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# ***Inclusion and diversity management in education and work-life: a slogan or a true process?***

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## **ABSTRACT**

Major demographic and generational changes, massive digitalization, open access policies and an increased need for widening participation are changing the landscape for tertiary level students as well as future knowledge intensive and managerial level experts. Many higher education institutions (HEI) have taken efforts to increase inclusion in order to cater for increasingly diverse students and work-life needs. HEIs seem to be at the forefront of adopting an inclusive mindset and managing student diversity (Claeys-Kulik, Ekman Jørgensen & Ströber 2019). Many initiatives have also been taken in work-life, but there is currently no clear understanding of what the status of diversity management is in the labor market.

The study sets out to explore and compare how employer organizations have adopted an inclusive mindset by reviewing the organizations' self-reported activities on their websites. The benchmark includes major employers and largest private companies by turnover in four selected geographical areas, with ten organizations from each region (Birmingham, Cologne, Helsinki, Linz). The observation of inclusion and the status of diversity management (IDM) is based on the diversity management scale outlined by Langholz (2014). The data were gathered quantitatively from existing documentation on www-pages. The analysis was based on an applied thematic analysis through categorizing similar themes as outlined by Guest, MaQueen & Namey (2012).

The study reveals that HEI's may, indeed, be regional forward-thinkers in dealing with IDM issues. The organizations' websites demonstrate that, although still taking a predominantly deficit-oriented approach and being impregnated by economic arguments, several employers already have or were aiming at taking a strategic approach towards diversity management. More research is needed to understand the wider phenomenon in order to be able to define needed IDM competence and to meet the work-life needs of graduates.

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

Due to societal transformation higher education institutions (HEI) need to reach out and attract increasingly diverse and non-traditional student candidates (Sursock 2015). This demands awareness of inclusive diversity management practices. Inclusion and diversity management (IDM) have been recognized as a strategic issue not only in HEIs but in any organizations ranging from tech start-ups to large multinationals (Räisänen 2019; Claeys-Kulik 2019), and various organizations have embraced their stakeholders' diversity as an opportunity to reach better economic outcomes and increase work-related well-being.

The numerous advantages of inclusion are well researched in both private and public sectors as well in research and academia (e.g. Dizikes 2014; Phillips 2014). Inclusion means a breath of perspectives, benefiting the clients, customers, consumers, citizens, students and similar stakeholder groups in enabling a safe and open-minded dialogue. Inclusion also means attracting, developing and retaining talented employees and reflecting the diverse communities in which the organizations are nested. Diversity management has become such a performance issue and growth engine that, in 2016, financial consultancy Thomson Reuters launched a Diversity & Inclusion Index (D&I) ranking top publicly traded companies and helping investors screen companies for long-term opportunities and risks (Bloomberg 2016).

## **1.1 Objective of the study**

HEIs have become very conscious about educating and preparing their students for increasingly diverse labor markets and, according to a recent large scale survey (INVITED 2019, n=159 HEIs in 36 European systems), 88% of the HEIs reported on addressing the topic of equity, diversity and inclusion as a strategic and explicit value for their institution. Thus, the terms *inclusion*, *diversity* and related concepts are common vocabulary in many institutions. But are they just buzzwords perpetuated in media and by forerunner organizations? Or have employer organizations also adopted an inclusive mindset on a wider front? If so, in which forms is inclusion applied and stakeholder diversities managed? How does the management “walk the talk” and make inclusion more than just a slogan? The research objective of this study is to explore whether the IDM phenomenon has found real foothold in work-life communities in four selected urban regions in Europe.

## **2 PHENOMENA OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION**

The terminology relating to the phenomenon of widening participation in HE includes concepts such as equality, equity, diversity, inclusion, intersectionality, and accessibility (Claeys-Kulik, Ekman Jørgensen & Ströber 2019). This study focuses on the terms *diversity* and *inclusion* and explores how inclusion and diversity management (IDM) have been approached from the perspective of labor markets which is the future work context for many HE graduates. The terms annotate to a variety of slightly different phenomena depending on the context. In this study, diversity is conceptualized as given in the Higher Education Awareness for Diversity model (the HEAD Wheel, Gaisch & Aichinger 2016).

### **2.1 Theoretical framework**

Categorizing for describing diversity are infinite. The HEAD Wheel defines diversity from a holistic perspective. The model has been developed for the tertiary education level but serves well to address diversity also in work-life. It challenges to see differences in a broad sense including intertwined demographic (age, gender, sexual orientation, physical and mental disabilities, cultural backgrounds, ethnicity, religion and ideologies), cognitive, disciplinary, functional and institutional perspectives of diversity (Gaisch & Aichinger 2016).

### **2.2 Key concepts**

*Diversity* and *inclusion* are often used as synonyms, which Sherbin and Rashid (2017) consider a mistake: “In the context of the workplace, diversity equals representation. Without inclusion, however, the crucial connections that attract diverse talent, encourage their participation, foster innovation, and lead to business growth won’t happen“. In other words, diversity does not automatically drive inclusion, which demands action. Diversity enables inclusion if

transformed into capabilities. Many organizations can display *inherent diversity*, which forms the basis for different perspectives and thinking patterns, and is composed of varied backgrounds of the workforce or students (e.g. nationality, gender or age.). However, even more important is *acquired diversity* (Hewlett, Marshall & Sherbin 2013). It is this other dimension of diversity which correlates strongly with an open culture where everybody feels free to voice their opinions, is heard and *feels* included. Acquired diversity is characterized by leadership competencies such as cultural fluency, being generational savvy or gender smart, social media skills, cross-functional knowledge, global mindset, language skills (Hewlett & al. 2013).

Observing or measuring IDM-related phenomena may be challenging. Inherent diversity can be quantified by headcounts and other statistics, but acquired diversity, the actual driver for inclusion, consists of multiple skillsets, knowledge and attitudes which are harder to evaluate. Similarly, the notion of *inclusion* is a very broad phenomenon ranging from different practices, human interaction to emotions. Thus, measuring or assessing it would demand qualitative, in-depth approaches. Moreover, there may not be a shared global understanding about the essence and categories of disadvantaged or underrepresented groups, which should be “included” as the realities are often local or national.

Elaborating the concepts further, Langholz (2014), drawing on several other studies, has listed different approaches to diversity management. The different understandings and ways of dealing with diversity are illustrated in Table 1. Langholz claims that only the last two approaches on her scale can be seen as holistic management opportunities, which can be integrated in organizational structures and processes in long term.

**Table 1.** Understandings and approaches to diversity management (based on Langholz 2014)

Different approaches	Characteristics
Resistance	Denying of or not recognizing institutional diversity; treating members as a homogenous group
Discrimination & fairness	Discrimination an organizational problem, special emphasis on disadvantaged groups. Prevention based on policies and legislation. Quotas. Superficial level without genuine integration.
Access & legitimacy	Economic rationales, diversity a necessity. Matter of choice rather than a legal obligation. Stereotyping likely as people reduced to their minority membership as functionalized actors.
Learning & effectiveness	Proactive learning and adaptive change. Commitment of mutual education and learning. Affects work processes and groups. Focus on potential resources in the medium-term.
Strategic responsibility & sensibility	Broad strategic leadership. Diversity linked to higher org. goals. Long-term positioning, social responsibility

The different conceptual understandings and the diversity management approaches will serve as the framework for observing and analyzing the phenomenon in this study. An additional clarification is needed with the search terminology. Since the research is conducted in four geographical and three different language areas (English, German, Finnish) key words for the data search are listed in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Vocabulary used in data search

English	German	Finnish
Diversity	Diversität Vielfalt	Diversiteetti Moninaisuus
Inclusion	Inklusion	Inklusio

The vocabulary used in the domain of IDM is, in reality, more varied. The chosen terms result from a scoping review of relevant literature.

The concept of *Diversity management* is linked to the American Civil Rights movement and has evolved in the US business sector as a response to different societal changes (Langholz 2014). They are also connected to the immigration history in nations such as the USA, the UK, and Australia (Chydenius & Haapa 2019). Countries with more homogenous population groups (e.g. Austria, Germany, Finland) have adopted the concepts and followed trends set in more heterogenic environments. The applied loan words into German and Finnish (Diversität, diversiteetti; Inklusion, inklusio) reflect the strong foothold in English speaking countries. The term inclusion has been adopted as a direct but phonetically assimilated loan in both the German and Finnish language in lack of directly suitable original words. If this term is not used, the phenomenon is typically explained by several words or a sentence.

### **3 RESEARCH DESIGN**

The research was conducted by desk research reviewing website content of ten prominent organizations in each selected geographical area. The four city regions were chosen due to the participation of four local HEIs to the Enhance IDM project with the aim of diversity awareness raising and enhancing strategic inclusion in these institutions. The institutions were not included in the corpus since the objective was to explore to what extent inclusion is addressed on the studied websites in these regions' labor markets in general.

#### **3.1 The corpus**

The corpus included 10 organizations from each region, consisting of the five biggest employers and the five largest companies by turnover. In order to take a maximally mixed and versatile perspective on the labor markets for HE graduates, the biggest local hospital and university were also included in the corpus. This was already the case in the Helsinki region where both the HUS-hospital and the University of Helsinki were among the top five regional employers. Quite similarly, in Birmingham / West Midlands, Cologne/ North Rhine-Westphalia and Linz / Upper Austria the regionally biggest hospitals and universities were among or very close to the top ten employers.

The selected corpus provides a listing of regionally heterogeneous organizations, which are, in terms of the type of the source rankings, the year of ranking (between 2017-2019), different structural reporting and other regional characteristics, not exactly comparable. Despite these shortages this comparative study is considered indicative enough to give an overview of potential regional trends and cultural emphases. The organizations included in the study in regional alphabetical order were: *2 Sisters Food Group, Bet365, JCB, Lloyds Banking Group, Mondelez (Cadbury & Trebor), National Express (West Midlands Travel), Sainsbury's, The Rigby Group, University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust, University of Birmingham; Bayer Global, Deutsche Lufthansa AG, Ford-Werke GmbH, Kölner Uni Klinik, Lanxess AG, REWE Group, Stadt Köln, Stadtwerke Köln, Strabag Group, Universitet zu Köln; Helsinki University, HUS Hospital, Kesko Group, Neste Group, Nokia Group, Posti Group, SOL*

*Palvelut Oy, StaffPoint Oy, StoraEnso , UPM; BMW Motoren GmbH, Dussmann GmbH, Greiner Group, Hofer KG, JK University, Kepler Universitäts Klinikum, Pierer Industries AG, Swietelsky Baugesellschaft, voestalpine AG, XXXLutz KG.*

## **3.2 Content review and analysis**

Fink (2014) characterizes a good review as systematic, explicit, comprehensive and reproducible. This organized approach directed the steps taken in this analysis based on the above defined search words. Fink's approach was complemented by a text-driven and an interpretative way of reading (Krippendorff 2004) website content. Krippendorff's conceptual foundation of content analysis is based on the perception that content emerges "in the process of a researcher analyzing a text relative to a particular content" (2004, 19) as opposed to definitions that take content to be inherent in a text or a property of the source of the text. This makes content analysis an interpretive approach where the analysts must acknowledge their "own socially or culturally conditioned understandings" influencing and participating in the "interactive-hermeneutic" approach (p. 17). Krippendorff further justifies his interpretative and process-oriented definition of content analysis by the following statements (2004, 22-26):

- "Texts do not have objective, reader-independent meanings.
- Texts can be read from numerous perspectives.
- The meanings of texts do not need to be shared by others.
- Meanings can speak to something other than the given texts.
- Texts have meanings relative to particular contexts, discourses or purposes."

These are important aspects to consider especially since the category borders of different diversity management approaches (Table 1) are very fuzzy and the terminology not consistent and equally established in the different geographical contexts or IDM related discourses.

The seemingly similarly used concepts (diversity, inclusion) were chosen to be used as search words in the webpage review. The data were searched for using these terms in their translated forms when relevant (Diversität Vielfalt; diversiteetti, moninaisuus; Inklusion, inkluusio). The key-word-in-context (KWIC) method locates all occurrences of the term in the text and analyzing the context in which the term appears (Guest, Namey & MacQueen 2012, 10; 51). This often demanded the reading and interpretation of the whole web page or section.

In addition to the general search function available on all websites, the webpages were reviewed manually. Sections which were considered to be the most likely to disclose topical information on IDM related phenomena were:

- Front page
- 20 most recent news postings
- Organizational fact sections (About us / Über uns / Tietoa meistä; Sustainability, responsibility / Nachhaltigkeit, Verantwortung / Vastuullisuus or similar sections)
- Career section

The search was not extended to explore any deeper content such as videos, annual reports or additional pdf's out of the reach of the search function.

	Resistance	Discrimination & fairness	Access & legitimacy	Learning & effectiveness	Strategic responsibility & sensibility		
<b>Birmingham region</b>							
						2 Sisters	
						Beit365	
						JCB	
						Lloyds Banking	
						Mondelez	
						National Express	
						Sainsbury's	
<b>Birmingham region</b>							
						2 Sisters	
						Beit365	
						JCB	
						Lloyds Banking	
						Mondelez	
						National Express	
						The Hatco Group	
						University Hospitals Birmingham	
						University of Birmingham	
<b>Cologne region</b>							
						Bayer	
						Deutsche Lufthansa	
						Ford-Werke	
						Koelner Uni Klinik	
						Lanxess	
						REWE	
						Stadt Köln	
						Stadtwerke Köln	
						Strabag	
						Universität zu Köln	
<b>Helsinki region</b>							
						Helsinki University	
						HUS	
						Keciko	
						Neste	
						Nokia	
						Posti	
						SUL Palvelut	
						StaffPoint	
						StoraEnso	
						UPM	
<b>Linz region</b>							
						BMW	
						Luzmann	
						Gretter	
						Hofer	
						J&L	
						Kedler Universitäts Klinikum	
						Pierer Industriez	
						Swietelsku	
						voestalpine	
						XXLAuto	

In some cases, the organizational approach included mixed elements of diversity management or it was hard to judge the approach category, thus they are marked with dark bars in two relevant categories. Overall, Table 3 indicates that there are, indeed, slight regional differences.

There seems to be only few clear patterns, which allow any generalization. In Birmingham, Cologne and Helsinki regions many organizations can be considered to have a holistic, strategic approach to IDM. These organizations were typically large internationally operating organizations. The most advanced approaches included IDM practices, such as: Advertising reflecting modern society (Lloyd); “No limits” employee testimonials on including a wide range of diverse people (e.g. Nokia); multicultural work induction teams and a world calendar on religious/cultural holidays (SOL Services); a whistle blowing hotline (National Express); flexible work-time models (Rewe, Sainsbury’s); Disabled Days, Greenlight for Girls, participation to the Pride Movement and similar support to local initiatives.

Regional difference could be seen in some accentuations. Several Birmingham located organizations stated about zero tolerance for modern slavery or human trafficking which was not the case in most of the organizations in the EU regions. The German speaking organizations had most mentions about promoting gender equality, and especially in the Linz region, gender equality was regarded as the sole IDM issue in the majority of the organizations. The strongest focus on cultural diversity could be seen in university settings, which is

not surprising considering the strong presence of incoming foreign and exchange students. Internationally oriented organizations seemed to have a widest perspective on diversity, including age, religion, sexual orientation as well as mental and physical disabilities. Some organizations avoided any categorization of diversity and stated to treat all their employees fairly and equally. A process aspect of IDM was also well visible. Several organizations were documenting a step-by-step journey towards IDM through different initiatives, campaigns or awards.

Organizations headquartered in the Linz region seemed to have the least need to report or address publicly how they approach and manage the diversity of their employees. This may relate to various societal phenomena or lack of IDM awareness. Similarly, the regional differences need to be respected, e.g. Linz being a provincial area with more locally operating companies while, for example, the Helsinki metropolitan region is a capital region with many internationally operating enterprises.

Based on this small-scale study, it is difficult to prove how IDM is applied in real life. Many organizations reported on high-level, ambitious statements and policies towards social responsibility and IDM, and media criticism needs to be practiced. Yet, their reporting can be considered indicative of these organizations' real practices and discourses in their societal and trade-related environments. The organizations varied a lot by their nature and a one-to-one comparison would thus not be reasonable. However, all four universities ranged relatively high in their regions, indicating that HEIs are local forerunners in addressing IDM issues.

## **5 REFLECTION AND CONCLUSION**

The study reveals that HEI's may, indeed, be regional forward-thinkers in dealing with IDM issues. The phenomenon of IDM does not seem just a slogan in the surrounding work-life either. The studied organizations' websites demonstrate that, although still taking a predominantly deficit-oriented approach and being impregnated by economic arguments, several employers already had or were aiming at taking a strategic approach towards diversity. This means that the diversity of employees and other stakeholders was not only seen as an opportunity to use all potential human resources, but as a source of mutual learning and as a long-term strategic positioning and a process towards respecting all human beings as equals. For reaching a fair-opportunities-for-all goal, organizations manifested to have practices and policies mobilizing inherent diversity into acquired diversity and towards real-life inclusion.

The most unexpected discovery was that very few organizations actually promoted themselves as an appealing employer by addressing their potential job candidates' diversities or promoting their inclusive practices in their Career sections. This lack may, nevertheless, be caused by website structures since IDM issues were discussed predominantly under Sustainability / Responsibility sections where job seekers can find the information. In those sections, however, social responsibility seemed to be subdued to environmental responsibilities. Along with the strong HEI focus on IDM (Claeys-Kulik & al. 2019), graduates will be increasingly diverse and this should to be reflected in work-life recruiting practices.

Inherent diversity is the foundation for inclusion. Organizations that can put into action acquired diversity are mostly likely to capitalize on the competencies towards prospering communities. This would demand unpacking the concept of acquired diversity (Hewlett et al. 2013) and provide the future leaders (current HE students) with competencies, knowledge and attitudes that can transform the variety of people and thoughts into better decision-



making, innovations and socially supportive and well-being communities. Only a positive understanding of diversity will lead to learning and positive outcomes.

The discussion around IDM is likely to continue. It is a hot political topic which may also lead to new stigmatization if not handled carefully. Employer organizations need to reflect carefully whether to approach IDM only as a management issue or to take a broader processual human rights perspective. On reputational grounds, no organization is likely to be able to admit that they prefer less diversity.

## 6 LIMITATIONS

The results are only indicative as it was not possible to dig deeper into the websites or organizational documentation within the scope of this study, nor were the organizations and used concepts exactly comparable. Websites may reveal only surface information on the IDM topic and not illustrate adequately real-life IDM practices.

A researcher effect in interpreting the website content and doing the diversity management categorization will also limit the generalizability of the findings. The review and content analysis processes are kept transparent in order for the reader to detect possible biased or faulty interpretations.

## 7 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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**Table 3.** Approaches to diversity and inclusion on organizational websites. Dark gray indicates the type of approach taken, light gray displays that the issue was not addressed in the corpus.

	Resistance	Discrimination & fairness	Access & legitimacy	Learning & effectiveness	Strategic responsibility & sensibility		
<b>Birmingham region</b>							
							Z Sisters
							Bet365
							JCB
							Lloyds Banking
							Mondelēz
							National Express
							Sainsbury's
							The Habitat Group
							University Hospitals Birmingham
							University of Birmingham
<b>Cologne region</b>							
							Bayer
							Deutsche Lufthansa
							Ford-Werke
							Kölnner Uni Klinik
							Lenox
							HE W E
							Stadt Köln
							Stadtwerke Köln
							Strabed
							Universität zu Köln
<b>Helsinki region</b>							
							Helsinki University
							HUS
							Kesko
							Neste
							Nokia
							Posti
							SUL Päiväkot
							Stahlport
							StoraEnso
							UPM
<b>Linz region</b>							
							BMW
							Dussmann
							Greiner
							Höner
							JKU
							Kedler Universitäts Klinikum
							Pfizer Industries
							Swistaloku
							voestalpine
							XXXLutz