**Diversity Management at the Tertiary Level  
An attempt to extend existing paradigms**

Abstract

**Purpose**: The purpose of this paper is to adopt a holistic diversity lens with the aim to enhance understanding of the underlying paradigms for diversity management at the tertiary level.

**Design/methodology/approach:** This contribution takes inspiration of existing diversity paradigms used in business settings and relates them to education. It then articulates them in greater depths in line with the diversity segments of the so-called HEAD (higher education awareness for diversity) Wheel and seeks a common denominator that may be shared across disciplines by adding an eclectic and context-specific approach.

**Findings**: It was identified that the underlying assumptions which constitute the commonly known diversity paradigms are only partially applicable for the tertiary level. As a frame of reference for a holistic diversity management, the HEAD Wheel with its five interconnected diversity segments (demographic, cognitive, disciplinary, functional and institutional diversity) draws on dominant paradigms and is therefore indicative of the ongoing dynamics in the field of diversity management.

**Originality/value**: This paper seeks to address the paucity of studies with regard to diversity management at the tertiary level. By drawing on relevant paradigms and relating them to specific diversity segments, this study intends to make a meaningful scholarly contribution to the existing body of knowledge.

**Keywords:** Diversity management, HEAD Wheel, diversity paradigms, tertiary education, higher education institutions

Paper type: **Research paper**

**Introduction**

In European higher education institutions, diversity aspects have recently gained momentum due to the rising demand for the creation of inclusive teaching, learning and service environments. This is all the more relevant in view of increasingly heterogeneous student populations that are demographically different from traditional students in terms of age, modes of study, admission pathways and social integration. For these purposes, this paper sets out to discuss a multidimensional and intersectional approach towards diversity management that is particularly suited for the higher education sector. First, a brief terminological clarification is given to achieve a common understanding of the concepts of diversity and diversity management. Then, the historical dynamics that have been shaping diversity discourses in the US and Europe are sketched.

In an attempt to provide a comprehensive framework to address diversity in its full entirety, a governance frame, which we call HEAD Wheel (Higher Education Awareness for Diversity), is introduced. It looks at the concept of diversity from a demographic, cognitive, disciplinary, functional and institutional angle and seeks to capture a broad spectrum of variables that impact diversity management at the tertiary level. In doing so, it is hoped to increase awareness of the breadth of diversity and show the creative potential of diversity management through the interplay of these segments.

In a next step, this contribution aims to synthesize existing diversity paradigms (resistance, discrimination, access, learning and responsibility) and provide a high level overview of the underlying rationales for diversity management. Thereby, an additional paradigm, which we would like to call “pluralism and eclecticism” is identified and discussed in more detailed. It is also argued that higher education institutions (HEIs) draw on differing rationales –e.g. notions of education ethics, social dimension or third mission – in their attempt to implement diversity strategies. While organizations tend to put forward business case arguments when driving diversity initiatives, HEIs are more likely to engage in social mobility discourse and foreground equity perspectives and humanistic conceptions.

**Towards terminological and conceptual clarity**

The discourses on diversity and diversity management are informed by various ideologies and ideals triggered by the aftermath of the civil right movement (Wrench, 2016; Gaisch and Aichinger, 2016; Brazzel, 2003; Lorbiecki and Jack, 2000; Ivancevich and Gilbert, 2000). What they all have in common though is that they cause a certain normative and moral pressure to react to a broad spectrum of inequalities and differing forms of majority power leading to a shift towards more inclusive practices.

Nonetheless there is no universal definition of diversity. While some researchers associate diversity predominantly with the labour market and describe it along the lines of the variations of social and cultural identities among people in defined employment or market settings (Cox, 2001, p. 3), or as any mixture of items characterized by differences and similarities found within the workforce (Thomas 1996, p. 5), others seem to mainly relate this concept to gender issues (Schiller et al, 2011; Walt and Ingley, 2003). Looking at the notion of diversity from a broader perspective, as taken in this paper, it can be defined as the differences between individuals in terms of any personal attribute that affects how people perceive one another (Gonzalez and DeNisi, 2009).

A similar picture emerges when looking at the concept of diversity management. Here again, no commonly agreed definition can be found and its definitional scope ranges from linking diversity initiatives with existing systems and core activities in the organization (Dass and Park, 1999) over the totality of an organization’ efforts to become inclusive (Danowitz and Hanappi-Egger, 2012) to “voluntary organizational actions that are designed to create greater inclusion of employees from various backgrounds into the formal and informal organizational structures through deliberate policies and programs” (Barak, 2013, p. 235). What these definitions have in common, though, is the focus given to organizations where conditions need to be implemented that help to make best use of diversity management in order to “enhance organizational performance” (Cox, 2001, p. 4). In this sense, a vast majority of definitions foregrounds organizational performance (Thomas, 1990, Cox and Smolinski, 1994; Kochan et al, 2003) and looks at workforce potential (Visagie et al, 2012; Mujtaba, 2007). Such a lens is associated with the so-called “business case for diversity management” (Robinson and Dechant, 1997; Lorbiecki and Jack, 2000) which has taken full swing in the 1990s where improved productivity (Owens, 1997), innovative solutions (Rice, 1994) and increased corporative competitiveness (Capowski, 1996) started to take centre stage. While all those rationales for diversity management seem to be legitimate, it needs to be argued here that higher education needs to go beyond a purely economic perspective and also embrace issues of social mobility and educational justice.

**A brief historical analysis of diversity management**

The scholarly debate on diversity issues started in the 1980s in the USA and was further spurred by the historical process of diversity management as identified by Lorbiecki and Jack (2000). They highlight four turns, namely the demographic, political, economic and critical period during which significant developments took place. The turning point in *demographics* was announced by the report entitled Workforce 2000 (Johnston and Packer, 1987) which pointed to dramatic demographic transformations within the North American workforce, including an ever-decreasing number of white males. Consequently, fundamental changes in business strategies were recorded and the paradigm of a diversity of compliance was gradually shifted towards a matter of business survival (Thomas, 1990) where affirmative action for women and minorities was no longer viewed as a panacea for the ailment of the American labour market. At that time, diversity management opened up to all kinds of differences including learning styles, levels of creativity and qualifications which, most importantly, no longer excluded the white majority (Thomas, 1990; Thomas and Ely, 1996).

This *political* *turn* started with the Reagan government when inclusive practices were seen as an appropriate option for affirmative action policies which had become increasingly unpopular by then. At that time, diversity management was regarded as a decent reply to constant claims of political correctness. In addition, as argued by Lowery (1995, p. 150) this new form of diversity was much easier to sell to a predominantly white workforce than the seemingly ambiguous impact of affirmative action. The *economic* *turn* started when voices grew louder (McNerney, 1994) that organizational performance may be at risk in view of outdated mono-cultural structures and insufficient preparation for the global labour market. Since then, the economic discourse on diversity management has been omnipresent and turned into the centrepiece of the previously described business case (Herring, 2009; Vedder, 2006; Robinson and Dechant, 1997). It has only been recently that the discussion around diversity management with its guidelines, prescriptions and toolkits has reached, what Lorbiecki and Jack (2000) call the “*crucial turn*”, most probably due to weak spots in their implementation policies. Gordon (1995) identified that numerous workplace diversity programs have sown hostility to the same extent as diversity trainings have become a full-fledged industry in the United States. Recognition of commonalities and willingness to capitalize on differences were seen as appropriate responses to disappointment and frustration caused by failed diversity initiatives. The *critical turn* makes clear that the promise of greater equality within the workforce is yet to be realized.

When zooming out of the United States and its historical roots of diversity management, a somewhat different picture emerges. Taking a closer look at Europe, one may find less clear-cut development steps of diversity management. One of the roots of diversity management is found in “established practices of intercultural management” (Wrench, 2016, p. 27) endorsed by companies that operate in international settings. This stance is further reinforced by the understanding that the foreign workers that largely contributed to Europe’s economic stabilization after the war have gradually developed into settled ethnic minorities within many European countries. A major driver behind the promotion of equal opportunities is therefore the willingness to sustainably integrate these guest workers or at least the second generation into the given labour market and employment structures (Geist, 2009; Wrench, 2016). What is more, in contrast to the US where standardized compliance with legal requirements was one of the major reasons for anti-discrimination policies, Europe with its many national differences has a much greater variety in legal systems and localized practices. In view of this wide variation, EU institutions put member states increasingly under pressure to “disseminate good practice on the employment integration of Europe’s immigrants and ethnic minorities” (Wrench, 2016, p 29). This was further reinforced by a growing body of research that pointed to the shortcomings of European workforce practices and racial discrimination in the workplace (Rydgren, 2004; French et al, 2003; de Beijl, 2000).

It is against this background that different rationales for diversity management in Europe are fleshed out more fully. Apart from resistance (Dass and Park, 1999), and the three paradigms brought forward by Thomas and Ely (1996), namely discrimination and fairness, access and legitimacy and learning and effectivity, another driver for DiM was identified; one that foregrounds responsibility and sensitivity (Schulz, 2009; Bührmann, 2015). Here it needs to be emphasized that the European understanding of diversity management was based on a proactive concept rather than the idea of affirmative action (Eger et al, 2012).

While the Scandinavian model for diversity management was based on social dialogue as a result of negotiations between trade unions and employers (Holvino and Kamp, 2009), the UK understanding of DiM has evolved as a reaction to anti-discrimination legislation (Klarfeld, 2009) and a solution to business needs. In this context, it may surprise that the UK unions regard diversity management as a purely managerial intervention (Stringfellow, 2016; Greene et al, 2005). It was also argued that the neoliberal rhetoric of diversity management, one where individualism is promoted and a unique combination of competencies among employees represents a value for the organization (Lathi, 2013; Holvino and Kamp, 2009) has also found its way into the European body of thought. In the German-speaking world the business case for diversity takes centre stage (Krell, 2007, p 11) and although critical voices point to the shortcomings of what is also referred to as the “access and legitimacy paradigm” (Thomas and Ely, 1996; Dass and Parker, 1999) in terms of its narrow social and ethnical categorization of staff and customers which may lead to the reproduction of stereotypes (Hansen and Mueller, 2003, p 25), it still seems to be the main corporate strategy for diversity management. On a positive note, diversity management based on this paradigm serves as a platform to “discuss plural identities” (Holvino and Kamp, 2009, p. 396) and identify “productive sources upon which competitive advantage can be secured” (Ahonen et al, 2014, p 272).

Interestingly, it is argued that social dialogue has only been able to shape diversity management where it was considered to be a possible solution to a perceived crisis in models of integration (Stringfellow, 2016). Given that, in Europe, for the vast majority of guest workers diversity issues were not on the agenda, it may be timely to address this topic at least for the second generation. In doing so, it is hoped to redistribute opportunities and enable social mobility for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds that have been excluded for too long.

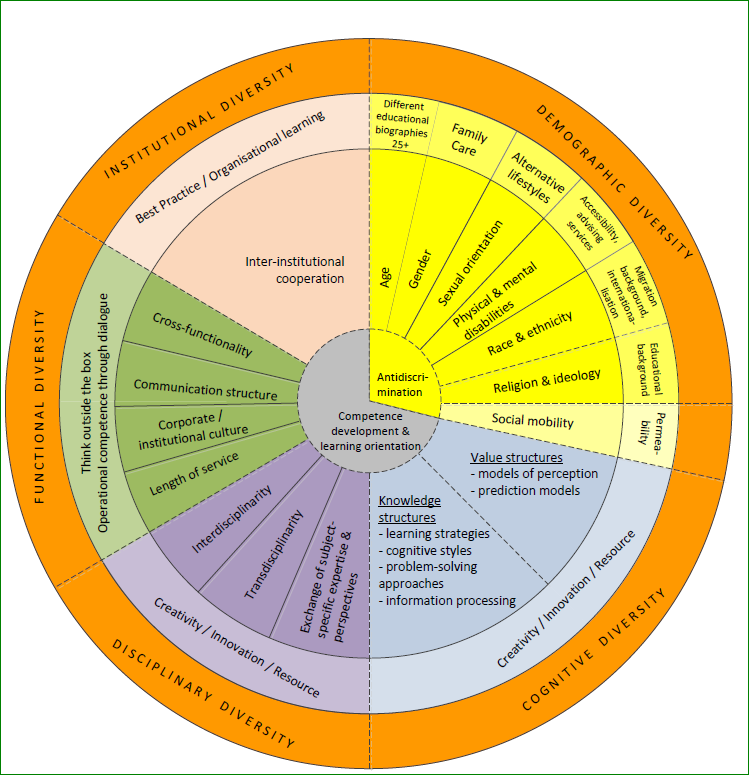
Overall, it can be summarized that during the last years an increasing body of research has been devoted to diversity management in Europe (Podsiadlowski et al., 2013; Wrench, 2016; Klarsfeld, 2009, Janssens and Zanoni, 2014), showing that “US lessons are being Europeanised” (Ravazzani, 2016, p. 154) and country-specific strategies for diversity management are implemented in line with localized societal and corporate needs. Although diversity management was found to be largely imported from affiliates of US-American companies, it still needed to be adapted to local circumstances and legal frameworks (Hanappi and Hanappi-Egger, 2014). This is in line with critical diversity discourse (Ahonen et al, 2014; Zanoni, 2009) that finds common ground in the assumption that the instrumental perspective of differences is an inherent part of a diversity lens that is non-positivistic and non-essentialist and “socially (re)produced in context-specific processes” (Zanoni et al, 2010, p. 10). Such a view then takes account of critical voices that see the mainstream discourse on diversity limited to rigid identities and stuck in an inadequate theorization of power relations and context-specific factors. For too long, so it was argued (Jones et al, 2000) was the focus of diversity management placed on US cultural standards only and country specific historical and cultural frameworks were largely ignored.

Given that diversity management is a relatively new research field in the European business context, it is not surprising that it is even less researched in the educational setting. It stands to reason that further studies on diversity in higher education would add to the understanding of the complexities involved and create more elaborate theories (Aigare et al, 2011). It becomes also clear that a context-sensitive perspective allows for a more situated and dynamic diversity management. In the following, a conceptual framework is introduced that seeks to address these complexities by depicting the breadth of diversity inherent in higher education. The aim is to provide a cohesive model that helps to gain insights into the dynamic interplay of complex systems while at the same time offering a frame of reference for diversity managers that seek to structure “contextuality in operation” (Ahonen et al, 2014, p. 269). Here, a particular light is shed on contextualised power structures and their specific, identifiable effects that require analysis in their singularity.

**The HEAD Wheel – a holistic approach towards diversity management at the tertiary level**

The HEAD Wheel (Gaisch and Aichinger, 2016), short for Higher Education Awareness for Diversity was designed to provide a comprehensive overview of the five diversity segments that play an integral role at the tertiary level (figure 1). It draws on demographic, cognitive, disciplinary, functional and institutional diversity and relates them to the underlying core missions that are associated with each orientation. In framing this complex matter along the lines of a wheel, it was sought to reduce complexity and conceptualize a holistic diversity management. In the middle of the wheel, one can find the rationales for diversity-related action. In the segment of demographic diversity there is an outer ring that shows specific challenges that higher education institutions are confronted with. When drawing on cognitive and disciplinary diversity as a resource, more innovative solutions and a higher degree of innovation may derive. Functional diversity appears fruitful in terms of think-outside-the-box approaches and institutional diversity is beneficial with regard to inter-organisational competencies development.

A brief explanation of the specific segments, followed by a synthesis of what the authors consider to be the main contribution of the HEAD Wheel is outlined in the following paragraphs.

  
Figure 1: HEAD Wheel (Gaisch and Aichinger, 2016)

To begin with, **demographic** diversity - described as predominantly stable and group-forming categories such as age, gender, sexual orientation, physical and psychological disabilities, ethnicity and race and religion and belief - is increasingly regarded as a normative goal for higher education institutions to address social groups that had previously been excluded from higher education. Such populations, commonly referred to as non-traditional students (Chung et al, 2014) bring new challenges with them given that they are demographically different from the norm. This may be due to their age, gender or physical abilities, their mode of study, admission pathway, commuter or socio-economic status or in view of the multiple roles that need to be managed. They are the ones that are most at risk in terms of access, retention, active participation, academic success and social integration (Galimberti, 2014). This umbrella term points to non-traditional groups with differing needs whose participation in higher education seems to be constrained by a number of structural factors. To successfully integrate historically underrepresented student populations and to widen access, participation and increase diversification, HEIs need to offer support structures that promote educational equity, accountability and social justice.

The second segment depicted in the HEAD Wheel is the one of **cognitive** diversity and includes different value structures and knowledge bases such as various problem-solving strategies or distinct models of perception or prediction. While the business case for diversity holds that effectively managed diversity may lead to increased innovation, a higher talent pool and improved customer relations (Cox, 1993), there are also critical voices that– if relational demography and organizational diversity fail – associate it with increased group conflict (Ely and Thomas, 2001; Boehm et al, 2011; Jackson et al, 2003). In terms of teaching and learning in higher education, cognitive diversity requires transformative intellectuals (Giroux, 1992), so to say teaching staff that “call into question their dominant societal and educational values that typically frame their teaching approaches” (Gaisch, 2014, p. 21) and promote critical thinking and ethnorelative reflection (Bennett, 1986). In doing so, they may use difference as a resource upon which to develop a competence focused mind-set. From an economic perspective, a cognitive diversity approach appears fruitful since differences are understood as opportunities for action to work across diversity lines. In this sense, persons with shifting perspectives may act as gate-openers and ensure access to previously underrepresented markets or culturally distant customer bases. Consequently, cognitive diversity may represent a decisive competitive advantage, improve financial results and enhance customer satisfaction.

**Disciplinary** diversity as the third segment of the HEAD wheel relates to specific and target-oriented cooperation between persons that are socialized in disciplines grounded in different epistemological backgrounds. According to Kuhn (1970) scientists judge contributions and agree on their reliability and universal truth based on a shared perception of the world leading to visible outcomes. When it comes to transdisciplinary border crossing, however, this set of shared practices no longer applies. Mutual trust in each other’s expert knowledge is vital when working in interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary teams (Oellinger et al, 2014). Appreciation of various skill-sets and a dynamic exchange of different disciplinary perspectives create new opportunities, may lead to more creative solutions and a strengthened potential for innovation. In the context of higher education disciplinary diversity seems to increasingly become a strategic imperative for graduate employability. For a rapidly changing employment market, new job profiles that also entail entrepreneurial and innovation skills, intercultural understanding and critical thinking ability have become a critical asset (see Yerevan Communiqué, 2015). Undoubtedly, broad educational choices and settings that aim to create inclusive and inspiring learning spaces for all students are a prerequisite to prepare future graduates for interdisciplinary border crossing. What is more, HEIs that engage in interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research activities seems to be best prepared to establish close ties with and sustainable development for the local industry (Chydenius and Gaisch, 2014). In doing so, they go beyond the classical tasks of teaching and research and pursue the so-called “third mission” agenda which may be broadly described as “dissemination or outreach activities” for increased innovation and social change (Guldbrandsen and Slipersæter, 2007, p. 113).

Segment four of the HEAD wheel takes account of functional diversity and places an institutional focus on internal processes of organisational learning, team cohesion and team performance. In this regard, it was found that functional diversity positively affects group performance and innovation (Auh and Menguc, 2006) which indicates that cross-functionalities and cross-fertilization of ideas may have beneficial effects on individuals’ learning curves, and as a result also lead to collective learning. A synergistic combination of different bodies of knowledge together with dialogical action competence and a change in perspective may result in increased efficiency and more strategic thinking (Gaisch and Aichinger, 2016). Dialogical action competence draws on all four dimensions of emotional intelligence defined by Gardenwartz et al (2010), namely affirmative introspective, intercultural literacy, self-governance and self-architecting abilities. Dialogical competence also requires the creation of new knowledge within a certain conversational container (Isaacs 1999), which is characterised by an appreciative and respectful culture with the aim to shape a common ground of thinking and acting. Consequently, working in functional groups may help to detect blind spots or mental models that typically impair an agent’s capacity to see beyond one’s department or discipline (Senge 1990, Denzau/North 1994). Not only can unbalanced and unilateral views be countered by a systematic consideration of different alternatives, they may even be overcome in view of shifting perspectives. This may occur along the lines of interdepartmental communication and intra-organizational cooperation where intergroup relations can unfold and know-how and expertise can be passed on to junior or uninitiated colleagues. For this to happen, there has to be a corporate or institutional culture based on social responsibility that encourages an exchange of experiences and cooperative activities (Hanke and Stark, 2009). It also requires persons in senior positions that are prepared to pass on their knowledge and expertise. Although, at first sight, functional diversity may seem to only apply to staff, it is also well applicable to students. When taking on different roles on campus, be it as a student advisor, tutor, marketing assistant or representative, students learn to think laterally and get prepared for future challenges of the world of work. On this note, HEIs profit from a student population that is capable of seeing the big picture, assuming various functions and thus cater different aspects of graduate employability.

The fifth and last segment of the HEAD wheel is the one of **institutional** diversity which, in this context, refers to the collaboration with external stakeholders, be they different HEIs, industrial partners, persons in the area of politics, economics or science. Undoubtedly, organisations from different functional systems draw on differing institutional logics (Thornton and Ocasio, 2008), which is why cooperation between them may be a source of conflict. At the same time knowledge of coherences and awareness of how functional systems and institutional logics work can help to enhance collaboration and create emergence. If this happens, institutional diversity can be a source for institutional learning, a resilient foundation for sustainable development (McGinnis and Walter, 2010).

In addition, there is common ground on the assumption that a more diversified HE system also enhances students’ choices and consequently improves their levels of participation (Huisman et al. 2007, p. 563). This certainly also serves the purpose of the third mission mandate according to which HEIs may cooperate with non-university institutions for the sake of a societal contribution, either with regard to teaching, learning, applied or fundamental research activities or social responsibility. Working with different stakeholders requires the willingness to cope with complex adaptive systems and to minimize misfits, to what Herrmann-Pillath (2009) calls an openness for gains in specialization. In other words, the interaction with which an institution of higher learning is prepared to engage with differing knowledge institutions may have an impact on its national and international networks, prestige and visibility and also on its adaptability and change-related uncertainty. This shows that the notion of institutional diversity is hardly used as a neutral, descriptive term. Rather, it is treated as a normative value, one that should be espoused by HE systems and individual institutions in their policies, funding and framework conditions, in order to adapt to their scientific and social environments and respond to their stakeholders successfully (Reichert, 2009, p. 12).

In framing the importance of all five diversity segments, the HEAD Wheel can be understood as a multi-dimensional approach for a holistic diversity management in tertiary education that attempts to reduce a highly complex phenomenon by providing a single, yet multifaceted governance framework. While the underlying paradigms for targeted diversity management activities are all rooted in diversity research and seem to be applicable to all kinds of organizations, it was found that the rationale for drawing on them is rather different in business and higher education settings which suggests that they cannot be converted seamlessly in either context. In the following, an attempt is made to sketch the paradigms for diversity management in line with the identified segments and to explain why certain diversity perspectives are more likely to be found in specific settings than others. At the same time, the dynamic interplay of diversity aspects is outlined and a new paradigm is proposed whereby it is argued that it specifically draws on segments that serve specific corporate or institutional purposes. What is foregrounded here is a motivational needs-driven approach for diversity management that facilitates intersectional perspectives and a deeper discussion on the socio-demographic and socio-economic phenomena that currently shape both corporate and institutional realities.

**Diversity paradigms revisited**

Back in 1996, Thomas and Ely identified the following diversity paradigms: ‘discrimination and fairness’, ‘access and legitimacy’ and ‘integration and learning’. While the first perspective focuses on the elimination of discrimination by ensuring justice and equality to all persons, the access and legitimacy approach sees diversity as a gate-opener that provides access to previously underserved markets with a broad and diverse customer base. In contrast to the discrimination and fairness approach where diversity is mainly associated with assimilation, the access and legitimacy perspective values diversity as an appropriate means to an end. The third paradigm looks at integration and learning and regards diversity as a resource for learning. As a result of this, adaptive change, product innovation and a shared perspective in learning may unfold and differences that agents bring to bear on their work may be internalized. A few years later, Dass and Parker (1999) identified the so-called resistance perspective as a reactive strategic response to a growing pressure for diversity. It was feared that minorities might replace established and homogeneous insiders. They found that many of their informants from US-American, European and Japanese firms associated diversity with a threat and the protection of the status quo was hence considered a top priority.

In 2009, Schulz identified a further diversity paradigm, referred to as “responsibility and sensitivity” approach, whose aim lies in streamlining diversity management activities with overall strategic objectives. In doing so, measures should be targeted that take account of corporate social responsibility (CSR). What is foregrounded here is action in line with economic sense and sustainable impact. This approach stresses the “humanistic role” of an organization with the aim of making a contribution to society (Schulz, 2009, p. 76). Here, the symbiotic link between enterprises and society is strengthened and the benefits for both the organization and society are beyond doubt. Unquestionably, CSR “represents a differentiating factor that may be used successfully by firms to distinguish themselves within their industries” (Hill et al., 2007). Applied to tertiary education, this means that third mission activities may represent a unique selling proposition for HEIs. In view of the bandwagon effect, however, it can be assumed that numerous institutions have already taken on activities in the fields of knowledge and technology transfer, services to the community or establishments of science parks, incubators and much more (Gaisch, 2016).

Either way, social and economic action sharpens the focus on social sustainability for regional development (Gaisch and Aichinger, 2016, p. 6). This requires transformative institutions that are willing to “engage in co-creating social, technical and environmental transformations in pursuit of materialising sustainable development in a specific city” (Trencher et al, 2013, p. 151).

**A need to extend current paradigms**

The five diversity paradigms are summarized in the table below together with their strategic alignment, perspectives, focus and objectives. Given that all those paradigms were identified in and related to a business context, it is attempted here to also look at them from a higher education point of view and to carve out how they may differ in terms of rationale.

Additionally, a sixth paradigm is introduced, which we would like to refer to as “pluralism and eclecticism” to take account of ever-changing societal challenges in a global era that need to be addressed with informed decisions in a context-specific manner. In line with the complexities of contemporary society in which demographic shifts, technological advances, generational dynamics and globalisation reshape our lives, industries, working areas and education systems, this paradigm is of eclectic nature. It is based on a context-specific approach and does not follow one system alone but draws on intersectional considerations. By acknowledging that an organization is not a single, cohesive and static entity but exists of competing powers, conflicting interests and a complex interconnected constellation of factors that influence an aggregate of individuals at multiple levels, it points to a more fluid conceptualisation of diversity paradigms. With such a loosely coupled system (see Weick, 1976) in mind, it is not surprising that similar to special significance attached to certain diversity segments, there are also differing rationales within such an entity that drive the need to implement either sketchy, stand-alone or comprehensive diversity measures. In this sense, diversity is regarded as a context-sensitive commodity that can be pro-actively used in line with the corporate or institutional mission statement, the willingness to engage in adaptive action or with the formal or informal change management strategy. This perspective suggests that organizations may not draw on just one paradigm to achieve diversity-related outcomes. They may have a broad array of policies and instruments that address all diversity segments and are based on, at first sight, conflicting paradigms. On closer inspection, however, one may find that they do not necessarily be kept apart. They can be combined and also help to reflect on diversity measures more systematically, and as a result, yield more predictable and realistic results. In doing so, it is possible to go beyond opportunistic mainstreaming activities taken in line with normative legitimacy (Stangel-Meseke, 2016; Schreier, 2016). In other words, pluralism refers to explicit and extensive knowledge about the multitude of diversity paradigms, their underlying rationales, prescription and focus, while eclecticism shows itself by informed and context-specific decisions taken by the relevant stakeholders. By adopting a situational lens, dedicated action towards diversity management can be sustained on various levels with certain variations in line with the respective organisational /institutional/ departmental vision, mission and strategic outlook.

In the following, it is sought to provide an overview of existing diversity paradigms and relate them to the segments of the HEAD Wheel. It is also attempted to sketch how these approaches may differ in terms of business rationale and higher education rationale and where commonalities can be identified.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Diversity Paradigms | Diversity  Segment | Prescription | Focus | Business rationale | Higher Education rationale | Common denominator |
| Resistance (Dass and Parker, 1999) | blind to all segments | Sustain homo-geneity | diversity = threat  reactive | diversity-resistant  groupthink | Elite thought  excellence for an exclusive group | Protection of status quo  Keep established insider  Ivory Tower attitude |
| Discrim-ination-  Fairness  (Thomas and Ely, 1996) | Demo-graphic | Assimilate individuals | diversity = problem  defensive  surface level= based on principle of colour-blindness | Compliance with law  Political correctness  normative | education ethics  educational equity  (stakeholder) participation  social dimension | equal opportunities  fair treatment  mentoring & career development programs societal attitude |
| Access- Legitimacy  (Thomas and Ely, 1996) | cognitive  disciplinary | Accept and celebrate differences | diversity =  competitive  advantage  accommodative  surface level = based on observable parameters | Economical/ business perspective | Equity perspective  Educational mandate on behalf of society  Be better prepared for a highly complex world  Employability focus | access under-  represented markets to  get broader customer base  achieve better (financial) results  recruit a broader pool of students/ staff  inclusive attitude |
| Learning-Effective-ness  (Thomas and Ely, 1996) | cognitive  disciplinary  functional  institu-tional | Acculturate pluralism | diversity = resource  proactive  deep level = non observable traits | collective learning to enhance performance of all employees | Collective learning to enhance performance of all employees & students | transformation of learning capability and mental models due to organizational learning and institutional co-operation  transformative attitude |
| Respons-ibility-Sensitivity (Schulz, 2009) | all segments | Value differences and communalities | diversity =  social responsibility  accountable  /sustainable | Corporate social responsibility | Third mission  Humanistic conception  Academic responsibility for the creation of a democratic and sustainable society | Sustainable impact  Co-creation for regional transformation  responsible attitude |
| Pluralism- Eclecticism (Gaisch, Preymann and Aichinger, 2017) | Specific segments in line with intended purpose | Customize differences and intervention | diversity =  context-sensitive- commodity  dynamic | Motivational needs-driven approach | Constructivist paradigm shift  Inter- and transdisciplinary thinking | Implement diversity management in line with organizational culture  dialogical attitude |

Table 2: Diversity paradigms and their differing rationales: A comparison between business and HE rationales

When taking a closer look at table 2, it becomes obvious that the **resistance** approach is adopted by organizations that seek to maintain the status quo of demographic and cultural homogeneity (Dass and Parker, 1999; Omanovic, 2002). In general, diversity is regarded as a threat which contributes to the resistance of change, the reproduction of inequality and discrimination at the workplace (Kirton and Greene, 2005). In this context, businesses employ accommodative strategies to demographic pressures by foregrounding the advantages of a monocultural organization that mainly consists of ‘old boys' networks (Oakley, 2000) and closed shops (Rastetter, 2006). Such a groupthink also applies to HEIs where homosocial reproduction, so to say the tendency to advance and recruit others similar in appearance or background (Gilbert et al, 1999) is coupled with the demand for excellence and elite thought. What we would like to call an “ivory tower” attitude towards the outer circle appears to permeate both systems, for one in the form of a rigid monolithic organization (Cox, 1991), for the other in the shape of a ‘monoversity’ (Gaisch and Aichinger, 2016, Matuko, 2009) where a monocultural higher education institution counteracts current efforts of social mobility and permeability of class structures and social categories.

In contrast to the resistance approach that is blind to all diversity segments, **the discrimination and fairness paradigm** is clearly linked to the demographic segment by placing emphasis on equal opportunity, fair treatment, recruitment, and compliance of protected groups. Here, difference is regarded as a cause of problems with a normative obligation to accommodate persons of different backgrounds and recognize and support all kinds of demographic minority groups. While companies may be predominantly driven by political correctness and fears of non-compliance (Kulik, 2014), HEIs tend to foreground education ethics and seek to create a “safe, respectful and supportive space which is inclusive, ensuring fair and equal treatment for all through appropriate support mechanisms” (Caruana and Ploner, 2010, p. 58). What the Bologna communiqués address as the ‘social dimension in higher education’ are, inter alia, “alternative access routes targeting non-traditional learners and guidance and counselling services available to students during their studies” (Crosier et al, 2012, p. 72). While the corporate system also takes account of equal opportunities for previously excluded persons and aspires to mentoring and career development programs, HEIs seem to have an even stronger commitment to enabling a broader participation of disadvantaged groups, and in doing so, increase the overall number of students. Hence, educational equity is increasingly gaining in importance (Kugelmass and Ready, 2011) which is also reflected in the attempt to open up narrow lenses of inequality by addressing a much wider array of contextual factors that impact the perception of justice (Baye and Demeuse, 2008). In this sense, educational equity is understood as the capacity of institutions of higher learning to engage in institutional action that improves access and retention of a minority student population to also reflect societal diversity. This approach is certainly reinforced through specific legislations, incentive funding and a general discourse related to social justice and social responsibility.

**Access-legitimacy** works with the assumptions that diversity - as a useful instrument directly influenced by business forces - can be employed as a competitive advantage in multicultural societies. It brands diversity in line with accommodative strategies aimed at increasing a company’s reputation of a good employer (Maiorescu and Wrigley, 2016) or attracting relevant employees for a particular organizational goal (Curşeu, 2015). From a business perspective, this paradigm is useful to gain access to previously neglected customer bases, attain legitimacy by diverse stakeholders and positively affect an organization’s public image (Roberson and Park, 2007). What Thomas and Ely (1996, pp. 83-85) describe along the lines of ‘accepting and celebrating differences’ are organizational objectives that make business sense and help to achieve competitive edge. This is in line with the “value all differences” paradigm brought forward by Palmer (1994, p. 255) or “valuing diversity” approach adopted by Loden (1994, pp. 294-300) where cognitive diversity with its differing value and knowledge structures is generally acknowledged as a source of creativity and innovation. Undoubtedly, the value of such a stance may also be significant for higher education institutions, especially when it comes to the recruitment of a wider pool of students and staff. Yet, the question remains whether the focus on diversity issues should not go beyond an economisation of difference (Andresen and Koreuber, 2009) and also embrace an educational mandate on behalf of society. HEIs have a societal duty to holistically educate future graduates for the challenges that an increasingly complex future holds in store. To achieve this, students need to be aware of the existence of various models of perceptions and prediction and also be trained to deal with cognitive styles, problem-solving approaches and information processing that differ from their internalized value and knowledge structures (Gaisch and Aichinger, 2016). In this regard, the acquisition and application of practical knowledge together with transversal skills are crucial competencies that HEIs need to convey. To understand that a reasonable breadth of education may enable future graduates to better deal with issues beyond their disciplinary content knowledge requires an inclusive and accommodating attitude towards all segments of the HEAD Wheel.

When applying the **learning-effectiveness** paradigm to HEIs, it seems to generate the same effects as in enterprises. Not only are differences and similarities valued in both systems, the appreciative way of dealing with diversity as a concept (Krell, 2011) adds to customer satisfaction, social responsibility, innovation and increased productivity. Here, companies seek to tap into new and often foreign market segments with a sharp eye on organisational learning. In a similar vein, HEIs open up to an increasingly diverse student population from a variety of socio-demographic backgrounds. What both systems have in common is a vested interest that staff (and in the latter case also students) acquire appropriate skills that equip them with the ability to manage cross-border projects, tackle complex global challenges and proficiently interact with stakeholders around the world. To achieve this, both individual and organizational growth is a key parameter that allows agents to flexibly adapt to dynamic changes, often for the benefit of the respective organisation. In this sense, transformative interventions need to be offered that encourage deep-level diversity through extended interactions and enhanced group efficacy. Since the acculturation in pluralist knowledge communities is based on collective learning processes, suitable windows of opportunities need to be provided so that cognitive, disciplinary, functional and institutional cooperation between different individuals can be achieved. When relating this paradigm to the HEAD Wheel it becomes clear that targeted initiatives and organizational conditions that favour competence development enable social actors to successfully navigate transitions, diversify their ideas and develop a shared vision (Tschakert and Dietrich, 2010).

The **responsibility-sensitivity** paradigm seems a logical progression from the recent attention given to employee-focused corporate social responsibility (CSR) and ethical aspects of human resource management (HRM). Increased scholarly interest has been devoted to socially responsible HR practices in relation to diversity management (Krause, 2017; Hansen and Seierstad, 2016; Mazur, 2013; Gond et al, 2011, Karatas-Özkan et al, 2008). Not only has diversity management been one of the most popular HRM strategies since the 1990s, it has by now become a widely accepted and powerful management tool for corporate governance (Mazur, 2013, p. 43). What is foregrounded here is a diversity perspective that has both accountable and sustainable impact. While CSR is predominantly taking place at firm level and is therefore an issue for international corporations, such “visible doing good activities” (Minor and Morgan, 2011, p. 44) are becoming increasingly vital in the tertiary sector, too. What has been generally described as ’third mission activities’ throughout higher education institutions are measures that facilitate technology transfer, outreach and engagement to benefit society (Piirainen et al, 2016). Such activities include non-commercial and social innovation (Göransson, 2017) or consulting, services to the community, and/or contracts with industry and business enterprises (Koryakina et al, 2015). In this sense, the humanistic conception of HEIs and academic responsibility for the creation of a democratic society take shape in a number of activities that support sustainable regional development. The glue that holds both systems together is a sharp awareness that a responsible attitude towards society is not only a nice-to-have, but seems to become a prerequisite for modern enterprises and knowledge communities.

The **pluralism-eclecticism** paradigm takes account of the dynamics involved in diversity management by providing an intersectional analysis of all previously discussed diversity segments. Such a lens may better help to capture the complexities in social interactions, and in doing so, defy simplistic answers. Undoubtedly, the diversity, complexity and fast-paced dynamics of our digitalized world where knowledge seems to constantly reinvent itself calls for more innovative and customized solutions. In such dynamic systems it is no longer sufficient to subscribe to one diversity paradigm. Rather, it requires the openness and adaptability to adopt several approaches and relate them to specific settings. In this context, the concept of pluralism points to the knowledge about the coexistence of a number of diversity paradigms and underlying rationales in one social system. It is argued that within these systems specific entities are organized into an undetermined number of multiple, voluntary, competitive, non-hierarchically or conflicting categories. It is with this broad knowledge base in mind that both organisations and institutions can make informed decisions about the context-sensitive usage of the relevant diversity strategy and its guiding principles. Not only does this customized approach lend itself more naturally to the development of a contextual understanding of the diversity aspects at stake, it also refrains from either/or solutions that may have a somewhat limited view of the underlying mechanisms that enable or disable specific diversity action and interventions. Behind any diversity management activity - we would claim - lies a motivational or needs-driven explanation which may lead to a constructivist diversity paradigm shift. In this light, the ability of contextualized and critical high-order thinking and interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary and translational action should become the major driver behind any diversity-related intervention.

What we would like to call a ‘dialogical attitude ‘is the ability to explore “[…] the difference which makes a difference […]” (Bateson1972, p. 276) which is based on a psychologically oriented description of learning. It encompasses items of behavioural change and modifications of thinking and emotionality which can be adapted as experienced perceptions and comprehension (Zimbardo et al. 2003). In this sense, the dialogical attitude can be characterized as a learning notion which is performed both at an individual and at an organisational level. Even though dialogue is more euphemistically connoted as a harmonising and open-ended communication format – its decisive strength lies in the creation of an exchange setting, free of domination where thoughts and demands can be articulated without fear of reprisal (Habermas 1987; Petersen 2003; Mandl et al. 2008). Dialogical attitude therefore calls for appreciative co-operation/co-creation/co-innovation at an eye level where the principle of subsidiarity is most crucial.

**Theoretical and practical implications**

This contribution sought to take stock of existing diversity paradigms and their transformative potential by relating them to the so-called HEAD Wheel. In doing so, a paradigm shift towards an eclectic and context-specific framework suggests that the paradigms do not operate in a static system but need to be dynamically applied to the organization at hand.

The core contribution of this cohesive frame of reference is its systematic, wide-scope and cross-sectoral way of addressing diversity segments at the tertiary level that allows for a contextual understanding of diversity management in a more nuanced way. As such, the HEAD Wheel may serve as an academically informed qualitative assessment tool for diversity managers that wish to make more informed choices that go beyond either compliance or opportunity-oriented diversity approaches. To identify individual and organizational needs, the HEAD Wheel serves as an overarching structure that enables an in-depth understanding of existing practices, its consequences, limitations and underlying rationales while at the same time moving away from a rigid separation of legal, social and business-oriented motives for diversity management (Ravazzani, 2016; Tatli, 2011).

The interplay of theoretical knowledge and practical insights into specific tertiary diversity management settings may help to design localized practices that do justice to the complexities that higher education institutions are faced with and move beyond a narrow conception of single identities and one-sided structural dimensions. As such, it helps to draw increased attention to intersectionality by foregrounding multiple identities and contextual conditions that individuals in the tertiary education are confronted with. It is argued here that the HEAD Wheel together with a greater understanding of the mechanisms of each diversity segment and its underlying paradigms may provide a solid and timely basis for a contextual diversity management at the tertiary level of education.

Altogether, this approach argues that by taking a more holistic and socially responsible perspective of diversity management that foregrounds contextual conditions and takes account of national, functional and institutional specificities, the perceived gap between different paradigms may be bridged. At the same time, resistance may be overcome by promoting the added value of diversity as well as problematizing its realities and unpacking stereotypical concepts.

More so, by reconciling diversity considerations of different nature and applying them to specific socio-cultural and socio-demographic settings, a complementary view of diversity management may offer the justification for moving away from the previously rigid separation of compliance, opportunity-oriented or socially responsible diversity arguments.

In this context, further research is needed to delve into contextualized settings of diversity management at the tertiary level. Additional studies could scrutinise whether the differing rationales for diversity paradigms are applicable across nations and various contexts or if national specificities and their situated power relations will create even greater complexity.

What needs to be equally addressed are “specific practices that fit a particular perspective” (Ravazzani, 2016, p. 156; Podsiadlowski et al, 2013). Practice-driven indicators that go beyond formal declarations and window dressing need to be identified, tested and implemented. Clearly, assessment tools for practitioners may have powerful transformative potential for organizations and structure diversity interventions along the lines of organizational practices and existing power relations (Benschop et al, 2015). Here it needs to be stressed, however, that before practical implications can be drawn, it is vital to better understand the underlying mechanisms that drive specific organizations and institutions.

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