

Track 1: Theorising Equality and Diversity in Crisis?

Track chairs

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Track outline

The subject of this stream has a dual purpose. Theorising equality and diversity has always been a controversial and contested project. The current global economic crisis, whilst adding to the complexity of the debates, makes pressing the case for equality and diversity even more vital. The mainstay of arguments for equality and diversity has been, for the last two decades, dominated by the business case that has all but evaporated along with the confidence of global business. The new global economic giants, such as China and India, have limited and questionable histories in relation to labour rights generally with rights for women and minorities particularly limited. At the same time the jaded developed economies are struggling with their commitment to the equality and diversity agenda, both economically and politically. The US faces a continuing 'backlash' against positive action and Europe continues to grapple with equality and migration legislation that appear to stand in direct contradiction with each other. Feminism is seen to be a thing of the past (or post!) and multiculturalism has been eclipsed by social inclusion. The only ray of hope in this bleak global landscape is the election of Barack Obama as the next President of the US. However politicians of all persuasions will be lobbied hard to reduce the 'burdens on business'. Past experience and early indications suggest that gains made in equality and diversity policy are likely to be the first casualty of recessionary measures, even though those that will suffer the most are the already vulnerable. The relationship between labour market segmentation and segregation means that disadvantaged groups are located in economically volatile sectors and insecure jobs. In addition, recession often results in protectionism at a number of different levels from the State to the workplace. Equality and Diversity are viewed as 'risky' issues at a time when risk is shunned.

The ensuing ideological battle between the new business logic and social justice will require a strong theoretical basis for equality and diversity and a clarity that has so far been lacking if policy makers are to be dissuaded from viewing them as luxuries we can no longer afford. This call for papers is therefore seeking to bring together academic ideas and research that will add to the debate. Both theoretical and empirical papers that inform theory are welcomed. Papers will be sought that address, but are not limited to, the following:

Track questions

- Is the business case dead?
- What does corporate social responsibility mean for the equality and diversity agenda?
- Is equality and diversity reducible to economics and resources?
- Have the barriers to equality and diversity changed?
- Who is most at risk in the current economic slowdown?

- Has equality been achieved for some traditionally disadvantaged groups?
- Can legislative reform withstand the economic crisis?
- Are equality and/or diversity human rights?
- Is the equality agenda progressing for workers in the new leading economies?
- In what ways do informal practices affect equality and diversity?
- Whose jobs will the trade unions protect?
- Does the economic crisis mean that the light at the end of the equality and diversity tunnel has been switched off?

Key words

equality, diversity, theory, crisis