

The Learning Organization: Implementing Diversity Policies in German Universities

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Abstract—This Research Full Paper deals with the institutionalization of diversity management in German universities, which only started after the Bologna Reform at the end of the 1990s, the Excellence Initiative starting in 2006 and the passing of the General Equal Treatment Act (AGG) in 2006. The aim is to explore the motives of universities behind the implementation of diversity management and identify isomorphic mechanisms in the process of the implementation. Further, the paper conducts a first stocktaking of practical anti-discrimination work at German universities carried out through the organizational practice to identify further connecting factors and problematic situations. To answer the research questions, five expert interviews were conducted with diversity officers from two universities and three engineering universities in five different German states. Among other things, it was found that the interviewees rejected the term diversity management due to its underlying economic logic and preferred the more current term diversity policies. Moreover, from a university perspective, a total of eight different motives for implementing diversity policies were identified: Anti-discrimination, external effectiveness, acquisition of external funding, legislation, favorable investment compared to other measures, intrinsic motivation, potential approach, and exemplary function. Thus, universities initially try to appear diverse externally to meet the rationality expectations of their environment and only supplement this external effect with the appropriate measures and structures over time, while the motivation of diversity officers is intrinsic. This is also related to the fact that voting rounds slowed down processes, but universities would have to position themselves on current discourses, such as in the summer of 2020 after the racially motivated murder of George Floyd. Accordingly, it could be highlighted that the motives of diversity officers and their universities are not automatically congruent.

Keywords— *diversity, workplace diversity, multiculturalism, intersectionality, intercultural competence, discrimination*

I. INTRODUCTION

The functionality of diversity management (DiM) as a potential-increasing practice, but especially as an instrument to create equal opportunities, has been criticized time and again [1]. On the one hand, it is debated whether a diverse composition of organizational members truly leads to economic success and, on the other hand, whether DiM can reduce discrimination or even intends to do so. There is no question that the diversity of the population must be dealt with, but it remains of great relevance in what way this is implemented and what motives the respective organization pursues during this. In addition, the legal mandate of anti-discrimination must not be disregarded. Accordingly, the education sector is not unaffected by the need to address diversity [2]. While economic organizations in Germany had already been implementing DiM and reaping the financial

benefits since the 1990s, universities did not start until the Bologna Reform at the end of the 1990s, the Excellence Initiative starting in 2006, and the passing of the General Equal Treatment Act (AGG) in 2006. These developments resulted in universities in Germany having to cope with an irreconcilable contradiction: The social justice perspective and "new logics and requirements in governance" [3]. In this regard, universities hope for advantages by specifically using the potential of the diversity of their employees, students as well as academics, but, in contrast to companies, at the same time emphasize the goal of social justice. Here, the university as a (re)production site of certain knowledge and collectively recognized (social) practices, is given a highlighted role and responsibility within the debates on discrimination [4,5].

This paper examines this very implementation process from the perspective of neo-institutionalism. In doing so, it engages with the institutionalization of DiM at German universities and provides a first inventory of practical anti-discrimination work. Furthermore, its aim is to explore the motivations of universities behind the implementation of DiM. In this regard, the chosen neo-institutionalist approach provides a framework that uses institutionalized expectations and other drivers of structurally aligning processes to explain the actions of organizations and other actors and is therefore suitable as an approach to a complex topic full of tensions and current debates.

Research Question 1: Is diversity management a rationalized myth?

The first research question examines whether the organizational practice DiM can be defined as a rationalized myth according to Meyer & Rowan (1977). Of particular interest is how universities manage the contradiction between DiM as a social justice case or as a business case and whether decoupling processes emerge.

Research Question 2: What arguments and motives do universities express?

The second research question focuses on arguments and motives for implementing DiM put forward by universities. The focus is on whether it is more of a potential-driven or an anti-discriminatory motivation.

Research Question 3: How do universities implement diversity as anti-discriminatory practice?

The third and final research question addresses DiM as a work activity and explores how directors, deputy directors, advisors, and officers of diversity offices at German universities practically implement and exercise anti-discrimination.

II. NEO-INSTITUTIONALISM – A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

According to neo-institutionalist theory, there exists an interdependence between organizations and their social environment [6]. They influence each other in such a way that institutions emerge and spread. The approach of Meyer and Rowan (1977), and DiMaggio and Powell (1983), the founders of macro-institutionalism [7,8] places the environment of organizations at the center of attention and gives it a prominent role in the emergence of institutions, organizational structures, and practices, while the micro-institutionalist perspective defines organizations themselves as institutions that shape their environment [8–10]. Common to both approaches is that they examine formal institutions, such as the church or family, as well as informal institutions, for example, behaviors and routines [11].

Meyer and Rowan (1977) followed up on Weber's (1964) fundamental idea that institutional legitimacy of organizations and bureaucratic rule is oriented toward efficiency considerations [12]. According to their thesis, legitimacy and efficiency requirements were not congruent; but rather, the formal-rational structures developed in organizations served to achieve legitimacy alone [13]. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) specified Meyer and Rowan's contribution, which had only a vague understanding of social environment and was missing explanations of the mechanisms by which the environment affects organization and leads to formal adaptation [9].

A. Organizational Field

DiMaggio and Powell specify the environment of organizations as the organizational field in which the organization under study operates [14]. More precisely, it is a system of organizations that are culturally interrelated and interact with each other in a context of meaning [8,15]. Accordingly, it consists of the various organizations that are relevant to the organization under study, such as "competing companies, suppliers, customer companies, and policy-regulatory entities" [9]. As a result, universities that act reciprocally form an organizational field: For example, colleges and universities of music and art that have a competitive relationship may form an organizational field, or universities in a region that relate to each other through their local proximity. Also, schools form part of the organizational field, where students in a particular subject area or with particularly good grades graduate and thus produce further potential students.

B. Institutional Isomorphism

What remains striking is that organizational fields exhibit a remarkable homogeneity of organizational forms and practices, while considerable diversity exists in the early stages of their life cycles. However, once a field is established, widespread homogenization appears to occur. These processes of structural homogenization between individual organizations that occur within an organizational field are what DiMaggio and Powell call institutional isomorphism. Organizations undergo it to gain resources, customers, social and economic potential, political power, and institutional legitimacy, and ultimately to ensure their survival [14]. DiMaggio and Powell distinguish between three isomorphic mechanisms responsible for organizational change: Coercive isomorphism, mimetic isomorphism, and normative isomorphism [14]. The former arises from formal and

informal pressures, dependency relationships, and social and cultural expectations from the society in which the organization functions. It manifests in the form of government requirements, such as laws and quotas. If uncertainties arise in an organizational field due to "unclear cause-effect relationships, heterogeneous environmental expectations, and [...] lack of unambiguous problem-solving technologies" [11], isomorphism through imitation occurs. Organizations that are perceived as particularly successful are attributed an exemplary function by their organizational field. The last isomorphic mechanism is normative pressure. It refers to establishing a regulatory framework within which bodies of knowledge and practices are recognized and labeled [16]. The recognized, labeled specialists unite in formalized professions. They are under the direct influence of "professional groups, professional and trade associations, organizations that influence the formal education of actors (e. g., vocational schools, universities, other educational and training institutions), or even professional journals" [16].

C. Legitimacy and Rationality

If organizations meet the rationality expectations of their environment, they are granted legitimacy [16]. Maintaining this legitimacy is one of the highest goals of organizations, as it improves their chances of survival [12]. Legitimacy is a set of culturally constructed meanings that provide "meaningful explanations for the organization's existence, functioning, or scope of responsibility" [17]. For this, organizations must, among other things, implement formal-rational structures that emerge in highly institutionalized contexts: Professions, policies and programs are rationally created and adopted together with products and services [12]. In line with Max Weber, neo-institutionalism consequently also states that legitimacy is justified by rationality [11,12,14]. While for Weber rationality goes hand in hand with efficiency and functionality [18], Meyer and Rowan, on the other hand, claim that formal structures of organizations only appear rational when viewed from the outside and that their functionality lies primarily in achieving legitimacy. Moreover, the prevailing conceptions of rationality can differ depending on the stakeholder group [10,19]. For example, people expect different hygiene concepts from hospitals than from department stores, and in the case of DiM, the expectations regarding universities to act in a socially just manner are higher than those of economic companies. Here it also becomes clear that different rationalities differ in quality since some are measurable, and moral values support others

In fact, when trying to act rationally, organizations come into conflict when, on the one hand, they implement institutionalized rules and norms, which, in turn, could jeopardize their efficiency, and when, on the other hand, they try to fulfill existing environmental expectations. For this reason, organizations decouple the formal structure from the activity structure to be able to cope with the demands and gain legitimacy – regardless of the immediate effectiveness of the adopted practices and procedures. Therefore, organizations implement environmental expectations ceremonially, which can be observed, for example, in the case of showcased diversification or currently especially in the form of greenwashing. Since it is rather a belief in the efficiency of structures than in their actual effectiveness, Meyer and Rowan, therefore, refer to these formal-rational structures as a rationalized myth [12].

D. Rationalized Myth

Lastly, Meyer and Rowan use the term rationalized myth to define highly institutionalized structures and practices that are adopted unquestioningly by organizations regardless of their actual productivity. By doing so, they attempt to maintain legitimacy and resources to ultimately ensure their survival. Accordingly, the formal structures of organizations reflect the myths of their organizational field [12]. Rationalized myths are, therefore, vital for the survival of organizations, as they initially transform inconsistent and overwhelming demands of various stakeholders into manageable myths [11].

III. CRITICAL VIEW OF NEO-INSTITUTIONALISM

Like any other (sociological) theory, Neo-institutionalism is subject to various criticisms. Its early publications could not sufficiently elaborate on the approach in its entirety and were extensively developed on constructive criticism [20]. To take these disputes into account and to include them in answering the research questions, this chapter will address the existing limitations and weaknesses of neo-institutionalist organization theory that are relevant to this topic.

First, it has been criticized for being too rigid and deterministic in its institutional isomorphism, which is one of the greatest achievements of neo-institutionalism. Thus, it left "no room for real entrepreneurial decisions [...] and the specific prerequisites and economic-technical efficiency requirements of individual enterprises [...]" [21], in this case of individual universities. In this respect, individual actors in organizations at the micro level are expressly losing importance in the institutionalization process. At the same time, neo-institutionalism is criticized for paying too little attention to the emergence and non-isomorphic organizational change itself, as well as institutionalization and de-institutionalization, as the focus is on the continuous and stabilizing effects of institutions [16,22,23]. In response, several empirical as well as conceptual works examined de- and institutionalization processes of rational-formal structures and showed that organizational change does not contradict neo-institutionalist assumptions [24,25]. Contrary to the objections, it was also argued that organizational change itself was the focus of attention: Institutional isomorphism within an organizational field would ultimately be triggered by institutions, which in turn caused organizations to change [14].

Jörges-Süß and Süß (2004) criticize macro-institutionalist approaches for not being able to clearly identify "by whom and how rationality myths are institutionalized, and why some organizational arrangements become institutions while others do not" [22]. Regarding DiM, the question arises of how universities recognize which environmental expectations need to be met while others can be ignored without jeopardizing their legitimacy. Moreover, neo-institutionalist approaches generally are no instruments to be used for criticism of capitalist, racist and sexist power dynamics, as they systematically exclude issues of power and domination when these are not themselves made the object of research [23]. According to Ortmann (2000), institutions in particular are presented in an ideal-typical way and are not deficient in reality, which is why they lack "subjective authorship with regard to social conditions" [26]. In this context, the aforementioned aspects could be constitutive for organizational research, especially concerning economic companies, since a large part can and may act 'freely' (or must

use other forms of legitimacy) – as a consequence, various power- and domination-related ideologies as well as mechanisms would be passively internalized and reproduced here [27]. This fact appears essential in the case of diversity and DiM, as they are considered resistant concepts in their fundamental orientation that deconstruct capitalist, racist and sexist power, and domination relations to create equal opportunities. Therefore, this point of criticism, in particular, will be taken into account to avoid losing sight of the critical perspective on power structures in the course of the analysis. To this end, the theoretical assumptions and elaborations on diversity and neo-institutionalism described above will be intertwined: This is to ensure that institutionalization processes can be examined with the inclusion of elements critical of power structures. In this regard, forms of discrimination such as racism, sexism, etc., or forms of domination such as colonialism and patriarchy are themselves considered as institutions in order to enter the organizational field as actors, so that their influence on various isomorphic mechanisms is not disregarded.

IV. DIVERSITY FROM A NEO-INSTITUTIONALIST PERSPECTIVE

In summary, the theoretical conceptualization for this paper is visualized in the following figure for better understanding.

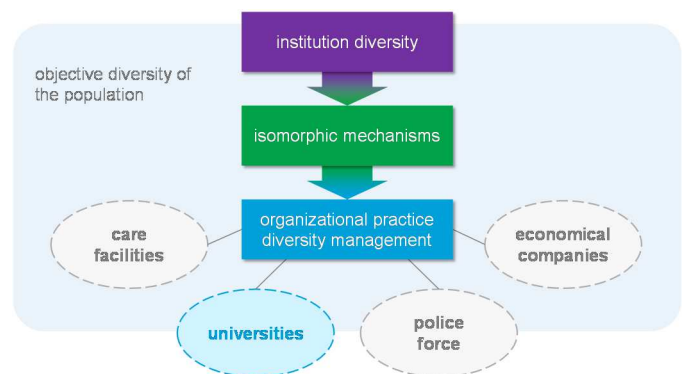


Fig. 1: Summarized theoretical conceptualization (own presentation)

Diversity is defined as the collection of all anti-discrimination strategies against difference markers that are consequences of historical negotiation processes are enforced with discriminatory continuity. Which categories and dimensions are meant by diversity depends on the respective theoretical basis, the object of research, and the region. In English- and German-language discourses, the categories gender, race, or age have mostly been considered so far [28,29]. In addition, diversity is defined as an institution: Therefore, it is a historical result of complex religious, cultural, and legal power relations that have existed for centuries and decades, and have an effect in the present and, by implication, are also institutionalized (e. g. racism and sexism). These institutions, which are constitutive of a society, are taken for granted, are thus invisible, and have been "deposited in the social stock of knowledge" [24]. The institutionalization of diversity asserts through isomorphic mechanisms inter-, intra-, and transorganizationally as well as across organizational fields. The evolution of diversity into a system that seeks to redistribute and transform rules, roles, tasks, identities, and relationships is an institutional process that can currently be studied through many more examples at different levels and systems. The institutionalization of diversity takes place, for example, through laws and practices

such as DiM, which aim at equal opportunities, or revised codes of conduct, which are being established in more and more organizations. Nevertheless, the literature shows that, in most cases, DiM is economically orientated [30].

This transformation from a resistant normatively charged counter-concept to discrimination to a market-shaped, economic management concept remains interesting. From a neo-institutionalist perspective, this step is already interpreted as institutionalization, in which organizations, through external and internal coercion, translate diversity into a management concept that is profitable for them and decouple it from its anti-discriminatory character, so that they can meet environmental expectations, obtain legitimacy, and thus improve their chances of survival, i. e., the mythification of diversity. The organizational form of the university is seen as a special case here, since state requirements, but especially the increasing economization as well as privatization of education, have resulted in increased efficiency expectations [31].

V. STATE OF RESEARCH

After establishing a theoretical foundation, this chapter provides a brief overview of the state of research relevant to the topic. Studies about diversity, whether as a management concept, resistant equality policy measures or as a field that illuminates human diversity, have been steadily increasing since the 1990s in Germany as well [28]. The scientification of DiM began with the reorientation of human resource management, as training courses in human resources became increasingly professionalized and DiM was eventually incorporated into university curricula [32]. In classical business studies, research on DiM is primarily concerned with implementation, realization, and marketing measures, quantitatively and qualitatively collected data, and the advantages and disadvantages for companies [33]. In contrast, the social benefits, especially the underlying motives, are often critically questioned by social science disciplines [23,30]. Universities themselves conduct research on the topic of diversity from two different perspectives: On the one hand, from an external perspective that examines diversity in various scientific disciplines such as biodiversity in biology or multidisciplinary approaches such as migration and demographic change; on the other hand, from an internal perspective that has been researching its own structures, intersectionality, development, and governance for about 14 years [34,35]. Here, the focus has historically been on gender mainstreaming or gender inequalities, but, especially from a perspective of post-colonial and intersectional feminism, other categories of difference have been neglected [36,37].

While neo-institutionalist approaches have been applied to the study of DiM in organizations, to date there has been little research addressing the motives behind the institutionalization of diversity in general and none comparable that has addressed the institutionalization of DiM in German universities. Therefore, only a few contiguous examples are given here.

From a qualitative study, Lederle (2007) was able to establish that the institutionalization of DiM in German companies is not based on efficiency efforts. She conducted interviews with 16 experts who, contrary to the public discourse, confirmed DiMaggio & Powell's (1983) findings: She found institutional isomorphism, coercion, imitation, and normative pressure as drivers for the implementation of the management concept and was also able to determine that

companies kept quiet about isomorphic motives outwardly for fear of losing their authenticity as well as credibility and thus legitimacy. Moreover, DiM was not an institution that existed in the environment and flowed into organizations, but a process that took place in iterative and recursive loops and was generated discursively. [17]

Because of the historical origins and likewise resistant, political nature of equality, Herick's research provides further insight into the ways in which the institutionalization of diversity might occur. In 2011, she examined corporate equality norms, policies, and actions through 59 qualitative interviews, observation protocols, and other electronic data. She concluded that the societal model of gender equality became institutionalized, which was followed by gender equality policies and measures. However, this process was not linear; rather, the relationship was a triangular one in which the guiding principle of equality moved from the environment into everyday work and finally into the formal structure. By decoupling gender equality work and formal structure, the political and social claims of gender equality would be "extracted and shifted to the horizon of the 'functionalist' interpretive pattern" [38]. Hericks refers to this process as economization. She interprets DiM as a process that could be produced due to the loose coupling between gender equality work and the formal structure.

Süß (2009) used the example of DiM to explore why some management concepts became established in companies while others disappeared. His comprehensive literature analysis as well as quantitative and qualitative investigations showed that isomorphic processes, legitimation facades as well as the belief in rationality myths were rooted in the pursuit of legitimacy. Furthermore, his analyses "led to a more comprehensive understanding of institutionalization as an interest-pluralistic, political, and conflictual process" [16]. Consequently, especially during the implementation process of DiM, actors are confronted with a conflict of interests in which resistance must be slowly reduced.

Ehringer (2019) also reached this conclusion in his qualitative study of strategic management in Austrian companies. Accordingly, the survey of seven top managers revealed that they perceived a high social pressure of expectations on companies and therefore sought compromises to maintain conformity with their environment. Ultimately, this is done to maintain legitimacy, which enables not only the existence of companies but also their success and competitive advantages. Although this is a different management concept, it could also be made clear here how institutional isomorphism influences not only the implementation, but also the way in which organizations act. [20]

How can the organizational change of universities be explained by neo-institutionalism? Kraatz and Zajac (1996) investigated this question in a long-term study of 631 private art colleges in the USA. They concluded that, contrary to neo-institutionalist assumptions, the organizational field of art colleges is becoming increasingly heterogeneous in its study design. Moreover, art colleges considered successful were not imitated – instead, they were oriented to their own local and individual circumstances. Further observations were the increasing professionalization in the field of art studies at that time and the general structural change in the educational sector, which were brought about by technical and non-institutionalized practices. To the authors' surprise, these developments did not have negative consequences for art

colleges, but had a positive influence on their legitimacy, although the changes were often perceived as illegitimate from the point of view of traditional art colleges. [39]

Blümel (2016) also examined the organizational change of universities using the example of the university and administrative management. He identified that the perception of universities as self-contained, homogeneous, and agentic actors is a social construction of the organizational field and that in fact there is "no uniform formal structural model of universities" [40]. This self-understanding of universities emerges particularly during public discourses, which are solidified by both society and universities themselves in order to construct legitimacy. In contrast, Blümel defines the identified change in higher education organization as "from an academic-bureaucratic logic of higher education administration to a post-bureaucratic logic of higher education management" [40].

Arnold et al. (2020) hold rationalization and individualization processes responsible for the ways in which organizations interpret and perform DiM. As a result, they argue, the rationalization of diversity leads organizations to reinterpret the resistant equality policy character into a business case and to adapt their formal structure to social values of fairness and equal opportunity. In addition, the authors suspect social individualization behind the success of the management concept, which emphasizes empowerment and the development capacity of the individual, in addition to creativity, innovativeness, and self-realization. [32].

By listing the most relevant preliminary works that show intersections with the topic, it becomes clear that there is a research gap regarding DiM at German universities. Significant findings on the status quo of practical anti-discrimination work at universities, isomorphic processes as well as the motives of universities and their actors behind the implementation of DIM are missing. This paper provides a first approach to the topic.

VI. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESIZING

Based on the theoretical fundament, the hypotheses reduce the epistemological interest of the research questions to questions relevant to practice. Elementary for this are the institutional isomorphism and the rationalized myth according to Meyer and Rowan (1977) and DiMaggio and Powell (1983), whose assumptions can be transferred to DiM in German universities.

Research Question 1: Is diversity management a rationalized myth?
Hypothesis 1: Universities must decouple the formal structure from the activity structure in order to implement diversity management

The first hypothesis was derived from the first research question: The formal structure visible from the outside is at the center of the first hypothesis: Universities ceremonially adapt their external image to their environmental expectations and only change the activity structure accordingly in retrospect. For example, universities implement DiM ritually through ceremonial events and present themselves as inclusive and tolerant on their homepages, without this staging being structurally and practically underpinned. Meyer & Rowan assumed that organizations must first decouple the outwardly visible formal structure from the inner activity structure to cope with unclear demands and to ensure their

own survival [12]. Accordingly, they must adopt myths, regardless of their functionality, to maintain legitimacy and resources.

Research Question 2: What arguments and motives do universities express?
Hypothesis 2: The motivation of universities behind the implementation of diversity management is economic success rather than equal opportunity.

The second hypothesis was derived from the second research question and addresses the formal structure once again: Within the formal structure visible to the outside world, universities emphasize equal opportunity (anti-discrimination measures) but tend to focus on their economic success (diversity as performance) when implementing diversity offices. The external impact helps them gain legitimacy and resources from their environment. The current literature suggests that economically oriented organizations implement DiM primarily to obtain economic benefits rather than to establish social equity. Therefore, due to the increasing economization of higher education structures, the assumption arises that universities are also influenced by this development.

Research Question 3: How do universities implement diversity as anti-discriminatory practice?
Hypothesis 3: There are significant differences in the way diversity management has been/is structurally institutionalized in the respective university and thus in their working practice.

The last two hypotheses were derived from the third research question. The third hypothesis refers to coercive isomorphism: Universities are forced to work against discrimination by legal regulations, but how exactly this is to be carried out, or in what form is the choice of the university. This can be speculated since the university laws differ at the state level or, in some cases, provide very few or no guidelines. Moreover, they do not provide a prespecified definition of diversity and DiM. As a result, the universities are relatively free in how and where they structurally anchor and design their diversity offices. Furthermore, diversity offices have emerged in historical negotiation processes, meaning that the respective history of development from women's offices and gender equality offices to diversity offices has taken place differently at each university [36].

Hypothesis 4: Universities are more likely to take their cue from other successful universities than from local, demographic, constitutive circumstances, and conditions.
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The fourth hypothesis is based on mimetic isomorphism: Uncertainties due to a lack of regulations, ambivalent environmental expectations, a lack of financial resources and previous thematic experience, etc. lead universities to rather orient themselves towards universities that are perceived as successful in the organizational field than to local circumstances (demography of state, city, or university) to gain certainty of action. A comprehensive, self-developed conceptual solution tailored to the university's own needs is not feasible for various reasons, such as a lack of resources.

VII. EMPIRIC INVESTIGATION

Within the framework of the empirical investigation, an interview guideline was created in preparation for conducting the interviews. Guidelines are both important instruments in structuring the research object and orientation aids in the survey process [41]. The structuring of the questions was based on the formed hypotheses and resulted in three thematic categories with approximately seven questions each, in total consisting of 22 questions (see Annex). The development of the questions was conducted carefully to ensure that they are as neutral, unambiguous, and as straightforward as possible to prevent misunderstanding [42].

In order to investigate the implementation of DiM in German universities, it seemed reasonable to interview experts in this field since they have "responsibility [...] for designing, implementing, or controlling a problem solution" and have "privileged access to information about groups of people or decision-making processes" [43]. Therefore, the expert interview was chosen as the data collection method. In total, five expert interviews were conducted with heads, deputy heads, advisors, and commissioners of diversity offices from universities in five different German states, including three engineering universities.

Field access was achieved via the online platform "Netzwerk Diversity an Hochschulen" (network diversity in higher education institutions), on which all diversity officers in Germany are listed. A total of ten people from ten different universities were contacted by e-mail, four of whom had no appointments available in the specified two-month period, and one of whom had only recently taken up the post. The interviewees were informed of the objective of the work and that their data would be treated anonymously. In addition, questions from the interviewees were answered transparently to promote open communication. In general, there was a high willingness to cooperate and positive approval of the research topic, despite the time constraints of the profession. Furthermore, the interviews were semi-structured: The interview guideline, was individually adapted to the respective course of the interview in its question sequence, wording, and newly arising questions. Questions were asked about the characteristics of working, structure, work goals, experiences, and the own perception of the field of work. The length of the interviews averaged 51 minutes, and, in addition to answering the research questions, they aimed to depict the current status quo in the field of DiM at German universities. In advance, the interviewees signed a written consent form explaining the use of the collected data and guaranteeing anonymization of the interviews.

According to Kuckartz (2018), the content-structuring qualitative content analysis was selected as the analysis and evaluation method [44]. The approach is characterized by the identification of selecting content aspects in the data material, which are conceptualized and systematically described in a next step [45]. After the transcription of the interviews, the initiating text work took place with the help of the qualitative content analysis software MAXQDA. For this purpose, all data material was screened and roughly coded along deductive main categories derived from the interview guideline. In total, the entire material was run through three times, resulting in a category system with 13 main categories and 44 subcategories (see Annex).

VIII. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In accordance with the first research question, it could be determined that 'diversity management' is a myth since the term has lost its original meaning of political resistance and has been recast with an economic logic of exploitation. This development process was described and criticized by the interviewees themselves, which is why they rejected the term and prefer 'diversity policies' (DP). Subsequently, DP can and should be spoken of in the context of German universities when the focus is on anti-discrimination and equal opportunities and when these are tested for their anti-discriminatory effectiveness in future research. Likewise, the respondents try to make the success of their measures, i. e., the cultural change within the university, measurable by developing new instruments and methods in transorganizational cooperation.

Regarding the second research question, eight different motives and reasons were identified why German universities implemented DiM: anti-discrimination, external effectiveness, acquisition of third-party funding, legislation, favorable investment, intrinsic motivation, potential approach, and exemplary function. Here, the second hypothesis could not be answered unambiguously, as it became clear during the interviews that the motives of the respondents and their universities were not congruent. This approach is consistent with Blümel's (2016) research findings on the perception of higher education institutions as self-contained, homogeneous as well as agentic actors, which identified this image as a social construction of the organizational field and their environment [40]. While anti-discriminatory intrinsic motives predominated among respondents from diversity offices, senior organizational members of the university, such as the senate or rectorate, would need to be interviewed to clarify this hypothesis. In this regard, it seems reasonable to assume that the university management is primarily pursuing economic motives, such as increasing performance and potential, due to the increasing economization of university structures. However, no clear statement can be made on this, as this circumstance requires its own investigation.

The third and last research question focuses on the working practice of the diversity offices. In this regard, eight thematic fields of action and fifteen activities, shown in the following figure, were identified.



Fig. 2: Working practice of the diversity offices (own presentation)

Overall, there were differences in the time periods and ways in which DP were implemented. In addition, the criticism of neo-institutionalism that individual actors in organizations are neglected at the micro level must be considered at this point. Based on the material, it became apparent that not only region, laws, and other macro as well

as meta processes determine the timing and manner of implementation, but also to a large extent which individuals drive and characterize the implementation at which point in time with which position and which way of reasoning and working. Thus, each person interviewed influences his or her direct work environment much more than neo-institutionalism suggests. Therefore, from a critical-of-rule perspective, the socialization, mindset, and position of individuals within the organization play a large role in the decision-making and, ultimately, the voting processes of higher education institutions. The same is true of labor practices. While predominantly the same areas of action and activities were identified, nevertheless, the manner of data collection, project work, or execution of diversity strategy, for example, was different for each person. Since four of the five interviewees have held their positions since before the start of the diversity implementation, they have developed their own working style and seem to have left a lasting mark on their working environment with their expert knowledge.

In connection with the fourth hypothesis, it could be partially confirmed that universities need to decouple their formal structure from the activity structure at the beginning of DP implementation. In order to meet the rationality expectations of their environment and gain legitimacy, universities initially try to appear diverse to the outside world. However, this outward appearance is only complemented over time by the appropriate policies and structures. One interviewee described that this very way of developing the activity structure of universities could consist of stating intentions as well as formulating goals and fulfilling them afterward. This, the person said, is also related to the fact that voting rounds slow down processes, but universities need to take a position on current discourses, such as in the summer of 2020 following the racially motivated murder of George Floyd by police officer Derek Chauvin in the United States. Consequently, the decoupling process can be interpreted as a functionalist consequence, as long as action actually follows.

Furthermore, the fourth hypothesis, stating that universities tend to be oriented towards other successful universities rather than to local, demographic, or other constitutive circumstances as well as conditions, could be disproved. Thus, the material showed that diversity offices were equally oriented to other universities as well as to local circumstances, and that, above all, however, it was the content rather than the external appearance that was considered to provide orientation. Respondents expressed a desire to be allowed to collect more data about their own universities in order to create more accurate, customized policies. This fact aligns with the research findings of Kraatz and Zajac (1996), who found that, when possible, universities were more likely to orient themselves to their own local and individual circumstances than to other institutions of higher education.

A. Further Findings

In addition to answering the research questions and evaluating the derived hypotheses, the study gained further insights. The interviewees' statements revealed that a large part of their work consists of convincing the university environment, whether students or employees of the university, of the relevance of the topic of diversity and raising awareness. In addition, they strive to promote cultural change at the university, which simultaneously depends on the university management's attitude toward the issue. Structural and cultural change is only possible when the management is

convinced or even forced to do so, whether by the awareness-raising work of the diversity offices, the necessity due to the pressure of expectations from society, laws, or their own prior knowledge as well as the demographic data of individual persons in the university management. For example, one interviewee in a study case reported support from the rectorate because the person comes from the field of gender equality and is therefore aware of the relevance of the topic. As a result, it becomes clear once again that individual actors at the micro level can have more influence on structural developments than neo-institutionalism assumes. For this reason, a subsequent investigation could be conducted at a lower level to make the infrastructural processes of universities more visible and to understand all participants' motivations better. Accordingly, the university itself can be interpreted as an organizational field in which individual chairs, departments, offices, defined as organizations, operate with different motives. Here, the individual organizations try to maintain legitimacy within the university structures in order to survive. As a result, diversity offices must assert and rationalize themselves vis-à-vis other organizations to gain not only approval, but the right to exist. This perspective is again congruent with Blümel's (2016) findings, which identified universities as heterogeneous actors.

B. Indications for the Field of Engineering and Computing Education

Three of the five interviewees work in engineering universities and emphasized the underrepresentation of women, ethnic minoritized groups etc. in the STEM domains both in the staff and the student body [46]. Since the field of engineering and computing neither focuses on the human in social structures nor incorporates an intersectional perspective, it is reasonable to assume that the technical disciplines have to rely on outside disciplines to investigate their own diverse composition and discriminatory aspects [47]. Therefore, social sciences and transdisciplinary research have expanded their subject area to include this field of research. Still, the development of reflective research practices within the STEM domains regarding diversity and discrimination remains a big task [48,49]. This circumstance highlights the relevance of the work of diversity departments in universities, especially engineering universities, in order to achieve a sustainable cultural change.

C. Limitations

Even though the attempt was made to draw an objective picture of the current DiM landscape at German universities, it must be emphasized that in this work, the interpretive knowledge of the interviewees is particularly relevant. Thus, the respondents' individual views, interpretations, or even attitudes are in the foreground. This perspective seems to be particularly valuable in this work, since experts or persons in certain professional positions with their "knowledge and their assessment(s) (co-)structure the conditions of action of other actors in a decisive way" and create orientations for action [50]. Furthermore, interviewer effects were considered, such as interviewer bias and interviewer variance [51]. Since the interviews were conducted via Zoom video conferencing, it must be emphasized that while this format has many advantages, such as the accessibility of geographically distant individuals, greater flexibility, less time required, and subsequently an increased willingness to participate, at the same time there are some possible disadvantages, such as technical problems, a higher non-binding nature, or premature

termination of the interview [52,53]. In the case of the present work, none of the mentioned disadvantages occurred, but it remains to be noted that a video interview has a different quality than a face-to-face interview. In the latter, for example, body language can be better interpreted, and the communication also takes on a more personal touch. Finally, it can be assumed that the gender, race, age, and other demographic aspects of both the researcher and the interviewee play a role during the conversation, especially in the current topic, which deals with anti-discrimination.

It must be emphasized that the validity of the results cannot cover the entire DP practice, as the respondents are only from one group of actors and occupy a specific role in the organizational field. For this purpose, for example, multiple perspectives could be taken, such as university members affected by discrimination, members of the university management or also funding bodies. However, the results presented provide not only new insights but also give potential for further research. For example, future work can examine the motives of university leadership and how these differ from motives of other departments within the organization. In addition, it may be worth investigating whether gender equity and DP are understood and treated as the same thing in the organizational field, what differences there are in the choice of categories as well as foci, and what forms of discrimination may be neglected. Furthermore, it will continue to be interesting to observe whether DP are effective from a domination-critical perspective and reduce discrimination and even make this process measurable. As a final point, it should be analyzed how intraorganizational university structures influence the work of DP.

IX. SUMMARY

This paper has dealt with the institutionalization of diversity management (DiM) in German universities from a neo-institutionalist perspective. In this regard, the aim was to explore the motives of universities behind the implementation of DiM and isomorphic mechanisms, as well as to conduct an initial stocktaking of practical anti-discrimination work at universities in Germany carried out in the context of the organizational practice. In order to answer the research questions, five expert interviews were conducted with heads, deputy heads, advisors, and commissioners of diversity offices from two universities and three engineering universities from five different German states and, in the next step, analyzed and evaluated using content-structuring qualitative content analysis according to Kuckartz (2018).

It was found that the interviewees rejected the concept of DiM and preferred the more current concept of diversity policies (DP). In doing so, they addressed the economic logic of exploitation and the consequent negative connotation of DiM. According to this, the finding coincides with the literature describing the loss of the resistant, political character of the once anti-discriminatory organizational practice.

In terms of motives, a total of eight different motives were identified: Anti-discrimination, external effectiveness, acquisition of external funding, legislation, favorable investment, intrinsic motivation, potential approach, and exemplary function. In addition, it was possible to highlight that the motives of diversity offices and their university are not congruent. For example, it turned out that the interviewees are driven by their intrinsic motivation to achieve anti-discrimination and equal opportunities in all areas of the

university. At the same time, the literature and interviews lead to the assumption that from the perspective of the universities, a potential-driven motivation predominates due to the increasing economization of university structures.

Further findings suggest that isomorphic mechanisms play a role in the institutionalization of DP. Accordingly, normative, and coercive isomorphism were identified as main factors for structural alignment processes: Expectations from society, governmental guidelines, institutionalized values, but also the professionalization of diversity-related practices, methods as well as instruments. It is precisely this professionalization that is closely related to mimetic isomorphism, as diversity offices align themselves to develop a common regulatory framework.

In conclusion, this paper is an important contribution to the field of diversity and university research. Thus, it fills a research gap that existed regarding higher education institutions' motivations for implementing DP, structural alignment processes, and the DP working practices.

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1. CATEGORY SYSTEM

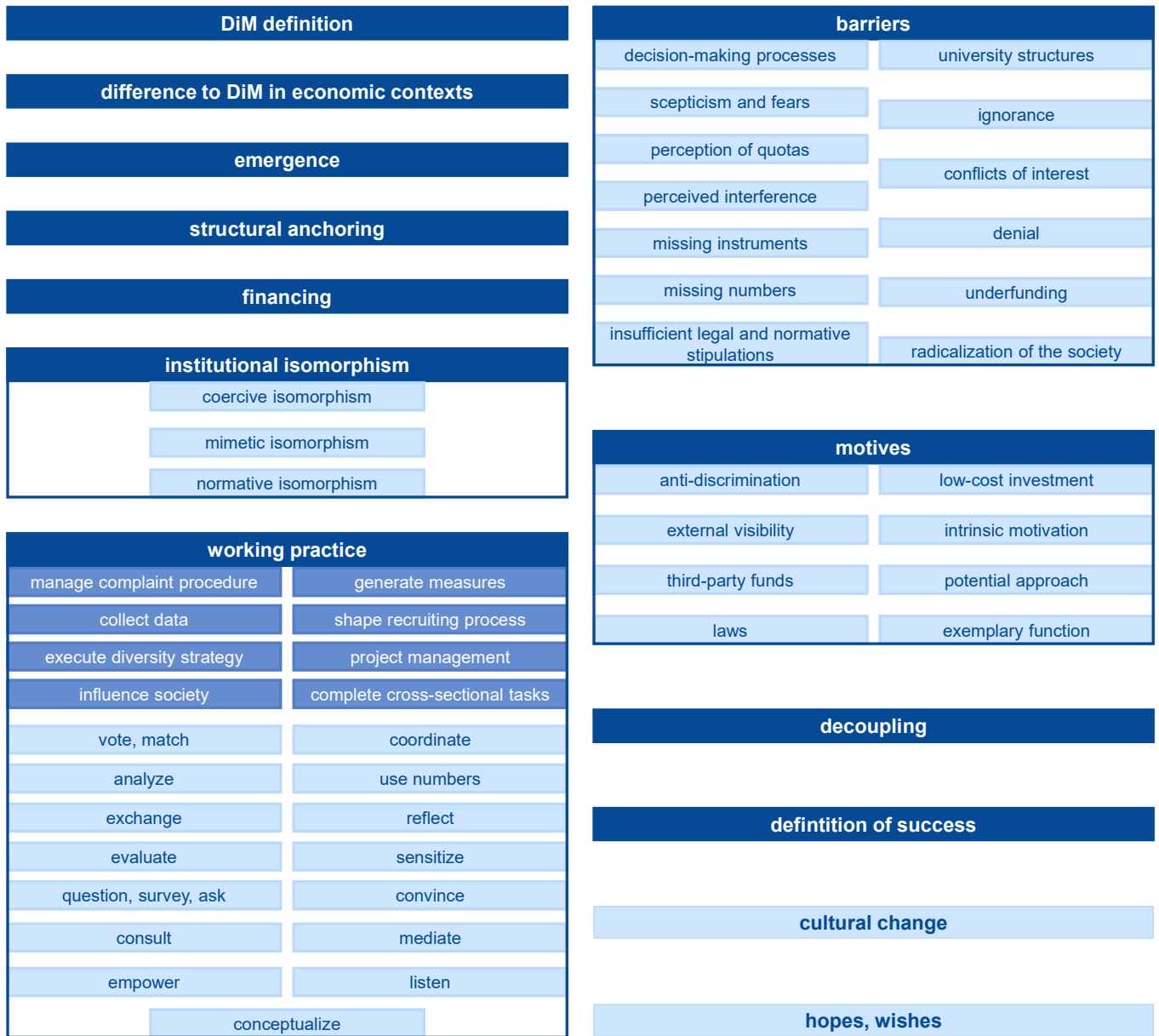


Figure 3: Category system with thirteen main categories and 44 subcategories (own presentation)

The wider boxes represent the main categories, and the narrow boxes represent the subcategories. In addition, the color dark blue stands for a deductive generation and the color medium and light blue for an inductive generation of the categories. In total, the category system includes 13 main categories and 44 subcategories.

2. INTERVIEW GUIDELINE

Topic	Guiding Questions
conception and structure	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How do you define diversity management? 2. How long has diversity management existed at your university? 3. How did it come about...? (History of development, special laws?) 4. How are you funded? 5. How is your DiM structurally enacted? (Own office, staff position, project, ...?) 6. What is your role, position? What is your task? 7. Does your DiM differ from the DiM of the free economy? If yes, in what way?
coercive isomorphism, mimetic isomorphism, and normative isomorphism	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Do you use demographic figures? 9. Towards which demographic figures are you oriented? (Local, university, Germany, ..., where do the numbers come from?) 10. With which actors/organizations do you cooperate? 11. Do you orientate yourself towards other institutes/ organizations/ universities? 12. Are you familiar with the Diversity Network? Is it relevant for your work? 13. Do you have to adhere to specific guidelines? 14. Which guidelines do you follow? 15. Do these guidelines help you?
decoupling processes and myths	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 16. Do you encounter hurdles in your everyday work? (Structural? Where are hurdles located: University, legislation, other institutes/organizations?) 17. What is the goal of your work? 18. How do you define the success of your work? 19. Do you measure this success? If so, how? 20. Is the success appreciated by your environment? 21. Are you under the impression that DiM achieves structural changes? 22. What motives do you think are behind the implementation of DiM in your university

Table 1: The interview guideline