

Minority Issues in the DK-DE Border Region

Vision 2024-26

The ECMI Cluster “Minority Issues in the Denmark-Germany Border Region” was established in 2022 and has gradually become consolidated with both staff and initial activities. As the team has come together, so too has a clearer vision of the Cluster’s mission as well as its research foci over the next 3-4 years. This document presents these two key parameters as a way of clarifying the Cluster’s scope, needs and plans.

Mission

The Denmark-Germany border region is home to four officially recognized national minorities. This diversity is not simply a circumstance of the region. It also offers, from a research point of view, a unique laboratory for the simultaneous study of different ethnopolitical and ethnolinguistic situations. Whereas the German and Danish minorities reflect borderland settings with an important role being played by their reciprocal kin-states, the Frisian minority represents the case of a small minority without a kin-state and being confronted with the need to maintain its linguistic and cultural vitality. Meanwhile, the Sinti and Roma in Schleswig Holstein form part of a European-wide minority, but also without a kin-state and struggling against long historical prejudice and persecution. The Cluster is committed to both encompassing and serving this **multiplicity** of minority communities through its research, policy advice, and outreach activities.

Further, we believe this diversity calls for a conscious nurturing of **multidisciplinary competences**, as the four communities embody different minority issues, be they sociolinguistic, political, historical, socio-psychological or economic. In this respect, the Cluster differs from the other ECMI clusters, since the latter tend to derive from single disciplines, e.g. Justice and Governance is heavily linked to law, Politics and Civil Society to political science. The DK-DE Border Region Cluster, by contrast, must be more consciously interdisciplinary to fulfill its aims.

We believe the development of the Cluster with these two objectives actively in mind corresponds best to the mandate of the ECMI and the interests of its three Founders.

To this end the Cluster has sought to develop its staff in such a way as to cover these varied directions. At the moment the Cluster has strong grounding in both the Danish and German minorities (Martin Klatt + initially Johann Hörkner, henceforth Erik Köhl) and the Frisian minority (Ruth Kircher). A specialist in Sinti-Roma affairs will hopefully be available in the coming years. In the meantime, the Cluster is developing its outreach to the Sinti and Roma community with its existing staff (see Director’s Report for April 2024) and working actively with other scholars familiar with Sinti-Roma research (e.g. Sebastian Lotto-Kusche from the EUF).

Likewise, the Cluster has developed a very strong interdisciplinary balance with Martin Klatt (history/political science), Ruth Kircher (sociolinguistics/social psychology), and Johann

Hörkner and Erik Kühl (political science). Moreover, these disciplinary backgrounds encompass a wide range of research skills and approaches, including both qualitative and quantitative methods.

In sum, the Cluster sees as its mission:

- to maintain a multi-dimensional focus on the four national minorities of the region,
- to sustain multi-disciplinary perspectives and diverse methodological competences,
- to deliver a variety of research outputs, policy advice, and outreach activities.

Research and activity agenda

The substantive, thematic program of the Cluster over the next 3-4 years is intended to focus on some of the most important issues pertaining to the four communities of the region as well as contributing to research innovation. To this end, the Cluster will cover projects related to the individual minorities but will also seek to develop overarching actions that will help both to compare the minorities and to develop a region-wide (cross-border) understanding of the four minority groups, of their inter-relations, and of their relationships with the different majority communities.

Three specific research strands are planned for the next 3-4 years.

1. Unpacking the Danish-German minority model

The Danish-German minority model usually focuses on the bilateral, reciprocal kin-state – kin-minority relation as well as home state recognition by the Danish and German minorities. However, the essence of minority affairs in the region has increasingly become an *interaction* of all four minority groups in the region to the extent that government policy often operates with all four in mind. This is epitomized by phenomena such as the *Dialog Forum Norden* and the *Minderheiten-Kompetenz-Netzwerk*. The model has clearly evolved into a more intricate and interactive relationship.

Moreover, drawing on the postulate that the four minorities in the region represent at least three different ethnopolitical situations, it is important to unpack the ways in which these differences are also mirrored in community organization, government policy, and public attitudes. For the German and Danish minorities, the challenge often relates to retaining their unique minority character in a context of increasingly hybrid identities among some members, a considerable inflow of new members from the home states attracted by the competitive education system of the minorities, as well as kin-state identities among new settlers (e.g. *Zuzügler*). Meanwhile, a different constellation of organization, policy, and attitudes are at stake when the challenge is minority language transmission and cultural identity preservation – as it is among Frisians. Lastly, struggles against discrimination and racism in socio-economic life imply yet another model when talking about the Sinti and Roma.

By leveraging precisely the multidisciplinary profile of the Cluster, the aim of this research stream will be to diversify our understanding of the Denmark-Germany minority model and

to draw more conscious and nuanced attention to the multidimensionality of minority issues in the region.

The stream will be led by Martin Klatt with assistance from Erik Kühl.

2. Supporting minority language transmission

For many minority communities in Europe, one of the most important dimensions of life involves retaining language vitality. North Frisian, spoken almost exclusively in the district of North Frisia, is an endangered minority language whose speaker numbers have been declining for years. To date, research as well as language policies and planning measures have focused primarily on the maintenance and revitalization of North Frisian via the traditional education system. This remains important. However, promoting the intergenerational transmission of North Frisian in the home, long before children enter the education system, is also crucial. Additionally, the transmission of North Frisian to adult new speakers (i.e. individuals who did not acquire the minority language at home when they were children) can play a pivotal role in the revitalization process.

The research conducted as part of this stream will investigate these issues, with the aim of informing language policies and planning measures that support the intergenerational transmission of North Frisian – and thereby the revitalization of this endangered minority language. Already in 2024, an important survey-based study will be conducted among North Frisian speakers, the results of which will constitute the basis for more targeted approaches to supporting intergenerational language transmission among minority communities. Additional, comparative work between North Frisia and West Frisia will follow on from this, based on external funding from the Provincial Government of Fryslân that has already been secured.

This stream is being led by Ruth Kircher and will additionally involve the Researcher in inter-group relations, once appointed.

3. Developing a survey instrument on inter-group relations

Research on minority issues in the Denmark-Germany border region needs more temporal continuity (time-series data) and integrative dimensions (encompassing both minority and majority populations). To this end, the Cluster will seek to develop a large-scale survey study of intergroup relations that can be repeated in future years and allow for comparison across both minority and majority groups.

This stream is described in a separate document in order to underscore its more infrastructural nature. In addition, the document serves to clarify why the Cluster believes that the selection criteria for the new Researcher in inter-group relations must privilege prior experience with quantitative data collection and analysis (e.g. knowledge of statistical programs such as R). The success and innovative potential of the stream depend on it.

This stream will be a joint endeavor by Ruth Kircher and Martin Klatt, and will additionally involve the Researcher in intergroup relations, once appointed.