will be higher in contexts where threat and inclusivity norms will be salient than in contexts of low threat but also in contexts where the norm is not salient. Additionally, we will examine whether in polarized social settings, the effects on norm conformity are stronger for descriptive or injunctive inclusivity norms. In Study 7 (N=360), we aim to replicate the results of the previous two studies in a **semi-intervention** context, in which student participants will form small task groups and the information about the new ingroup norm will be randomly presented either by social referent ingroup members (injunctive norm) or based on information of what percentage of the newly formed group is willing to follow the norm (descriptive norm). An injunctive or descriptive inclusivity norm will be made salient either in a threatening or non-threatening context. Threat will be manipulated by inducing a sense of high vs. low personal control over the outcomes of individual actions. We expect higher norm conformity in a threatening context, because acting in line with group norms can serve as a means to restore a sense of control and certainty.

Work Package 3: Personal network analysis (PI Lubbers)

While research on interpersonal influence typically studies single settings (*e.g.*, bounded groups such as schools), individuals participate in numerous settings in daily life (*e.g.*, work, family, neighborhood, friends, children's schools), where they interact with people of their own and other social groups. Consequently, each individual has a unique interpersonal environment (*personal network*), composed of their interaction partners. These relationships vary in strength, role, duration, and similarity in ethnicity or political orientation, jointly exerting a complex social influence on them. While evidence shows that people with outgroup members in their personal networks have more positive attitudes toward that group [31, 32], it is unclear how relationship characteristics and network positions moderate this influence. Furthermore, there is no evidence on the perceptions and spread of inclusivity norms in personal networks.

WP3 addresses these gaps. The polarization regarding Catalonia's independence of Spain provides us with an excellent case to study this. About half of Catalonia's population favors independence, the other half not [33], dividing families, friendships, and communities [34, 35]. The gap has deepened over time and repeatedly leads to escalation. How do people adopt, negotiate, or abandon inclusivity norms while managing these ideological differences in their networks? Which relationships affect individuals' perceptions of inclusivity norms most? Which network constellations favor conformity, internalization, and active enforcement of inclusivity norms?

To answer these questions, WP3 adopts a sequential mixed-methods design, where personal network analysis [36] and semi-structured interviews are conducted in (qualitative) Stage 1 and cultural consensus analysis in (quantitative) Stage 2. For Stage 1, we draw a small sample of citizens in Catalonia (N=75; 60 adult citizens and 15 community leaders), following qualitative research principles (*i.e.*, the sample is designed to be theoretically meaningful rather than statistically representative). The sample is stratified into people who clearly identify as (1) independentists and (2) remainers, each having participated in protests or mobilizations, and people with (3) more neutral, mixed, or changing positions. In each category, we seek diversity in sociodemographic characteristics. To delineate participants' networks, we use a political discussion name generator [37], asking with whom participants discuss Catalan independence, and a socialization name generator [36], asking who are important in participants' lives, whether or not participants discuss politics with them. We then ask about the type and strength of each nominated relationship, respondents' perceptions of network members' conformity to inclusivity norms and of their opinions regarding Catalan independence. Semi-structured interviewing complements the networks to explore temporal processes of norm perception and adoption, political discussion with ideologically similar and dissimilar others, opinions about independence, and the envisioned future society. The interviews are tape-recorded, transcribed, and coded from a grounded-Project INCLUSIVITY 6

theory perspective with the software NVIVO, focusing on detecting causal links [38] between networks and norms. Networks are visualized with the software Visone.

In Stage 2, a cultural consensus web survey is administered to a randomized panel of Catalonia's population above the age of 14 (*N*=1,000; lower age limit chosen in connection with WP5). Cultural consensus analysis (CCA) studies a community's agreement about cultural norms or values [39]. First, in-depth knowledge is gained from community members about a cultural domain, here in Stage 1. Then, a series of items is constructed and implemented in a survey reflecting, in this case, inclusivity norms, practices to manage ideological differences in networks, and values regarding the envisioned future. Respondents are asked which items reflect the norms they perceive in their environments, rather than their own adherence. The survey also collects data about respondents' attributes (e.g., age, political orientation) and networks. Based on the survey responses, CCA detects (1) whether the community has general consensus about norms and values, or consists of subgroups adhering to distinct norms, (2) which norms generate the most/least consensus, and (3) which individuals perceive the norms most/least accurately. Predictors are individual and network variables. CCA can thus detect issues that foster/inhibit consensus between and within ideological groups and assesses polarization more realistically than binary media imaginaries.

Work Package 4: Network experiments (PI Jaspers)

WP4 employs an experimental approach inspired by so-called intergroup chicken games [41, 42], to test how inclusivity norms can spread in polarized networks. The modelling strategy is threefold: 1. simulations; 2. testing of various within group structures; 3. testing of various between-group structures. We will start with a series of Agent-Based Models (ABMs) in which we vary centralities (e.g., high eigenvector vs high degree centrality) as well as connections (clustering) between two opposing groups, to determine the theoretical reach of our norm interventions. These models will help us develop hypotheses and determine the structures for the following experiments. Network simulations do not always capture the complex interdependencies of real-life networks [43], but they inform us about the most promising avenues for lab experiments. Next, we will impose various network structures in a first series of laboratory experiments to spread the new norm. Two groups will be competing in a specifically designed game over a collective good. The new inclusivity norm will be introduced as an incentive to collaborate with the other team, rather than compete, but only if the innovator(s) manage(s) to get the majority of both groups to collaborate. We test for instance whether a star-like structured network would quickly spread the new norm [44], arguing that the most central actors can carry innovation the furthest (social referent approach). Centola [22] posits that whereas information or disease may spread via highly connected 'influencers', individuals only adopt new behaviors (in this case: norms) after having been exposed to them through multiple social contacts. The mechanism underlying this regularity is social reinforcement. Adoption of new complex behaviors imposes strain on actors, both because they have to replace psychologically embedded behaviors, and because they risk nonconformity to the group. Non-conformity implies social sanctions, such as ridicule or social exclusion. When multiple socially linked others signal their conformity of the behavior to the individual, they will adjust their cost/benefit consideration for adoption of the behavior and will often ultimately do so. Should inclusivity norms diffuse via this mechanism, one would expect a clustered network with many relationships to facilitate the most effective spread. We will thus evaluate both the social referent and complex contagion strategies for the spread of inclusivity norms. See Figure 1 for a graphical representation of these models.

Polarized networks might additionally spread norms differently. Barriers to the spread of norms can be found when the network contains small cliques or network positions that block the dissemination [45]. Social referents with high standings across both groups potentially overcome these barriers, or low-level individuals with some ties at least to the other group are better able to successfully introduce inclusivity norms from the fringes. In a second series of experiments, we therefore intend to limit and vary with whom in both their own and the other group individuals can communicate. We will introduce inclusivity norms when there Project INCLUSIVITY 7

is no contact between the groups; when few people can communicate with one other person from the opposing group; and when one individual can communicate with many others of the other group. By varying the structure of intergroup communication, we can determine which structure spreads inclusivity norms best and furthest. The exact number of participants needed for these experiments is determined after the simulations, as some network structures require more network members than others. Participants will be recruited online, and via the sociology lab at Utrecht University.

Combined, these simulations and experiments will identify which target individuals are most successful in spreading inclusivity norms and under which within- and between-group structures.

Work Package 5: Network intervention (PI Van Zalk)

WP5 will introduce inclusivity norms in the field. Previous research has shown that especially social referents (*e.g.*, adolescents with most friendship nominations from others) can strongly influence norm changes in adolescence [26, 27]. Our network intervention focuses on middle adolescence (*i.e.*, 14–16-year-olds), which is characterized by salient developmental changes in peer relationships [46, 47], and by a peak in susceptibility to peer group norms in schools [48]. Prior interventions show that training social referents in this age group to spread anticonflict norms resulted in greater school-wide adherence to adolescent anti-conflict norms and reductions of interpersonal conflict [26, 27]. However, no prior studies have examined to what degree training social referents is effective for spreading inclusivity norms in school networks.

In WP5, **inclusivity norms will be promoted through such a school-based network intervention.** Our intervention will combine social referent approaches and social reinforcement by targeting influential groups of individuals and training them to exert long-term influence on inclusivity norms. Each intervention group will be trained to develop strategies and will be provided materials and platforms (*e.g.*, a dedicated website) to implement specific measures, activities, or campaigns in their school that promote inclusivity norms [26, 27]. In middle adolescence, this participatory approach in interventions is important as it accommodates youths' developmental needs for autonomy, respect, and status [49].

The intervention's effectiveness will be evaluated in a four-wave experimental network study (with five randomized conditions), with two pre-tests and two post-tests. We will invite five schools for participation at all four waves and implement the intervention randomly in four schools, with one remaining school as control group. At each wave, network data will be collected in all five schools. The procedure is as follows: within each school, all 8th to 10th graders are invited to participate at each wave, and to fill out network nominations on a range of network attributes (e.g., friendships, popularity, visibility; cf. [23]). Using the two pretests of these network data, we will identify four pools of adolescent participants in each school: (1) social referents with high standings in the entire network; (2) social referents with low standings, yet many connections to the fringes; (3) friendship cliques with high interconnections (e.g., mutual friends); and (4) friendship cliques with low interconnections, yet many connections to the fringes. Next, four schools are randomly assigned to the four intervention conditions, exclusively targeting one of the four pools of adolescents (capped at n=60 for feasibility). This allows us to evaluate both the complex contagion and social referent strategies for the spread of inclusivity norms. The use of longitudinal pre-test data is important to select adolescents and cliques who remain most stable in their network positions (as they are assumed to have more influence; see [48]). We will use two post-tests to examine immediate and lagged intervention effects. Specifically, we will examine to what degree the intervention results in the spreading of perceived inclusivity norms in networks, which, in turn, improves tolerance, collaboration, and contact willingness between ethnic, religious, and other groups.

Through our ongoing collaboration with the *Landespräventionsrat Niedersachsen* and the *Verein Niedersächsische Bildungsinitiativen*, we will first screen 8th to 10th graders with surveys on risk factors for adolescent polarization (*e.g.,* relative deprivation, divergent political attitudes, intergroup conflict, group discrimination; [46]). We will then select five schools that score high on these risk factors (a total of $N \approx 750$). An a *priori* power analysis (medium effect **Project INCLUSIVITY** 8

size f = .25; α = .05; 1- β = .90; four waves, five conditions) showed we need minimally *n*=390. Based on our own and others' prior studies with similar designs [23, 48], we anticipate a minimum response rate of 60% (*n* \approx 450).

Research ethics

The project will comply with the EU General Data Protection Regulation 2016/679 and national legislations of the scientific use of human data. Ethical approval will be obtained before the project starts by each PI at their respective university's/country's ethical committees. Active informed consent will be obtained from all participants, and for minors additionally from their parents/caregivers. In WP3, we ask separately for consent for the audio-recording of qualitative interviews. The audio-files will be eliminated once interviews are transcribed. Files will be anonymized during the project, and open access will only be given to the irreversibly anonymized quantitative data. Due to easier individual recognition in qualitative research, other authenticated researchers can only access the qualitative data upon signing a confidentiality agreement.

Originality and innovativeness of the project

The project is unique in integrating psychological research on social norms, tolerance, and intergroup relations, sociological research on social cohesion and polarization, and social network theory and analysis. We take a novel perspective on inclusivity norms, which span across multiple group divides and have the potential to enhance tolerance and the willingness to collaborate with other groups and thereby reduce and even prevent consequences of increasing polarization in Europe. Second, studies examining the role of social norms in the context of polarization are scant, and no empirical studies have examined how inclusivity norms can counter polarization on a European level or elsewhere. We will provide a substantial contribution to this field by combining survey, experimental, qualitative, and network methods in a series of studies cutting across many European countries. Third, we will design and evaluate a novel intervention strategy that focuses on perceived social norms as a key vehicle of social change, that explicitly uses social network analysis to identify and work with key network members who spread inclusivity norms in their social networks. Fourth, hitherto, there is very limited evidence regarding network interventions when a network consists of opposing groups. The literature commonly argues that norms provide solutions to problems of collaboration in social dilemmas [6]); however, little research has addressed norms that cross group divides (but see [45]). We will contribute to this emerging literature by focusing on the spread of norms in intergroup settings and test which individual variables, social context features, and network structural elements can block or enhance the impact of inclusivity norms on tolerance and intergroup collaboration.

Significance for the research field of "Challenges for Europe"

The socio-economic divide is growing in Europe throughout the last decades. The global financial crisis and, more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic have magnified existing social divisions and inequalities. These conditions are bound to enhance barriers and distance between social groups, lessen trust and social cohesion, and ultimately boost intolerance, discrimination, polarization, and political instability for years to come. To prevent harmful consequences for the social tissue of European communities and societies, and to effectively promote tolerance, cohesion and collaboration between Europeans, we propose to identify and study the power of norms to reduce polarization consequences in a novel and integrated approach.

Our approach advances research on current European challenges in three important ways. First, we provide a **unique**, evidence-based approach to understand how **polarization in Europe underlies major and interrelated European challenges** identified in prior research (*e.g.*, intolerance and integration problems, disinformation in the social media, populism). We propose that inclusivity norms have the potential to enhance the capacity of **Project INCLUSIVITY** 9

European societies to improve relations between opposing groups across multiple lines and thereby address these European polarization challenges. Second, our experimental and network approach to inclusivity norms goes beyond the state of the art, leading to a better understanding of these critical challenges and **a theoretically informed and rigorously examined intervention to address polarization in Europe**. Third, our project will result in unparalleled open-access empirical data on similarities and differences in inclusivity norms between 16 European countries and salient groups within European countries, including EU separatist movements (*e.g.,* Catalonia), in terms of the most effective ingredients and effectiveness-optimizing conditions in promoting cohesion in Europe.

Relevance for European countries and EU policy

This project will be crucial to European societies and EU policy for two main reasons. First, the increasing segregation of and polarization between groups in Europe are linked to growing intolerance, lack of willingness to come into dialogue, misunderstandings, and conflicts between different groups, ultimately leading to hostility, or even violence. Developing and maintaining common, overarching inclusivity norms, defined by equality-based respect, dialogue, and unity, is especially problematic in the diverse settings common in most EU countries and between EU countries. Inclusivity norms are important prosocial norms: when community members endorse inclusivity norms, they are likely better able to solve other normative conflicts and address collective action (social) dilemmas. Our project will produce unique knowledge on how to optimize transmission and adoption of such norms in contemporary Europe, especially amongst youth. In this sense, our project identifies social and psychological conditions that favor the implementation of diversity and inclusion strategies in the EU especially in the education of future generations of Europeans, in accordance with existing EU policies.

Second, by creating an international research hub on inclusivity norms, facilitated by implementing workshops, conferences, a multilingual website specifically designed for nonexperts, and ongoing collaborations with stakeholders, our project **will transfer knowledge to stakeholders and the general public in Europe**. A prime example is our collaboration with practitioners in the Radicalisation Awareness Network who work with youths in schools and neighborhoods. Thus, the unique scientific knowledge on inclusivity norms gained in this project will be transferred into European policies addressing polarization. We believe that by working on the social and psychological underpinnings of building intergroup relations based on respect, tolerance and readiness to communicate and collaborate on joint challenges (*e.g.*, treating the social, economic and public health crises as a joint task and challenge that can only be solved by acting together in solidarity), we can also promote tolerance for diversity of opinions and cultural backgrounds, and trust in democratic procedures that protect basic human rights.

Key participants and their expertise

The key participants form an interdisciplinary, international team. **PI Prof. Oliver Christ** (FernUniversität in Hagen) will coordinate WP1, **PI Prof. Marcin Bukowski (Jagiellonian University, Kraków)** WP2, **PI Prof. Miranda Lubbers (Autonomous University of Barcelona)** WP3, **PI Prof. Eva Jaspers (Utrecht University)** WP4 and **lead PI Prof. Maarten van Zalk (Osnabrück University)** will coordinate the project and WP5. All PIs are leading experts on social norms, intergroup relations, intergroup conflict and collaboration, and network analysis. The team's competencies guarantee a genuine interdisciplinary approach, bridging social, political, developmental psychology with sociological perspectives. The PIs collaborated together in past international and externally funded research schemes and have extensive experience in collaborative, cross-national research, and **complementary expertise** in survey, experimental, and intervention studies (see CVs).

Organization of the group and expected synergies

All PIs will contribute to data collection, survey design, analysis, and dissemination, including academic and policy work. The PIs have equally weighted roles to contribute to the project's success and will train and each be supported by one **Early Career Researcher** (PhD student or Postdoc). The PIs have ample experience with the supervision of junior researchers (see CVs). To further contribute to their training and ensure knowledge exchange between groups, the ECRs funded by this scheme will each visit one of the other PIs' institutions for three months.

Our team will benefit from external and international expertise, through an **advisory board** of additional ECR and senior researcher experts. The board includes Prof. Maykel Verkuyten (social psychologist and anthropologist, academic director of the European Research Centre on Migration and Ethnic Relations at Utrecht University); Dr. Nicole Tausch (social psychologist, St Andrews, UK); Dr. Tobias Stark (sociologist and social network analyst; ERCOMER); Prof. Soledad de Lemus (social psychologist, University of Granada), Prof. Małgorzata Kossowska (social psychologist, Jagiellonian University, Krakow) and Dr. Zsófia Boda (sociologist and social network analyst, ETH Zürich). They have already agreed to serve on the board. We have budgeted travel costs for these partners, PIs and ECRs to attend meetings. This combination of talent ensures that our work (a) is grounded in state-of-the-art science, (b) is highly innovative, and (c) will stimulate and shape the research of junior scientists.

The project will result in a joint peer-reviewed monograph on inclusivity norms. ECRs will participate in this book and other publications in peer-reviewed international journals and policy-relevant documents supervised by senior researchers in each WP.

Open Science

All PIs are actively committed to research transparency and will implement Open Science principles in this project (*e.g.*, pre-registration, open data, reproducible code). For optimal dissemination of findings and to allow replication, we will make all materials, quantitative data, and statistical code openly available using the OSF, ZPID and European Open Science Cloud tools, applying the FAIR principles (findable, accessible, interoperable, re-useable; see [51]). Qualitative data can be accessed by other authenticated researchers (see Ethics). All applicants have experience in applying best open science practices in terms of transparency in data collection and analysis, public availability of data, accessibility and transparency of scientific communication. All hypotheses will be preregistered before any data is collected. Furthermore, we have reserved external funds for article-processing charges for Open Access publishing.

Integration and supervision of junior researchers

We will hire all personnel according to Open, Transparent and Merit-based-Recruitment (OTM-R) quidelines. All PIs are fervently committed to promote an inclusive and diverse research community and will ensure equal opportunities and actively strive for diversity in our groups. As in our previous collaborations (e.g., the European Collaborative Research Project and the Open Research Area projects, see CVs), each ECR will be supervised by a PI, which includes (a) regular and personal mentoring (e.g., creating and maintaining an individual academic development plan); (b) self-directed and problem-based learning through independent reading and written work; (c) in-depth discussion of oral and written work with supervisor; (d) use of interdisciplinary approaches to maximize academic resource availability; (e) and stimulating ECRs to take their and other universities' academic courses and individual (career-related) consultation offers. To maximize ECRs' benefits from the team's international expertise, we will form a joint PhD committee of multiple PIs to supervise the two doctoral students. We will therefore implement a community of learners approach and also involve scholarly working groups among the ECRs, which will further stimulate a sense of academic cohesion, academic skills (e.g., writing, publishing), and knowledge exchange in our interdisciplinary group. ECRs Project INCLUSIVITY 11

will meet regularly online to discuss their research and development. At our annual meetings, ECRs and PIs will present and share research, benefiting both the ECRs and the PIs from the interdisciplinary team as a whole. All ECRs will participate in further academic training (*e.g.,* individual academic development plans, including the acquisition of higher education teaching certificates).

Strategy for science communication

The science communication strategy is oriented at (1) other social scientists, and (2) policymakers and the general public. Regarding other scientists, the project will invite international experts to the advisory board (see above), which amplifies the scientific impact of the research. Results will be published in high-impact international academic journals. Furthermore, we will organize an **international academic conference on targeting polarization in Europe** (organized by PI Jaspers) to disseminate our own and other cutting-edge scientific findings relevant to our project.

Regarding policymakers and the public, following the principles of Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI), we will actively involve societal stakeholders in the project. Furthermore, we will communicate research and intervention insights to relevant stakeholders, policymakers, and the public. For this aim, we will disseminate policy briefs at the EU level. involving EU-commissioned networks of practitioners (e.g., the Youth and Education work group of the Radicalization Awareness Network; see CV Van Zalk). We will also organize an international conference involving practitioners and other stakeholders (organized by PI Van Zalk), including dissemination of our own and other relevant cutting-edge scientific findings, workshops for NGOs, youth, and community groups interested in norms of inclusiveness and collaboration overcoming societal divisions in their groups. For instance. practitioners, scientists, and other professionals working on EU polarization will share key findings together with adolescent social referents who attended the social intervention in WP5. The team will involve governmental and other organizations through ongoing collaborations (see CVs) to further ensure knowledge dissemination, and will create, maintain, and promote through national and international social media, a multilingual website summarizing our findings in plain, accessible language intended for front-line practitioners in NGOs and community groups and publish all data, materials and results through open-access channels.

We will also apply for the Volkswagen Stiftung's **science communication module**. We have developed a strategy to establish and stimulate sustainable dialogue about inclusivity norms and their power to improve intergroup relations between (a) the scientific team/community and (b) adolescent citizens, a notoriously hard-to-reach target group, but an essential group of early adopters [52]. We will develop three tools in this module: the creation of (1) **an online and interactive graphic novel**²; (2) a so-called **serious game** that matches adolescents across Europe with each other to game and interact³; (3) an **international podcast** to transmit regularly updated key findings and personal experiences of adolescent participants in our intervention. All tools will be co-created with adolescents across Europe and distributed via European municipalities through our ongoing collaboration with Eurocities (<u>https://eurocities.eu/</u>) and via the social media adolescents primarily use, such as Instagram.

Work plan

Table 2 summarizes the work plan. From the **kickoff meeting** onward, we will prepare the general project and further design the methods used in the WPs. General project preparation involves developing ethical protocols, data management and communication plans, recruiting ECRs, and pre-registering research plans. Each WP will then design data collection materials,

² We have developed a plan with award-winning graphic novelist Maximilian Hillerzeder, who specializes in publishing graphic novels for adolescents on tolerance and group conflict and has an established track record. He won the "Tolerance in Comics und Graphic Novels" Award of the Evangelischer Presseverband für Bayern e.V. (EPV) in 2020.

³ We are communicating with Team Liquid about the development and promotion of this game (<u>https://www.teamliquid.com/</u>).

train ECRs, conduct pilot studies, and implement the data collection and analysis. In all WPs, each period of data collection is followed by coding and analysis and work on publications and dissemination.

WP1 starts in Month 2 with pre-testing, designing a large survey, collecting and analyzing data from 16 European countries. It also covers work on publication and dissemination of research findings. The first results feed into WP2-5.

WP2 covers a set of 11 studies (two correlational and nine experiments) divided into 3 lines of research. Each line takes approximately 12 months. The tasks planned within each line involve study design, pilot-testing, data collection, and analysis.

WP3 conducts a sequential mixed-methods study. Phase 1 involves personal network analysis and semi-structured interviews (16 months, involving preliminary fieldwork, design, pilot-testing, sampling, data collection, transcription, coding, network visualization and analysis) and Phase 2 cultural consensus analysis.



 Year 1
 Year 2
 Year 3
 Year 4

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Note: All PIs and their teams are involved in General preparation, WP1, Integration (theory and practical implications), and Science communication. WP2: PIs Bukowski and Christ; WP3: PI Lubbers; WP4: PI Jaspers; WP5: PI Van Zalk.

Table 2. Work plan.

WP4 will have three elements, namely simulations and two series of experiments (4 months each). Tasks involve design, pilot-testing, recruiting participants, coding, analysis and network visualization.

WP5 needs twelve months of preparation of complex data collection (*i.e.*, four-wave panel assessments of large school networks; *e.g.*, obtaining adolescent and parental informed

consent; further organization of data-collection in schools; validation of scales for adolescent populations) and (b) designing and preparing the intervention informed by initial results from WP1. We will start with (I) two pre-tests at the start of the school year (in the first half of year 2); (II) followed by the three-month intervention; and (III) implementation of the two post-tests.

In the second half of the project, after the first results, we will start **integrating the results in a theoretical model** of inclusivity norms, discuss practical implications, and write the monograph. Furthermore, we will develop **knowledge transfer activities** and apply for VWS's science communication module.

Throughout the project, we will hold regular online meetings and **four face-to-face group meetings** (one in each participating country) to ensure the integration of the subprojects and facilitate synergies. We will present results, exchange feedback, plan joined publications, and discuss further plans. At a **final meeting**, we will disseminate final results and plan future research and knowledge transfer.