



**“A sense or space of belonging is not constant for me; it happens at moments.”:
Queering Belonging in Dutch Higher Education**

Martijn Sips & Zehra Çolak

24 April, 9:00 – 10:30, Tinbergen Zaal

Belonging is a fundamental human need (Allen, 2020). Still, belonging is not always a given, especially for marginalized students in education (Steenwegen et al., 2025; Verbree et al., 2025). Moreover, research tends to view belonging in education as a fixed phenomenon, overlooking its dynamic and relational nature and especially the interactions among actors that shape it (Covarrubias, 2023). This study draws on the relational space framework (Butler et al., 2015) to study the social belonging (Louie et al., 2022) of queer students in Dutch higher education. In doing so, we explore spaces of belonging as relationally defined, temporary manifestations in education (e.g., a lecture) co-generated by various actors, including students themselves (Allen, 2020; Wong, 2024). Through in-depth interviews alongside co-drawing and photo-elicitation with 15 LGBTQIA+ students, we identified four main institutional actors shaping students' belonging: peers, teachers, the curriculum, and the physical space of student associations. By first in- and deductively apply thematic analysis, then illustrating how actors foster students' belonging through case-based analysis, we ultimately holistically interpret how actors jointly shape students' spaces of belonging. As a result, we showcase existing practices in which actors effectively collaborate to foster queer students' belonging in Dutch higher education.