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Please cite the original version: Rönkä, I. & Koivusalo, K. (2019) Nordic Higher Education Institutions' (HEI) Inclusion and Diversity Management (IDM) Scoping. In Margarethe Überwimmer, Robert Füreder, Michael Schmidthaler, Martina Gaisch (Eds.) Proceedings 2019. Cross-Cultural Business Conference 2019, May 16th-17th, 2019. Düren: Shaker Verlag, 195-205.

Nordic Higher Education Institutions' (HEI) Inclusion and Diversity Management (IDM) Scoping

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ABSTRACT

The Nordic countries are becoming increasingly diverse as a result of globalization, immigration and students entering the academia through multiple paths. Yet, different student groups are not equally represented in higher education. The higher education practices and policies on how to approach the phenomenon of diverse learners may be lacking. The objective of this scoping review is to obtain an overview of how various higher education institutions (HEI) approach inclusion and diversity management in the Nordic Countries.

The Nordic countries were chosen as the target of investigation in this article due to the countries' well-known set of cultural values, which is based on democracy and equality. The scope of study in this article is restricted to the best practices of HEIs in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

The methodological approach in this article is desk-top research of official HEI websites. The article showcases best practices in benchmarked HEIs, which were chosen from top ranked HEIs and some based on the valid practices in use. The article reviews the benchmarked HEIs' best practices in terms of the services provided to the growing nontraditional student body, which is partially a result of the growing number of foreign students in higher education. In order to receive a full overview of the inclusion and diversity management practices in use, the dual HEI model of Nordic higher education was considered. As a result, the scope of studied websites includes both research universities and universities of applied sciences.

1 INTRODUCTION

The concept of a traditional university student may turn out to be something completely different we believe it to be. The understanding beheld by many of a typical or traditional student may in fact be wrong. When we think of such a student we see someone who is in their early twenties and who has recently graduated from high school. However, this is not true. To highlight this, according to data published by Eurostudent (2018) the mean age of the Icelandic university student population is 29.7 and in all Nordic countries the mean is over 24.

The student population is diversified not only in terms of the age at which studies are started but other traits vary, too, such as sexual orientation or degree attained before entering higher education (HE). Some students may have family or other caring responsibilities during their studies and have a need to work alongside studying. To give a further example, Official Statistics Finland (2015) states that over 50% of Finnish university students were employed during their studies in the time period of 2008-2015. Many students also choose to complete their degree solely online and never set their foot on a campus due to a disability or living at a great distance from the school.

The world is becoming more global and as a result the new norm of a typical student is changing. The new norm in higher education institutions (HEI) is in fact nontraditional students.

As a result, HEIs must or have already needed to reconsider their inclusion and diversity management policies and how to increase flexibility in studies, which is a direct outcome from the new student majority. The HEIs need to integrate these nontraditional students into their institutions to ensure that each student has a smooth learning path and as a result graduates within the given degree time.

This scoping review investigates how various HEIs in the Nordic countries meet the needs of this new growing student population. The Nordic countries were selected as the target of investigation as a result of their reputation of valuing equality and democracy highly. The authors of this scoping review article have a solid background in teaching in Finnish HEIs of some 35 years altogether, enabling them to relate to the net scouted information on the investigated HEI websites. They are also globally recognized welfare states with excellent HEIs. According to Isopahkala, Börjesson, Beach, Haltia, Torfi Jónasson, Jauhiainen, Jauhiainen, Kosunen, Nori and Vabø (2018), in the Nordic welfare state HE is considered an important building block. They further highlight that the Nordic HE system has one of the highest European attainment levels as it embraces egalitarian access to education.

Tienda (2013) defines inclusion as organizational strategies and practices that promote meaningful social and academic interactions among persons and groups who differ in their experiences, their views, and their traits. In her article she claims that in order to harness the benefits of diverse student bodies, institutional leaders must pursue deliberate strategies that promote inclusion; integration is not an automatic by-product of a diverse university campus. Institutional diversity also refers to the collaboration with external stakeholders, e.g. different HEIs, in order to promote mutual exchanges of experiences.

The investigated HEIs were chosen on the basis of their high country ranking in the QS Top Universitites, global world ranking (2019) and The Times Higher Education World University Ranking (2019). The reviewed HEIs represent both research universities and universities of applied sciences (UAS) and university colleges or polytechnics, as they are called in some European countries. Three UASs were not on either one of these ranking lists due to not qualifying for the set ranking criteria but were analyzed on the basis of their range of adaptable inclusion and diversity management practices. Three Danish, three Finnish, two Icelandic, three Norwegian and five Swedish HEIs were sampled to this desktop research, totaling 16 HEIs.

Isopahkala et al. (2018) refer to the Nordic countries' educational law and policy and write that in the Nordic countries, the opportunity to access and enter a HEI needs to be egalitarian so that each individual is able to study to their fullest potential. Consequently, any Nordic HEI could have been sampled to this study. Some HEIs were, however, dropped out as the official website does not provide information on any practices in use as the information is not likely accessible in the school's intranet. Key words used while examining the best practices of inclusion and diversity management were learning disability, inclusion, diversity [management] and disability, to name a few. The vocabulary in use on the studied websites varies greatly but generally speaking the study process of a given website started with scrutinizing the section on studies and student services and thereafter moving onto obtaining an overview of how to get help in questions related to the listed key words incorporating diversity and inclusion practices. Official equality plans, reports and guidelines published by equality committees and similar groups were also investigated to gain an overview of whether instructions exist on maintaining diversity management for staff members.

This paper is produced as a part of an Erasmus+ funded project called Enhancing Inclusion and Diversity Management (IDM) in higher education (Enhance IDM! 2017). In this project, the

four European partner universities' goal is to raise awareness among HEI staff to gain recognition for the importance of inclusion and diversity management. One of the final outputs of the project is a toolbox that introduces diversity management tools that allow the planning of inclusion practices for the new diversified student population in HEIs. This article samples practices that may be adapted and included in the developed toolbox. By celebrating inclusion the project and this scoping review provide an understanding of various feasible practices already at use in the investigated Nordic HEIs.

Various HEIs already have a proactive view on inclusion and diversity management and prepare plans and annual reports on equality and diversity in order to support the creation of a healthy working environment for both students and staff. To give an example, University of Helsinki, in their equality and diversity plan 2017-2018, aims to recognize and eliminate practices and structures that create and sustain inequality. These objectives often take the form on permanent, everyday practices.

The table below lists the investigated HEIs and their rankings and other crucial inclusion and diversity related information if available on the internet.

Table 1.

	Country and name of university	QS Top Universities, global world ranking 2019 (1)	The Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2019 (2)	Number of students (1)	% international students (1)	number of academic faculty staff (1)	% international staff (1)	Female/male ratio (2)
	Finland							
1	Aalto University	140	181	11916	15.3%	1244	30.6%	35/65
2	University of Helsinki	110	99	22419	5.5%	2645	20.2%	65/35
3	Metropolia UAS	n/a	n/a	16680 (3)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Sweden							
4	Karolinska Institutet	n/a	40	7899	18%	1748	33.3%	68/32
5	Uppsala University	117	87	25199	14.9%	2490	23.1%	56/44
6	KTH Royal Institute of Technology	104	187	13254	16%	1488	41%	33/67

7	Lund University	92	98	27786	23.1%	3031	33.1%	54/46
8	Blekinge Institute of Technology, BTH	n/a	n/a	450 (3)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Denmark							
9	Technical University of Denmark, DTU	112	163	9116	25.4%	2117	45.7%	30/70
10	Aarhus University	141	123	26843	11%	3402	33.3%	54/46
11	Copenhagen Business School	n/a	201-250	17233	23.4%	599	32.6%	48/52
	Norway							
12	University of Oslo	135	121	17832	14.6%	2545	29.3%	62/38
13	Oslo Metropolitan University, OsloMet	n/a	n/a	20635 (3)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
14	University of Bergen	171	197	11653	8.3%	1596	32.1%	59/41
	Iceland							
15	Reykjavik University	n/a	301-350	3110 (2)	7% (2)			42/58
16	University of Iceland	n/a	251-300	8276 (2)	11% (2)			66/34

1 Top Universities, 2019

2 The World University Rankings, 2018

3 University's own webpage

2 THREE CATEGORIES OF INCLUSION PRACTISES

When scrutinizing the official websites of the sixteen HEIs three major categories could be distinguished according to the practices in use to meet the needs of any student, especially the nontraditional one, as it is usually this student population that needs support during the course of their studies and as such need to be included in the mainstream education. A nontraditional student is defined by Bell (2012) as one who beholds one of the three characteristics, namely the presence of an at-risk factor, age or socioeconomic background. The at-risk factors are that the student is working full time, is a single parent or does not have a high-school diploma

that has been earned traditionally. Isopahkala et al. (2018, p. 145) again define the nontraditional student as a student, who is the first in the family to study in a HEI, or a student, who is international, mature, or comes from a low socioeconomic background. In this article, recognizing students on the basis of these definitions is virtually impossible. Therefore the three main distinguished categories evolve around the concepts of students with learning disabilities and other special services the student body may need during their studies if they need any extra help beyond the scope of the regular teaching staff. This review also investigates services provided to long distance learner, to students mainly studying online.

It is noteworthy to mention that the official websites of the studied HEIs do not always include the full scope of inclusion and other student attainment practises. Sometimes, and which seems to be the case relatively often, these practises are given in the schools' intranets due to the private nature of the information or the information is only shown on the student union's website. Most HEIs, however, do provide the basic information as it might be in the interest of the new students to study the information prior to applying to the given institution. A full scope of practices is therefore lacking.

The first of the three main categories offering support services to students is a category that comprises student-led activities as well as events organized for the entire HEI, including both staff and students. The second category, again, is the professional services. This group includes university staff-led services where the staff have specific titles and education to answer students' needs in terms of study issues or health problems. The terms and positions in use differ from country to country and school to school. Titles net-scouted incorporate among others student counsellors, special needs teachers, diversity officers, student ambassadors and accessibility officers. As can be seen, these professions are very specific and specifically tailored to answer the diversified student body's needs. The third category mapped can be named flexible modes of learning. These services comprise flexible learning environments and ways of learning such as online studying and blended learning, IT tools, programmes and software as well as library services. One excellent example of flexible learning is the open university concept, allowing students a path to HEI studies without taking part in an entrance examination.

2.1 Student-led activities and events for university staff and students

The first category of student-led activities can be traced down onto many HEI websites. For instance, Swedish Uppsala University (2019) gives on their website how it is possible to receive help from a fellow student if one is visually impaired. The fellow student can lead the visually impaired student in the campus area. The website this information is given on is also designed so that the text can be listened to, further enhancing the user experience of any visually impaired student.

Another student-led activity example comes from Finland, Aalto University. Like many other Nordic HEIs it has an active student union that offers a wide range of services such as association-related counselling and renting vans and facilities (Ayy 2019). Student associations are amiable networks where it is possible for any student, including the nontraditional student body, to make new friends.

At Technical University of Denmark (DTU), again, various campuses organize Friday cafes for the apparent purpose of students meeting and socializing. This café concept is presented on the website in the section on sports and social life (DTU Education 2018.) Another practice in use at DTU is their Study Guidance Office, which is run by current students. They offer specific

guidance times for the students to come and seek help in questions related to studying at DTU, such as study planning or credit transfer (DTU Guidance and counselling 2019).

Yet another example is given on Norwegian OsloMet's website. It invites all the new international students to an orientation day at the start of their studies (OsloMet Orientation Day 2019). This event is an introduction to the Buddy Week during which students socialize, make new friends and get acquainted with Oslo. Similar orientation days or a series of days are organized in many HEIs. During these days the students are informed of practices, such as where to seek help in questions related to learning difficulties.

The University of Iceland organizes Equality Days annually, and the purpose is to call for discussion, enhance understanding and visibility of equality and important issues such as power and discrimination. All seven Icelandic universities participate in these Equality Days (University of Iceland, Equality and Diversity 2019).

Copenhagen Business School has opened the Diversity and Difference Platform to focus on culture differences, ethnicity, sexuality, languages or inclusive leadership and diversity management. The platform brings together researchers from a wide range of disciplines as well as policy makers, business leaders, NGOs and public organizations (Copenhagen Business School 2019).

2.2 Professional services

The second category, i.e. professional services, is the biggest of all the three named categories. All the investigated HEIs offer a wide range of professional help on their official websites. Lund University in Sweden, for instance, has faculty-specific Accessibility Officers, who can be contacted if the student has a permanent disability, such as ADHD or dyslexia (Lund University 2018). The range of support the university offers incorporates special arrangements for exams, which is one of the modes of support in use in most studied HEIs, and note-taking help as well as a special educator, to name a few. In order to achieve help, one must first fill in an online application form and only thereafter the student will be contacted by the specific officer.

Barrable, Papadatou-Pastou and Tzotzoli (2018, p. 2) point out how the challenges students face in the academia can result in negative outcomes, such as mental health issues and graduation rates that are lower. They also state that "study skill difficulties can affect students' ability to benefit fully from HE and reach their full academic potential." Wellbeing, on the contrary, has opposite outcomes, enabling students to flourish and study more efficiently in their studies.

DTU provides special education support to students with literacy problems or sense-related impairments, physical handicaps or neurological problems (DTU, Special Educational Support 2018). DTU's Special Educational Support services are only provided to full degree programme students, who are "covered by an international agreement" and are either Danish citizens or can be ranked as such. The requirements given exclude exchange and open university students.

At Swedish Royal Institute of Technology (KTH) the scope of student health services is vast. It is possible for the student to seek help for instance from a nurse, doctor and social counselor. The student can receive help in "social, existential, medical and personal issues" (KTH 2018). According to Barrable et.al. (2018, p. 2) HE is a "consumer driven market" and as a result student satisfaction affects the operational level of HEIs. HEIs should enable an experience that covers all interdependent parts of the study process. These specially tailored staff-led services, such as student and psychological counseling services, answer this demand,

ensuring that each student is supported during the time they study. If the student's needs are met ad hoc, it might guarantee that the student prospers in his or her studies and does not drop out. Each student drop out has a negative outcome, not just on the individual HE but also on society. The money spent on a single student will be wasted if the student does not graduate but drops out.

To answer this need of operating in a consumer driven market, some universities have a well-being questionnaire for students. Aalto University (2019) has developed an online well-being questionnaire, "Allwell?", for its students in order to gain knowledge of needs for study support. The questionnaire is open for two weeks every spring and it has questions from four dimensions; personal resources, study skills, teaching and study environment. Students have answered the questionnaire for the past two years and the university has been able to identify factors resulting in increased student stress and workload. The results of the questionnaire are given to the heads of the programmes. With the help of this annual questionnaire, the university gains research-based knowledge for planning actions for pedagogical development.

Many universities have equality and diversity committees or councils to promote and illustrate the importance of diversity and inclusion in relation to staff and students. Often equality committee members represent different genders and age groups or have particular experience of equality issues. To give an example, Reykjavik University in Iceland has a Gender Equality Committee to manage and review their equality programme, provide education about gender equality and give advice to staff (Reykjavik University 2019). While, in the University of Helsinki, the equality committee regularly prepares and updates the equality plan which features both the HR policy and operative targets for promoting equality (University of Helsinki, Equality and Diversity at the university 2019). The main goal of this plan is to support the creation of a healthy studying and working environment.

Karolinska Institutet (2019) in Sweden has decided on actions to improve their uneven gender distribution. In the university's "Guidelines and Action Plan for Equal Treatment 2016- 2018" they give information about activities to reduce uneven gender distribution in the undergraduate study programmes, e.g. targeted marketing measures. Many other universities have similar plans which include issues of wellbeing, equality, leadership, discrimination, multiculturalism or prevention of sexual or gender-based harassment.

Norwegian University of Bergen (2018) provides a service to its student population to give assistance in case the student has any conflicts or problems during the time of their studies. This is called the student ombudsperson. The student ombudsperson's responsibility is to give counselling and also to act as the whistleblower if the student is for instance bullied.

2.3 Flexible modes of learning

The third category comprises concrete tools enabling students prosper in their studies better. These tools include online platforms, special examination arrangements, multiple ways of assessing a course and technology aided programmes and databases. These programmes and databases are often provided by university libraries.

Various universities have multiple technology-aided tools in use to support students with special needs in their studies. For instance, Danish Aarhus University campuses are wheelchair friendly and also accessible for students with physical disabilities (Aarhus University 2019). Their websites have been designed to meet the needs of visually impaired people. Most of the university's services can be located online. The university also promises to produce teaching resources in electronic format so that the study materials can be studied in text-to-speech software. This is also possible at the University of Iceland (University of Iceland 2019).

At Aarhus University (2019) it is also possible to receive copies of resources where the text has been enlarged. Telecoils are in use in most of the auditoriums and audio recording can also be arranged. These services are not, however, provided to exchange students. At University of Iceland (2019) students have access to a range of distance learning courses that facilitate the learning process of any student wishing to pursue their studies away from the campus. Completing a full degree online is not possible.

Many universities offer special personal study arrangements for diverse learners. In examinations special arrangements can mean additional time, allowing the use of computers or arranging a private space where the student can take the exam. Aalto University in Finland instructs students to first contact the staff in order to arrange a meeting where the special arrangement will be considered (Aalto University 2019). Swedish Blekinge Institute of Technology (2018) has an array of alternative assessment methods presented on their official website. These practices also include extended time for taking a test. The student may also be assessed in a small group or privately. Students may also supplement their exam answers in speaking or can use computer-aided answering in an exam or can take the exam in parts.

Norwegian University of Oslo (2019) allows the student body to loan technical aids and access quiet rooms. Reserving study spaces in the reading room is also a choice for the students. The university also lists Talking Books and Braille as alternative modes of studying on its official website as well as a variety of special examination arrangements. You can request more time during an exam and can breastfeed your child during the exam allowing you to gain more time. Access to dictaphones and assistive software is also promised as well as taking the exam in a smaller room or moving around in the exam facility or taking a rest during the exam.

In Finland the Open University offers tuition to everyone regardless of former education or age. These university level studies can be completed online or part-time while working. They offer flexibility for students to plan their own studies. One such university is Metropolia University of Applied Sciences (2019).

3 CONCLUSION

It can be stated that equality, inclusion and diversity management are reflected on the websites of most Nordic HEIs. The websites of the investigated HEIs in this scoping review reflect this trend. The universities wish to showcase and set an example by illustrating to current and prospect students the practices available. The HEIs have a proactive stand on inclusion and diversity management and as a result treat their student population by guaranteeing a study path that allows each student to reach their fullest potential. This is one means of equality and the egalitarian stand the Nordic countries employ.

However, some HEIs had to be excluded from this scoping review due to the limited information given on their official websites. Comparing HEIs is also impossible within the range of this article as some information is most likely present in the institutions' intranets, as a result of its confidential nature or the school for some other reason wishing not to share it with the public eye.

The equality legislation in all Nordic countries places duties on HEIs and as a result the reviewed HEIs pursue the current legislation and this is demonstrated on their official websites. The current trend of internationalization of HEIs and the increased number of international students and that of the nontraditional student body are key drivers resulting in changes to HEI policies and practices. The ever growing body of nontraditional students has resulted in HEIs in new practices as well as forced them to think differently.

This article is a first step in generating the toolbox for the Erasmus+ funded IDM project. Some excellent resources could be located on the investigated HEI websites and these have already generated ideas and background to the toolbox. Especially inclusion and diversity tools were found useful.

This study started with high expectations of also studying curriculum level design and how it could be included in the developed toolbox. This was proven to be an impossible task for this paper due to firstly most of the course descriptions not being given on the official websites and secondly not being as such able to gain a complete understanding of how the curriculum works in practice. The websites do not either reveal how individual staff members, such as teachers, approach inclusion and diversity management in their lessons and in everyday student life. In order to gain an insight into teaching and assessment methods, individual teachers and curriculum level designers would need to be interviewed or studied through an alternative research method.

In conclusion, the inclusion and diversity management practices in the sixteen studied Nordic HEIs can be grouped into three main categories. The first category introduces student-led activities as well as events for staff and students, the second category again comprises professional services provided by paid HEI staff and the third category incorporates flexible modes of learning, both IT-facilitated tools as well as different modes of learning. The category most present in the practices of the investigated HEIs is that of professional services tailored to meet the students' needs. Some HEIs list very specifically which learning difficulties or other disabilities can be seen to. It cannot, however, be seen whether the working students' needs are met. This would require further examining and access to school intranets.

The topic could be investigated further by studying how inclusion and diversity management are reflected on curriculum level as well as in course contents. The courses could further be analyzed in terms of their pedagogical solutions, such as flexible modes of learning, enabling the student to choose an implementation that suits his or her preferred learning style most efficiently. Another interesting area of investigation would be to scrutinize how the courses are structured in terms of scheduling, course literature, modes of teaching, teaming up and other pedagogical solutions. These matters cannot be studied on the basis of official website information but would require interviewing and gaining access to HEI intranets and other internal documents, which in many cases may be classified as confidential information. Gaining insights into these matters would, in any case, elaborate the learning process of the nontraditional student body enabling them to be treated in an even more egalitarian and diversified manner as higher education institutions could benchmark each other's practices and introduce the best ones in their home institutions. This would serve all parties and end in a win-win.

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