**Trends in DEI Research in Central and Eastern Europe: Insights from a Call for Papers**

Anna M. Górska; Kozminski University, Poland

Barbara Czarniawska; University of Gothenburg, Sweden

**Abstract**

In this article we present various perspectives within research on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Central and Eastern Europe organizations. Such perspectives were answers to calls for chapters in the anthology we plan to edit "Beyond borders: Diversity, equity, and inclusion in research on organizations in Central and Eastern Europe". In this anthology we intend to bring together a collection of chapters that illustrate a complex interplay of historical, cultural, societal, and political factors forming DEI activities in the CEE region. Many topics make visible historical underpinnings of current DEI challenges, other gender diversity in the workplace, the impact of migration and integration, the persistence of prejudice and discrimination, and the tension between nationalism and regionalism. These themes underscore contextualized DEI approaches, which resonate with the specific realities of the CEE region.

**Keywords:** Diversity, equity, Central and Eastern Europe

**Introduction**

One of the most significant social matters is the question of how to reconcile diversity, equity and inclusion with principles of social justice, democracy and fairness. As societies become increasingly complex, the concept of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) has become a significant topic of academic, business, and societal discourse. Such increased attention to such topics and discourses is not merely a trend but a reflection of the growing recognition that DEI issues are essential in fostering just societies, innovative economic environments, and united organizations (Mor Barak, 2017; Shore et al., 2018). Yet, despite the importance of the topic DEI research dominates the research perspective in Western Europe and North America (Jonsen, Maznevski, & Schneider, 2011; Trepte & Loths, 2020), other perspectives, such as those in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) [[1]](#footnote-1) —a region rich in history, culture, and socio-political nuance—has not been much visible in DEI discourses and studies (Górska et al., 2021).

CEE holds a unique position in the global narrative. Historically situated at the crossroads of societal, cultural, and political influences, it has also been molded by current migration patterns. Its varied history, with its periods of both autonomy and foreign dominance, has played a significant role in the formation of its current social concepts, not the least those related to diversity and inclusion (Gundara & Jacobs, 2000).

This context creates an ideal setting to study DEI – not as a single, uniform idea, but as a collection of experiences and viewpoints influenced by the unique societal, political, and cultural characteristics of the region. As the CEE countries grapple with the complexities of globalization, historical legacies, future plans and regional differences – all this in the context of increasing migration and political tensions – there is an urgent need to understand these issues from a translocal perspective (Zięba, 2023). Many existing studies of DEI from the CEE region are reported in native languages, often limited to specific countries, which reduces their potential global impact (Czarniawska, 2014).

This is one of the reasons we believe it would be useful to create an anthology that will explore the complex dimensions of DEI within the societal, political, and cultural contexts of Central and Eastern Europe. We have invited a diverse range of scholars from various countries (not limited to CEE), of different genders, with different experiences, academic positions, and perspectives on this topic to join us. Such a book may dismantle the peripheral status of CEE by joining global DEI conversations. It can amplify the voices from the region, showing how DEI unfolds within its context. The initiative is not merely academic; it is a step towards redefining inclusivity, showing that DEI discourses are truly global in their scope, embracing the nuances of regions hitherto underexplored.

This article is a showcase a variety of answers to our call for contributions about themes "Beyond Borders: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Central and Eastern Europe". The abstracts received well describe the evolving field of DEI research in the region. They indicate an increasing interest in such topics like historical legacies, gender diversity, migration, and nationalism. This trend demonstrates that DEI studies in Central and Eastern Europe are not only growing in popularity but are also begin to reveal its growing presence in the wider academic world.

For example, the examination of historical legacies within the context of CEE offers a distinctive viewpoint. It shows how past societal and political events shape the challenges of diversity and inclusion today. Such approach contrasts with DEI diversity in Western settings, which often focuses more on current conditions and future plans. In Western studies, the priority is frequently on contemporary issues and prospective solutions, while the research in Central and Eastern Europe provides a profound understanding of how history informs current DEI challenges. This offers an unique contribution of the CEE region to the global DEI discourse; a comprehensive view that integrates past experiences with present and future considerations.

In this paper we discuss the anticipated outcomes of the anthology, and its potential influence on DEI discussions both globally and within the CEE region. This part aims to project how the anthology could inform future research and practice, contributing to the ongoing discourse on DEI.

**Background**

Diversity has long been a central aspect of societies, through various forms such as ethnicity, gender, race, economic status, and political beliefs, across different historical and geographical settings. The perception of diversity, however, has undergone significant transformations in the past century. The concept of "diversity" has evolved from a mere description of societal variation to a normative meta-concept, present in various fields as management, economics, and politics. This shift reflects a growing recognition of diversity's relevance in societal and organizational contexts and led to the creation of new academic disciplines as diversity management and diversity studies (Bendl et al., 2012)

Contemporary researchers increasingly investigate how DEI principles, grounded in social justice and democratic ideals, can benefit organizations and societies at large. This research often emphasizes the mutual benefits of diversity, suggesting that advancements in this area serve the interests of both individuals and collective entities, such as employees and corporations or individual citizens and their communities. For example, the studies by Ely and Thomas (2001) and Cox (1993) have established essential theories on the positive impacts of diversity in workplaces, showing how a varied workforce can drive creativity, innovation, and competitive edge. Richard (2000), who explored how racial diversity influences business strategies and performance, demonstrating the intricate relationship between diversity and organizational success. Yet his approach seems rather transactional and opportunistic, suggesting that we should strive for diversity *because* it is beneficial, rather than because it is stemming from ethical and social justice perspective. Another stream of academic debate claims that equality and social justice is inherently valuable, irrespective of the potential organizational advantages.

These two perspectives are both present within academia: one focuses on diversity's management within organizations, while the other engages in a meta-critical analysis of diversity debates in both academic and public spheres. The first stream examines the rationale and methods through which entities like businesses, institutions, and governments integrate diversity initiatives. Discussions in this realm often oscillate between utilitarian arguments, assessing diversity management in terms of productivity and economic benefits, and deontological arguments, which prioritize ethical principles like equality, dignity, and anti-discrimination.

The academic discourse on diversity is enriched by contributions from fields like critical race theory and postcolonial studies, which critique the normative and instrumentalist approaches to diversity management. These perspectives argue that transactional approaches can reduce diversity to a manageable entity, overlooking the complex power dynamics and processes of differentiation that characterize social interactions.

This scholarly engagement reveals a paradox: the discourse on diversity exhibits a fundamental split between normative ideals and the practical realities of implementing these ideals in societal structures. Thus, the academic treatment of diversity not only provides insights into how diversity is managed and critiqued but also underscores the nuanced challenges and opportunities that diversity presents in a globalized, multifaceted societal landscape.

Although this discussion is beyond the scope of this article, we believe it is an important discussion on the aspects of DEI from a scholarly perspective.

**Methodology**

Within this paper we analyze the 22 accepted abstracts out of 33 that were submitted for our edited volume “Beyond Borders: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Central and Eastern Europe."

Firstly, we aggregated abstracts, commenced with a broad call for contributions targeting scholars, researchers and practitioners with expertise and interest in DEI within the CEE region. This invitation was disseminated via academic networks, social media platforms and personal contacts.

We curated a collection of 33 abstract from various submissions, ensuring a variety of representations of topics, perspectives, and diversity among authors. This involved a meticulous selection process, whereby each abstract was evaluated for its relevance, research quality, study focus on CEE region, and contribution to the field of DEI. Further, for the purposes of this paper, we conducted a through analysis of each abstract, followed by the identification of themes.

**Results of the analysis**

The thematic analysis of the submitted abstracts revealed a couple of critical themes that present a though understanding of DEI within the CEE context. The analysis distinguished 6 themes: historical context, gender diversity in the workplace, migration and integration, prejudice, discrimination, stereotypes; and nationalism and regionalism,

This section delves into the analysis of the key themes identified in the submitted abstracts, providing a better understanding of the state of DEI research, and practices within the CEE context. The analysis integrates relevant literature, case studies, and examples to offer a comprehensive view of DEI in CEE.

**Historical context and its impact on contemporary challenges:**

The analysis of DEI in CEE cannot be disentangled from the region's historical backdrop. As highlighted in the abstract by Bell and Valenta, prejudice towards ethnic minorities has been a persistent issue, with studies suggesting higher levels of prejudice in CEE compared to Western Europe. The historical lens provides insight into how past socio-political dynamics continue to shape current DEI challenges, emphasizing the need for DEI initiatives to consider these unique historical influences. The transition from socialism to democracy and the varying stages of economic development across CEE countries further complicate the DEI landscape, necessitating tailored approaches to DEI interventions.

**Gender diversity in the workplace:**

Gender diversity remains a significant area of focus within DEI research in CEE. The abstract by Chludziński and Derra on gender equity challenges in Polish higher education reflects broader issues in the workplace, where gender biases and disparities persist. Despite legal frameworks promoting gender equality, practical implementation varies, indicating a gap between policy and practice. In comparison, Western European models of gender diversity may not fully resonate with CEE contexts, highlighting the importance of contextualized strategies that address the region's specific cultural and societal norms.

**Migration and integration:**

The abstracts reveal a growing concern with migration and its implications for DEI in CEE. The influx of migrants and refugees introduces new dimensions to DEI, as seen in the experiences of Hungarian entrepreneurs with disabilities and the narrative on Lithuanian migration. These insights underscore the complex interplay between migration, societal attitudes, and DEI efforts, pointing to the need for inclusive policies that accommodate the diverse backgrounds and experiences of migrants.

**Prejudice, Discrimination, and Stereotypes:**

Prejudice and discrimination against various minority groups, including LGBTQ+ individuals, are prevalent in CEE, as indicated in the abstract examining LGBTQ+ workplace activism in Poland. Such prejudices not only affect individual well-being but also hinder the creation of inclusive environments. The persistence of stereotypes and discrimination calls for comprehensive strategies that address underlying biases and promote acceptance and inclusion across societal and organizational levels.

**Nationalism and regionalism:**

The tension between nationalism and regional integration presents unique challenges for DEI in CEE. Nationalistic sentiments can exacerbate divisions and impede DEI efforts, as seen in the divergent attitudes toward different migrant groups in Lithuania. Understanding the role of nationalism and regionalism is crucial for developing DEI initiatives that navigate these sensitivities while fostering inclusivity.

**Conclusions**

The anthology is to offer a comprehensive exploration of DEI within the CEE region, providing a valuable contribution to an area often marginalized in global DEI conversations. Through a analysis of submitted abstracts, this paper sheds light on the multifaceted DEI landscape in CEE, uncovering the complex interplay of historical legacies, contemporary challenges, and the dynamic interrelations of various DEI themes, including gender diversity, migration, and nationalism.

The anthology's findings reveal the critical need for a nuanced understanding of DEI that is firmly rooted in the specific socio-political and cultural contexts of CEE. It underscores the insufficiency of one-size-fits-all approaches and highlights the importance of developing tailored strategies that respect the unique characteristics of the region. By offering a platform for CEE voices in DEI discourse, the book not only enriches the global understanding of DEI but also bridges significant gaps in research, fostering a more inclusive and comprehensive global DEI dialogue.

For scholars, this publication underscores the necessity for continued, context-aware research in the region, encouraging further investigations into the intersectionality and evolving nature of DEI in CEE. Practitioners and policymakers are urged to draw upon these insights, ensuring that DEI initiatives are informed by and responsive to the region's specific needs and opportunities.

Ultimately, "Beyond Borders" serves as an important step toward integrating CEE perspectives into the broader DEI conversation, offering fresh insights and strategies that can inform more effective and inclusive DEI practices globally. As the DEI field evolves, the inclusion of diverse regional perspectives, like those from CEE, is vital in constructing more equitable and inclusive societies and organizations worldwide.

**References:**

1. Braun, Virginia, & Clarke, Victoria. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), 77-101.
2. Cox, Taylor H. (1993). Cultural diversity in organizations: Theory, research, and practice. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
3. Czarniawska, Barbara (2014). A theory of organizing (2nd ed.). Edward Elgar Publishing.
4. Eagly, Alice H., & Carli, Linda L. (2007). Through the labyrinth: The truth about how women become leaders. Harvard Business Press.
5. Ely, Robin J., & Thomas, David A. (2001). Cultural diversity at work: The effects of diversity perspectives on work group processes and outcomes. Administrative Science Quarterly, 46(2), 229-273.
6. Górska, Anna M., Kulicka, Karolina, Staniszewska, Zuzanna, & Dobija, Dorota. (2021). Deepening inequalities: What did COVID-19 reveal about the gendered nature of academic work? Gender, Work & Organization, 28(4), 1546-1561.
7. Gundara, Jagdish, & Jacobs, Sydney. (Eds.). (2000). Intercultural Europe: Diversity and social policy. London: Routledge.
8. Jonsen, Karsten, Maznevski, Martha L., & Schneider, Susan C. (2011). Special review article: Diversity and its not so diverse literature: An international perspective. International Journal of Cross Cultural Management, 11, 35-62.
9. Mor Barak, Michàlle E. (2017). Managing diversity: Toward a globally inclusive workplace. Sage Publications.
10. Richard, Orlando C. (2000). Racial diversity, business strategy, and firm performance: A resource-based view. Academy of Management Journal, 43(2), 164-177.
11. Seierstad, Cathrine, & Opsahl, Tore. (2011). For the few not the many? The effects of affirmative action on presence, prominence, and social capital of women directors in Norway. Scandinavian Journal of Management, 27(1), 44-54.
12. Shore, Lynn M., Cleveland, Jeanette N., & Sanchez, Dania. (2018). Inclusive workplaces: A review and model. Human Resource Management Review, 28(2), 176-189.
13. Trepte, Sabine, & Loths, Laura. (2020). National and gender diversity in communication: A content analysis of six journals between 2006 and 2016. Annals of the International Communication Association, 44, 289-311.
14. Zięba, Ryszard. (Ed.). (2023). Politics and security of Central and Eastern Europe: Contemporary challenges. Cham: Springer.

1. We understand CEE with accordance to OECD definition that comprises of the following countries: Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, and the three Baltic States: Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania (OECD, 2001). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)