Call for Papers

Celebrate Diversity!? - Diversity (management) and the struggles over its interpretation(s) in Germany and Europe

"Celebrate Diversity" – in line with this year’s theme of the Eurovision Song Contest in Kiev and its politically controversial side effects, which were meant to be countered with (musical) diversity, the (re)productions of diversity in social and organizational discourses are ambivalent and ambiguous. Both diversity as construct and as conceptual processing, and the usages of diversity (as in the concept of “diversity management”), are often applied affirmatively; as affirmations of differences and their productive use. These affirmations are often based on affect rather than on an empirical or theoretical foundation, and they occasionally represent no more than lip service or a catchy slogan.

How the term “diversity” is conceived, negotiated, promoted, criticized, implemented... in different European countries depends highly on geopolitical, social, and organizational surroundings. Differences and similarities among individuals and group members can only be attributed in the tension field between "norm" and "deviation." The constitutive role of these social as well as organizational power relations should be examined more thoroughly.

Diversity (management) can be characterized as an empty signifier, defined by Laclau (2002) as “a signifier without a signified”, an "empty place" with contradictory and different definitions that generate struggles over its interpretation(s). In line with hegemonic principles, different articulations fill empty signifiers with their own meanings. These meanings, however, can only be partially fixed (cf Laclau / Mouffe 1991) - appearing as mere 'snapshot' of dynamic, contingent power relations. Conceptualizing diversity (management) as an empty signifier enables critical analyses that clarify diversity as a social construction, historize and contextualize management strategies, and make the understandings and functions of diversity visible. It is necessary to intervene in the struggles over those interpretations and actively shape the constitutions of meanings. Against this background, it is of great importance not only to approach the term “diversity” critically, but also to emphasize its constructedness and to discuss the different discourses and spreading movements in Europe.

For our anthology, we are looking for articles and positions dealing with questions about and approaches to diversity and with the history, dynamics, and developments etc. of diversity in European contexts. For example, the following questions could be discussed:

- Diversity (management) developed as a concept in the US. How can its dissemination in Germany and other European countries be described? What understandings and implementations can be found?

- In Germany, diversity implementation efforts often occur within (institutionalized) structures of women’s movements. How can we define the relationship between diversity and gender? What kinds of inconsistencies exist in other European countries, and (how) do these developments influence each other?
• What concepts of diversity can be developed beyond “economizing the other” (Lederle 2008) (also) for organizational contexts?

• What delimitations and intersections connect with other scholarly approaches, such as “social inequality”, “anti-discrimination”, “difference”, “inclusion”, “intersectionality” / “interdependence”? How are those interpreted?

• Demographic developments are (almost) always used to emphasize the importance of diversity (management). How are these arguments articulated and how are they subjected to critical analysis? Which other legitimate reasons for diversity can be found in the EU context?

• What discourses are developing around the so-called working world 4.0 and what conceptual developments of diversity (management) are necessary or conceivable in this context? What ‘classical’ diversity categorizations are addressed in the context of digital work forms such as crowds and clouds? And what dimensions of diversity not previously taken into account are gaining popularity now, and why?

The final submission date for abstracts of no more than 3,000 characters (including spaces) outlining your basic ideas / approaches for a contribution is September 15, 2017. We will inform you promptly about the selection of contributions. Full papers (with 45,000 characters) are then to be submitted on January 31, 2018. Submissions in either German or English are welcome.

We are looking forward to your ideas and contributions!
Wiebke Frieß, Anna Mucha, and Daniela Rastetter

If you have any questions or comments, write to us at: sammelband-diversity@wis.uni-hamburg.de

• Graduate sociologist Wiebke Frieß is a research assistant at the Chair of Human Resources and Gender at the University of Hamburg. In her dissertation, Productions of Diversity - A dispositif analysis of diversity (management) in organizations, she reconstructs and analyzes the production of diversity in the context of subjectivation, knowledge, and power effects.

• Dr. Anna Mucha is a research assistant at the Chair of Human Resources and Gender at the University of Hamburg. Her research interests are emotional work and micropolitics in subjectivated working contexts as well as (the production of) diversity / heterogeneity in corporate and higher education settings, with a focus on the dimension of class.

• Dr. Daniela Rastetter is the Professor for Human Resources and Gender at the University of Hamburg. Her research subjects are gender and organization, emotional work, micropolitics at the workplace, equality policy, and managing diversity. In addition, she is Gender Equalities Representative of the Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences as well as a member of the steering group of the Diversity Audit at the University of Hamburg.