As the debates on the accommodation of people’s cultural differences within western liberal societies have become more common, they have also become more detailed and fragmented. The theoretical and empirical, as well as political, discussions on different kinds of groups (national and linguistic minorities, indigenous peoples, immigrants, religious minorities and so on) and on different kinds of minority rights (self-governance, representation, assistance, exemption, symbolic recognition and so on) have, to a large extent, been differentiated, taking into account the complexity of normative considerations inherent in each. Many of the discussions have also operated within the political and legal contexts of particular societies, directing the debates away from the more abstract questions on the justifiability of differentiated rights within liberalism, to the more pragmatic questions on the kinds of consequences that different cultural policies may have, not only for the minorities or minority members, but also for the society at large. The critical assessments of different political models of multiculturalism have also led to scepticism, both with respect to liberal multicultural theories as well as the applicability of these theories in practice.

While the acknowledgement of the complexity of multicultural issues and the variety of ways in which these issues are approached bear many positive aspects, the fragmentation of the field has not been an altogether positive development. The contemporary, highly contextualized and specified debates on cultural accommodation owe much to older, more general debates and should thus also be assessed in the light of these historical roots. Many of the contemporary discussions utilize the theoretical frameworks developed at the height of the theoretical debates on multiculturalism in the late 1990s and early millennium, taking these debates as the general frameworks within which to assess
the more specific issues in question. Consequently, many of the flaws and presuppositions of these theories have been transferred to contemporary debates, leaving some of the crucial presuppositions of liberal multiculturalism unquestioned.¹

In the light of these developments, the aims of this work have been twofold. On the one hand, I have aimed to return to the roots of liberal multiculturalism in order to see why, in contemporary contexts, the liberal multicultural project is viewed both as a failure, and as a framework within which the more specific debates should, nevertheless, be conducted. The acknowledgement of this twofold nature of the liberal multicultural project has led me to look at some of the founding questions of liberal multiculturalism, including the questions relating to the initial framing of the debates, and the difficulties that this framing has led to with respect to the applicability of liberal multicultural theories in practice.

On the other hand, I have also tried to assess some of the current debates on liberal multiculturalism by way of assessing some of the presuppositions inherent in these debates. These have included the presumption of group-differentiation in cultural policies, and the difficulties that this emphasis on groups and group memberships brings to the specifically liberal approaches to cultural diversity. My focus on the issues of group-differentiation further led me to look for ways in which the liberal state, engaging in a variety of accommodative measures, could develop these measures by focusing more on the rationales behind different types of culturally differentiated rights, and those people (not necessarily group members) whose benefit these rights were set to serve. As a result, suggestions for more individuated, yet culturally sensitive approaches to cultural diversity were put forward, bringing the individual – albeit a culturally embedded individual – back to the centre stage of debate.

**Theoretical frameworks versus policy guidance**

In Part I, I discussed the so-called grand theories of multiculturalism, including autonomy-, equality-, and toleration-based approaches to cultural diversity. These theories were assessed both for internal consistency as well as for their scope of application. The applicability of the autonomy-, equality- and toleration-based approaches was discussed, not only in the light of their own theoretical frameworks, but also in relation to the frameworks of traditional liberalism on the one hand, and actual state policies on the other.