

Diversity – A functional comparison between economy and politics

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Diversity Management is a concept, which not only sheds light on the plurality of organisational membership structures in order to establish democratic equality, but also wants to use diversity for organizational aims. Business organizations for example put much effort in the question how heterogeneous teams achieve better results. In academia universities want to improve their research quality by promoting diversity. In public administration the aim is not only to strengthen the position of minorities, but also to improve the quality of services by a heterogeneous workforce. And even political organizations are not only concerned to fulfil basic rights and to provide basic structures of social inclusion, but also want to react to diverse demands by using their own diverse structures.

It seems thereby obvious that diversity is a dominant value both in all parts of society and their organizations, but it seems also obvious that the attributions and the practices in the very specific organizations need more exploration to gain a better understanding about the diversity of diversity practices.

Instead of focussing on the question, how diversity programs really add to equal opportunities or add to productivity – these are the common approaches of organisational research and theory –, this paper wants to address the phenomenon of diversity from a perspective which takes a general theory of society as their starting point. In a first step I will outline this theoretical base and address the following questions: For which societal and social problems is the emergence of organizational diversity management the answer? How does the distinction of diversity and uniformity effect organizational practice? And what consequences can be expected? This theoretical perspective is deeply interested in the (self)structuring of social practices and rejects any form of actor-centered theory. This means that I will not approach the question of how to understand diversity concepts and their practices by questioning the ‘real’ motives of the people or organizations involved in these practices in the first place. Moreover I want to shed light on how the introduction of new semantics and new practices of distinguishing effects the practice of organizing.

In a second step, I will show on behalf of empirical material that both in business organization and political parties – although these types of organization differ in their self-description – diversity management build a hybrid structure in the operative practice. In both types of organizations new connections and interruptions are established by mediating between increasing differentiation and integration at the same time. In practice one can observe, that diversity management is on one hand used to present diverse structures as uniform. On the other hand these presentations are so diverse itself and differ from time and place, that they stand rather unconnected to each other.

In a third step I want to use the empirical insights to discuss the ‘political’ dimension of this phenomenon. I will outline that it is exactly the use of diversity semantics that enable business organization to indicate their engagement in society as a democratic citizen, without dismissing their economic orientation. And in a similar way, political parties use ‘diversity talk’ to sketch a (post)modern picture of democracy as they are able to mark ambiguity, inconsistencies, difficulties of the social world, which are hardly possible to change by politics. But by doing this they also are yet able to present their own version of what politics should do. Furthermore, I will argue that these new forms are not only a

form of newspeak or should solely be characterized as window-dressing, but that there is hardly any alternative for organizations in our contemporary society to act without making use of equivocal structures like diversity concepts and their connecting practices as organizations are forced to act under equivocal conditions. I will end with some tentative assumptions about how to evaluate conservative resistance, which is of course empirically observable too, in regard of the future effects of diversity practices.