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Hinterhuber, Eva Maria; Vasterling, Veronica

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FREIE UNIVERSITÄT BERLIN

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Tagungsberichte

Eva Maria Hinterhuber, Veronica Vasterling

Gender and Diversity Studies in European Perspectives.

International conference, 8–10 January 2015, Rhine-Waal University of Applied Sciences, Kleve

Zusammenfassung

Gender und Diversity Studies aus europäischen Perspektiven. Internationale Konferenz, 8. bis 10. Januar 2015, Hochschule Rhein-Waal, Kleve

Vom 8. bis 10. Januar fand an der Hochschule Rhein-Waal in Kleve die internationale Konferenz „Gender and Diversity Studies in European Perspectives" statt. Die hier diskutierten Themen reichten von Fragen nach der Umsetzung und dem Wandel von Gender-und-Diversity-Strategien in spezifischen Feldern, Institutionen und europäischen Regionen über stärker theoretisch ausgerichtete Untersuchungen von Diversitäts- und Intersektionalitätskonzepten bis zu Handlungsempfehlungen für zukünftige Schritte. Die Konferenz zeigte die Notwendigkeit auf, die Analyseinstrumente der Gender und Diversity Studies zu schärfen und politische Allianzen über Differenzlinien hinweg auszuhandeln, um Stillstand und Backlash zu überwinden.

Schlüsselwörter
Gender, Diversity, Intersektionalität, Ungleichheit, Gleichheit

Summary

The Rhine-Waal University of Applied Sciences in Kleve hosted the international conference on "Gender and Diversity Studies in European Perspectives" from 8 to 10 January 2015. Topics discussed at the conference ranged from the implementation and vicissitudes of gender and diversity policies in specific fields, institutions and European regions, to more theoretical examinations of the concepts of diversity and intersectionality, and proposals for going forward. The conference highlighted the need to sharpen the analytical instruments of gender and diversity studies and to negotiate political alliances across lines of difference in order to overcome stagnation and backlash.

Keywords
gender, diversity, intersectionality, inequality, equality

Introduction[1]

The Rhine-Waal University of Applied Sciences in Kleve hosted the international conference on "Gender and Diversity Studies in European Perspectives" from 8 to 10 January 2015. The international event was organized by Ingrid Jungwirth (Rhine-Waal University of Applied Sciences) and Carola Bauschke-Urban (Fulda University of Applied Sciences) in cooperation with the Institute for Gender Studies at the Radboud University Nijmegen (Netherlands) and was funded by the German research funding organization DFG and the EU (Euregio/Interreg), among others.

1 Eva Maria Hinterhuber would like to thank Manuela Beyer for her support.

The conference attendees fitted the topic perfectly: For a conference dedicated to diversity, it was a particularly rewarding experience to witness a young and mixed audience, whose contributions to the discussions were, moreover, both of a high standard and refreshing. The discussions were on a par with the stimulating programme, which did justice to the theme. Many regions of Europe and its borders were represented, with scientists coming from Turkey, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Tunisia, Sweden and Russia, for instance. There was also, of course, a fair share of German scholars and activists. Topics discussed at the conference ranged from the implementation and vicissitudes of gender and diversity policies in specific fields, institutions and European regions, to more theoretical examinations of the concepts of diversity and intersectionality, and proposals for going forward.

Following the observation by *Ute Klammer* (University of Duisburg-Essen) that gender and diversity are not just about business cases, but also about social and gender justice and participation rights, we would like to propose that gender and diversity studies has two aims. On the one hand, gender and diversity studies analyses prevailing gender and diversity orders, on the other hand, it envisions possibilities for overcoming intersecting inequalities.

In her inspiring opening lecture, *Ilse Lenz* (Ruhr University Bochum) paved the way for meeting this twofold goal. She presented a perceptive analysis of the dynamics of change in contemporary Europe, a Europe which is facing many crises, including the crisis of neoliberalism. Instead of defining diversity simply as consisting of groups with collective positionality, she introduced a critical diagnosis of diversity, indicating the challenge of intersecting inequalities for diversity studies. Neoliberal capitalism is a champion of diversity-cum-inequality. Across the world there is hardly a more diverse workforce in terms of race, gender, sexual orientation, class and cultural background than that in Wall Street and the City of London – due to the fact that discrimination is a waste of talent and, hence, money. In a market with a diversity of consumers, companies with a diverse workforce involved in decision-making processes make more profit. By reducing diversity to a range of different but homogenous identities, though, neoliberal utilitarianism makes structural inequalities invisible, for instance the structural inequality of meritocracy in which those with lower educational qualifications are the losers. Combining astute theoretical approaches with an emphasis on the importance of social action, Ilse Lenz made a plea for reconciling gender and social justice, for building coalitions of intersecting inequalities.

Looking back, some core questions crystallized in the course of the conference; our report will be guided by these questions:

1. How can European gender equality and anti-discrimination policy be revived after a period of stagnation?
2. How can the tension between (welcome) mobility and (negatively connoted) migration in EU-rope be overcome from a gender and diversity perspective?
3. How can the backlash in EU Member States and beyond, a backlash fostered by conservative and also religious forces, be countered?
4. How can masculinities – both in their pro-gender and anti-feminist (anti-genderist) version – be conceived?

5. How can theoretical approaches within gender and diversity studies be improved and transferred from theory into practice?

1. How can European gender equality and anti-discrimination policy be revived after a period of stagnation?

The contributions to the panel on "Anti-discrimination law and policies" agreed on their assessment of stagnation and even on regression within EU gender equality policy. The contributions differed, however, as regards their conceptualization and contextualization of the common finding and suggestions for the future.

Anne van der Vleuten (Radboud University Nijmegen) presented a convincing model which contributes to a better understanding of the impact of EU gender equality policy. Based on an analysis of recent developments with respect to this policy, she proposed the following explanation for its stagnation and for its partial failure in recent years: Former successful coalitions and instruments are no longer as promising as they used to be – the velvet triangle has lost its effectiveness, and the chances of successfully catching an unwilling state in a pincer movement (i.e. putting it under pressure by supranational and domestic actors at the same time, cf. van der Vleuten 2005) in order to enforce gender equality have diminished. Instead, now is the time of experts. Gender equality (policy) needs to be reconstructed to fit into the new prevailing logic. Anne van der Vleuten also underlined the need to return to the very core of gender equality.

Petra Ahrens (Humboldt University Berlin) impressively traced the development from EU policy programmes to the latest "strategy for equality between woman and man 2010–2015", which she considered to be a "useless tool" for achieving gender equality. She confirmed her colleague Anne van der Vleuten's disillusioning assessment of the current state of EU gender equality policy and, linking her analysis to the aim of successful implementation, advocated "conflict, not compromise", thereby supporting more confrontational and demanding action by gender-political social movements.

Looking back over five decades of (promoting) European gender equality policy, it seems that its promotion always reflected the EU's multilevel system and governance. The supranational gender regime was taken forward by different actors: women's movements, femocrats in European institutions and academia. The actors' use of all levels, including the international one, has been framed as a ping pong effect (cf. Abels 2011), that is the strategic shift of arenas in the multi-level system and at the international level. Both speakers' conclusions suggest that it is once more time for such a shift, to hand the baton over to social movement action.

In her lecture on gender equality law in the public sector in the UK, *Hazel Conley* (Queen Mary University of London) offered another promising way out of stagnation. Elucidating its character of reflexive legislation, she convincingly presented this kind of legislation as a paradigm shift and a potential next step in relation to equality law.

2. How can the tension between (welcome) mobility and (negatively connoted) migration in EU-rope be overcome from a gender and diversity perspective?

On the topic of gender, labour migration and immigration policies, *Eleonore Kofmann* (Middlesex University London) made a case for a much more complex approach to gender and diversity, for example with regard to different sectors and contexts, thus demanding further differentiation and contextualization.

Anna Amelina (Goethe University Frankfurt) introduced the concept of a "regime of intersection" and drew attention to the tension between an inclusive cosmopolitan discourse and an essentialist definition of Europe, which are reflected in the notions of mobility and migration. This prevents diversity being incorporated into the regulation of migration, of which Europe is so much in need if it wants to meet its own standards. Overcoming the paradox between shifting boundaries and maintaining boundaries seems to be one of the most important challenges for contemporary Europe.

Carola Bauschke-Urban and *Kirsten Heusgen* (Fulda University of Applied Sciences) pointed out intersecting inequalities and outlined how international educational mobility is shaped by gendered and postcolonial structures. Their empirical investigation illustrated that women from poor families and with low educational qualifications are typically excluded despite official institutional attempts to promote international educational mobility.

Sabine Lorenz-Schmidt (Amelia Museum, Geneva), *Helena Pettersson* (Umeå University) and *Kerstin Sandell* (Lund University) exposed the problems associated with the lives and working conditions of postdoctoral researchers. Postdocs were found to experience disruption and a lack of continuity not only with regard to their research but also with regard to their social lives. This is in particular connected to issues of gender and diversity linked to partnership and family.

3. How can the backlash in EU Member States and beyond, a backlash fostered by conservative and also by religious forces, be countered?

Turkey, Russia and Tunisia face similar challenges of a political nature: Either new laws are being adopted which undermine gender equality and the rights of sexual minorities, or existing gender equality law is not being implemented and applied. In addition, the area studies which were presented showed a common backlash for which religious communities and state churches can be held responsible.

According to *Elena Zdravomyslova* (European University at St Petersburg), gender is at the centre of the development towards a new imperialism under Putin. A severe backlash, manifest in legal amendments, is supported by conservative politicians, representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church and conservative parts of civil society. Despite its long tradition, Russia's women's movement lacks the support of wider society and mainly consists of a small group of activists and academics. Progres-

sive civil society has again withdrawn to what is known as "second society". Elena Zdravomyslova painted a picture which suggests that Putin's system, with its authoritarian repressiveness, has won the day.

Amel Grami (Manouba University) and *Zeynep Usal* (Koç University Law School, Istanbul) described the disparities between law and practice in Tunisia and Turkey. Due to accession negotiations, harmonization of the law according to EU requirements has taken place in the latter. Still, the real challenge is implementing and internalizing those legal requirements. Contemporary Turkey makes it clear once again that gender equality law and societal support are mutually dependent: Gender equality and anti-discrimination law need support from civil society, and civil society needs legal frameworks in order to be able to promote gender equality and anti-discrimination.

In sum, the examples show that civil society and social movements are potentially very effective in promoting gender and diversity issues, but by the same token the open opposition of conservative counter-movements can be stressed. Consider, for instance, the PEGIDA movement in contemporary Germany, which is not only Islamophobic and xenophobic, but also distinctly anti-gender.

4. How can masculinities – both in their pro-gender and anti-feminist (anti-genderist) version – be conceived?

Katarzyna Woijnicka (Dissens e.V., Berlin) contributed to filling the gap in the still under-researched field of men and gender equality in European politics, with a special focus on unconventional political participation, such as associations, NGOs etc. Presenting a broad range of men's associations, she coined new, enriching categorizations. To the more common categories such as balanced/pro-gender/pro-feminist, she added the two new categories of alter-masculist and anti-masculist in order to be able to describe with specific Eastern European social realities.

Other highly interesting research on masculinities was presented by *Helena Petterson* (Umeå University), who presented her ethnological study of the making of masculinities in experimental physics. Her aim was to analyze academic men and academic cultures dominated by men as political categories and political subjects.

Research conducted by *Ingrid Jungwirth* (Rhine-Waal University of Applied Sciences) pointed in a similar direction: Women are underrepresented in the STEM field (i.e. science, technology, engineering and mathematics) in Germany, a country generally assumed to be proud of its technological expertise. Linking the "culture of engineering" to societal power, Ingrid Jungwirth assessed male gender and being autochthonous as characteristics of "distinction" as defined by Bourdieu.

5. How can theoretical approaches within gender and diversity studies be improved and transferred from theory into practice?

The keynote by *Mieke Verloo* (Radboud University Nijmegen) drew attention to blind spots in intersectional research. Given that it typically focuses on static intersections between gender and race, or gender and class, or all three, intersectional research tends to ignore two things. Inequalities do not statically intersect, they dynamically interact, mutually shaping each other in different contexts (e.g. institutions, social practices, politics and private life) and, hence, change in contextual ways. Inequalities do not only change in different contexts, they are also often inflected by privilege. In theory and especially in political practice, more attention needs to be paid to the interaction between privilege and inequality. For instance, as women are steadily gaining on men in terms of education, the cultural and economic privilege of a good education may deserve more attention when it comes to drawing up the accounts of inequality.

Taking researchers on gender and diversity to task, *Inge Bleijenbergh* (Radboud University Nijmegen) wants us to avoid a "reproduction of hierarchically organized dichotomies in organizations by taking them for granted". Rather we should "reveal the implicit norms that prevail and question them". She discerns an especially clear research gap in the intersection between (dis)ability, sexual orientation and class with other identity categories.

Victoria Showunmi (University College London) applied an intersectional framework to challenge universalist assumptions of gender and ethnicity with regard to leadership. This can serve as a model and as an incentive to avoid the reproduction of hierarchies in academic work. It is underwritten by a continuous reflection on our own situatedness as researchers, thus questioning implicit assumptions which might lead to distortions in our academic work, risking achieving the opposite of what was actually intended.

Dagmar Vinz (Büro Vinz Berlin) stressed the importance of transdisciplinarity for gender and diversity studies – a point which was confirmed by the conference setting itself, as researchers with manifold backgrounds fruitfully discussed the given topic. In line with this, a bridge between theory and practice was constructed as well. Two contributions deserve particular mention in the context of tackling diversity in a way which ideally leads to more social justice: *Ute Klammer* discussed in vivid detail how diversity management can be productively implemented in university structures and *Helen Weinbach* presented a new dialogical approach to a social justice and diversity training programme which seems highly relevant to students and staff in an academic context.

6. Summary: Drawing conclusions from the different contributions

To sum up, the conference showed the need to sharpen the analytical instruments of gender and diversity studies in order not to reproduce, in academic work, societal hierarchies and inequalities. This goes hand in hand with the ongoing need for differentiation

and contextualization. It is also necessary to continuously reflect on the position from which one speaks and writes, in other words, to be critically aware of one's situatedness. In doing so, we should keep in mind the double aim of gender and diversity studies: An analysis of prevailing gender and diversity orders and the effort to overcome intersecting inequalities. In view of these aims it is crucial that political alliances and coalitions which are not based on sameness, but cross the lines of differences, be negotiated, as authors like Linda Nicholson (1995) suggested back in the 1990s. The challenge does not stop at the gates of academia. Gender and diversity have been institutionalized as a teaching and research field which can be regarded as partially established. Although, at first glance, this may be regarded as a success, the project of gender and diversity also runs the risk of "successfully failing" (Lepperhoff et al. 2007: 11) in the face of continuing marginalization and the threat of institutional achievements, not only in the German context.

The conference offered an inspiring space for academic and practical exchange. Conference proceedings will be forthcoming, and there will hopefully be a reprise of this event in another European (border) region at which a range of European perspectives will be presented to a broad and diverse audience.

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Authors' details

Eva Maria Hinterhuber, Prof. Dr., Professor of Sociology with focus on Gender Studies, Faculty of Society and Economics, Rhine-Waal University of Applied Sciences.
Contact details: Rhine-Waal University of Applied Sciences, Marie-Curie-Straße 1, 47533 Kleve
E-mail: eva-maria.hinterhuber@hochschule-rhein-waal.de

Veronica Vasterling, Dr., Associate Professor of Philosophy and Gender, Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religion and Institute for Gender Studies, Radboud University.
Contact details: FTR, Erasmusplein 1, 6525 HT Nijmegen, Netherlands
E-mail: v.vasterling@ftr.ru.nl