

## PROFILE 'SOCIAL TRANSITIONS'

### **Collaboration across faculties**

Leiden University has created 15 broad profiles to encourage collaboration among academics working in these fields across different disciplines, departments and faculties. The profiles are intended, in other words, to bring together colleagues who are otherwise organized in separate units, and to do so across research, education and societal impact alike.

### **What is changing, rapidly**

Pressing societal transitions—such as the energy transition, increasing social diversity, fast-paced digitalization, and political fragmentation—profoundly affect the political, economic, legal and social fabric of our societies. They redistribute costs, opportunities, status and authority. They place demands on institutions—courts, markets, schools, media, governments—that were not designed with them in mind. And they can give rise to divisions and inequalities and put democratic institutions to the test.

### **What Leiden brings**

Leiden University conducts research on a number of these social transitions and helps citizens, civil society organizations, journalists, politicians, lawyers and policymakers interpret and shape these changes, drawing on insights from law, the humanities, and the social and behavioral sciences.

### **What the Social Transitions profile will do**

This profile brings together Leiden academics working on social transitions, creating a broader interdisciplinary network for exchange and new forms of collaboration across research, education and societal impact. Through this network the profile will develop and support joint activities and initiatives.

### **Areas of focus**

The profile does not start from fixed assumptions about what different social transitions have in common. Rather, it proposes several lines of enquiry, none of them exhaustive, and encourages colleagues to expand, refine, and reshape them.

**Institutions under strain.** How do legal frameworks, political institutions, economic systems, public administration, education and the media hold up under current rapid societal changes, and what has to be redesigned?

**Who bears the costs.** Transitions do not fall evenly. Which groups carry the burden of adjustment, how is that experienced, and what does it do to trust in institutions? How can individuals, groups, communities, and societies better navigate the redistributive struggles?

**Disagreement about values.** One recurring feature of many social transitions is that they give rise to highly charged controversies about political, legal and social values. Difficulties in discussing these controversies - caused by multiple factors such as social segregation, polarization, and disinformation - can create rifts in societies and make solutions harder to find. This strand does not assume that conflict is essentially a failure of communication: some disagreements rest on genuinely opposed interests, and part of the research agenda is to understand when dialogue is the right instrument and when it is not.

### **Dialogue as an opening research, education and impact theme**

At Leiden University, scholars from several departments have developed methods for facilitating dialogue on controversial issues, intended for its own student population as well as groups in society (schools, workplaces, associations etc.). The profile team wants to identify these initiatives and create platforms for collaboration and research within the university, with the aim of putting these initiatives to wider use both within and beyond the university.

Alongside this, the profile wants to ask the harder empirical questions: do these methods work, for whom, and under what conditions? Municipalities, provinces and employers face these questions concretely — in siting decisions for the energy transition, in participation procedures, and in workplace tensions — and this is one area where the profile can offer something practical rather than only interpretive.