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*Introducing diversity in public
organisations – diminishing
theoretical ambiguity and
controversy by empirical research*

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Abstract

Many theoretical dissertations have an unclear definition of diversity and when interpreting strategies of organisational diversity policies, theories often contradict each other. It is argued that this ambiguity and controversy can be diminished by basing theory on diversity and diversity policy more on qualitative structured descriptive empirical comparisons.

This argument is elaborated in two steps. First, diversity is shown to be a social construction: dynamic and plural in nature, dependent on the social-historical context. Second, the common theoretical dichotomy between diversity policy as equal opportunities or as diversity management is shown to be possibly misleading; empirical studies indicate more practical differentiation in types of diversity policy, manifested in public and private organisations.

As qualitative comparisons are rare, especially in the European context and especially among public organisations, this article calls for more contributions of this kind and provides an analytical framework to assist scholars in the field of diversity studies.

Keywords: diversity, diversity policy, context, definition, concept

Author's biographical note

Anne R. van Ewijk graduated cum-laude as MSc in Public Management at the Radboud University in Nijmegen (the Netherlands) in 2004, with a master thesis on the importance of the private life for public officials. Afterwards, she achieved the title of MSc in Public Safety Governance at the University of Twente in Enschede (the Netherlands) in 2006 with a master thesis on the policy theory behind policies regarding street-violence and serial-offending. Since then, she has been working on her PhD project on policies regarding the introduction and retention of diversity in police forces, at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona, Catalunya (Spain), guided by her tutor Ricard Zapata-Barrero. She hopes to finish this comparative study between the Politie Utrecht (the Netherlands) and the Mossos d'Escuadra (Catalunya, Spain) in 2011. Besides from that, she works part-time as a consultant in Change Management, moderating leadership-development and teambuilding programmes. Also, she has taught criminology at the Catalan Police Academy (Institut de Seguretat Pública de Catalunya).

0. Introduction

After decades of high levels of immigration, many forms of diversity have become more salient than before in European countries (S. VERTOVEC, 2007; R. ZAPATA, 2007), following similar trends in traditional immigration countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. In the meantime, awareness has grown both in the professional and academic world that it is important to adapt organisations to their diverse surroundings. Both private and public organisations have turned to specific policies to facilitate the inclusion of employees of diverse backgrounds. In Europe, this organisational tendency is reinforced by the adoption of diversity as a central political priority by the European Union (J. SQUIRES, 2005; J. SHAW, 2005).

Diversity and diversity policy have also been debated in academic literature. However, there seems to be substantial theoretical ambiguity and controversy in this field. For example, there is no agreement about which dimensions to include in the definition of diversity¹ or how to interpret the intentions and strategies of diversity policy². A conceptual confusion that is mirrored in practice, where even this distinction blurs and ‘diversity’ is often becoming a shorthand for ‘diversity policy’, i.e. the practice of dealing with the demographic mixture of people itself (J. WRENCH, 2007: 4).

The main argument of this article is that this theoretical ambiguity and controversy are very likely to be the result of overlooking the additional value of empirical analyses as the base for diversity theory. The ambiguity or controversy between theories on diversity and diversity policy might be substantially diminished by deploying systematic empirical qualitative comparisons. I will elaborate this argument in two steps.

First, I will argue that it is not possible to formulate a uniform definition of diversity (diversity in general and, more specifically, in organizational policies) as it is a social construction. With ‘social construction’, I mean that the concept of diversity is dynamic and plural in nature, and that its use and meaning is dependent on the social-historical context. An implication of this statement is that the value of theoretical categories in dimensions of diversity (here indicated as: modes of differentiation related

¹ Referring to the condition of heterogeneity within a society or organisation

² The approach regarding that condition; a mode of incorporation (see also: Faist, 2009)

to diversity) is limited, however useful sometimes for various reasons, in the sense that they can only be valid in a specific context at a specific time.

Second, I will argue that the concept of diversity policy is more plural in the practice of organisations than sometimes assumed in theory. The often made distinction between diversity policy as equal opportunities and diversity policy as diversity management is shown to be a possibly misleading theoretical dichotomy. In practice, diversity policy can be much more plural, both in public and in private organisations. Finally, the typologies resulting from some empirical analyses are carefully outlined, as they constitute the last part of an analytical framework that supports the execution of qualitative comparative descriptions, which, at their turn, form a solid basis for grounded theory-building.

Both of these analyses are based on reviews of a selection of international literature³ on diversity and diversity policy of the last few decades⁴. It should be emphasized that there is no attempt to provide a complete overview of existing North-American and European literature on diversity policy. Instead, the article draws on a selection of key sources that have not been combined in this way before, with the aim of providing a clear analytical framework for those who wish to study the development of diversity policy in the context of European public organisations.

After elaborating the main argument, a third section provides a general overview of already existing empirical research in this field. Explanatory hypotheses seem to be the most recurrent ones in the field of diversity studies. On the other hand, qualitative comparative empirical descriptions are shown to be very scarce, especially in the European Union and especially for public organisations.

1. Defining diversity

Diversity refers to differences between people. To make these distinctions, one needs a criterion, a characteristic to indicate difference. These are ‘modes of differentiation’: principles by which people, from context to context, situation to situation, mark themselves and each other as different (S. VERTOVEC, 2009: 9). Logically, an infinite number of characteristics can make individuals or groups different. However, what

³ This method is also sometimes referred to as a meta-analysis, which allows for the identification of central tendencies, variability, and prediction moderators from a set of individual studies addressing similar questions or pieces of a theoretical model (Wise & Tschirhart, 2000: 387-388)

⁴ Whether referred to as affirmative action, positive action, equal opportunities, or diversity management

distinguishes diversity from the mere presence of diverse aggregates (artificial categories of people), is the fact that the characteristic that makes someone different is not just any attribute, such as ‘speaking rapidly’ or ‘wearing a red shirt’, but a meaningful characteristic; an essential characteristic that influences the identity and the way of life of that person, such as ‘being blind’ or ‘being a low-educated employee of the work floor’ (I.M. YOUNG, 1990: 44). Unlike some authors on diversity, who tend to focus on immigrants (S. VERTOVEC, 2007; R. ZAPATA, 2009a/b), this article focuses on all forms of diversity in society, although specifically focused on diversity in organizational policies.

This section opens with the statement that diversity is a social construction: dynamic and plural in nature, dependent on the context. As said before, with ‘social construction’, I mean that the concept of diversity is dynamic and plural in nature, and that its use and meaning is dependent on the social-historical context. Afterwards, an analytical framework to study the definition of diversity (for example in organizational policies) is provided: various modes of differentiation related to diversity are distilled from political, social and management literature, and the theoretical distinction between individual or collective diversity is outlined. Consequently, empirical studies show how definitions of diversity (referring to both modes of differentiation and the individual-collective dimension) actually tend to be similar in similar social-historical contexts, and different in different contexts. Finally, another implication of this statement is outlined: theoretical categories in modes of differentiation related to diversity have limited value, however useful sometimes for various reasons, in the sense that they can only be valid in a specific context at a specific time.

1.1 Contextual variance in the definition of diversity

Diversity must be examined in a cultural-historical context (H. TRIANDIS, 1995). Modes of differentiation between individuals or groups, such as colour, visible marks of gender or other characteristics, are historical bookmarks: they only constitute difference at a certain moment in a certain place, and these differences are influenced by certain conditions under which they persist or perish (C. DYKE & C. DYKE, 2002: 66-67). In other words, diversity does not have a universal expression, but it is visualized differently depending on the context (R. ZAPATA, 2009a: 98). For example, certain types of individual differences may once have been influential in determining workplace relationships, but these differences may no longer be salient or provoke the same level of emotional or behavioural response (L.R. WISE & M. TSCHIRHART, 2000: 392).

This contextual variance in definitions of diversity can take two forms: 1. semantic variance regarding the same mode of differentiation, or 2. variance in the selective use or prioritization of certain modes of differentiation; in specific historical situations and in relation to specific people there are some modes of differentiation that are considered more important than others (N. YUVAL-DAVIS, 2006: 203).

Semantic variance refers to differences in the local interpretation of a mode of differentiation. For example, the mode of differentiation of 'age': what is considered as 'old' in a country with a lower life expectancy might be 'middle-aged' in a developed country. Even different ages groups have different ways of thinking about age: most teenagers define everyone over 40 as old, while most people in their sixties tend to reserve that category for people over eighty (W. FODDY, 1993: 40). Or the mode of differentiation of 'skin colour': what is considered as 'coloured' in a country with a majority population that is white, might be considered 'practically white' in a country with a majority population that has a very dark skin colour. Also, this mode of differentiation may be employed in several ways to indicate differences: in one country diversity might be related to 'white' versus 'non-white', while in another country the distinction is made between 'white', 'black', 'red' and 'yellow'.

Although one must always keep this semantic variance into account, it is the second kind of variance (the selective use and prioritization of certain modes of differences) that forms the basis for an analytical framework to study the definition of diversity. This framework is outlined below: different modes of differentiation are

distilled from political, social and management theory on diversity, and the theoretical distinction between collective and individual diversity is outlined.

1.2 Analytical framework: modes of differentiation

Diversity has bulked large in political theory, as one would expect given the concerns that underlie both past and present political thinking (P. JONES, 1998: 28), such as redistribution or equal opportunities (N. FRASER & A. HONNETH, 2003) or providing adequately for social diversity (B. PAREKH, 2000).

Many political theorists focus on culture, or ethnicity (see W. KYMLICKA, 1995, for ‘multinational diversity’ and ‘poly-ethnic diversity’, or B. PAREKH, 2000, for ‘communal diversity’), although they subscribe the importance of other modes of differentiation. According to Jones, this is because culture (or ethnicity) is not – like differences in religious faith or in aesthetic taste – just one more form of diversity that we can set alongside others. Cultures pretend to be all-embracing so that cultural diversity encompasses every kind of diversity that people can exhibit in their lives (P. JONES, 1998: 28-29). Also, according to Phillips, culture has special importance as a mode of differentiation because she sees, in the context of contemporary Europe, the differences associated with ‘culture’ as more specifically bound up with past and present patterns of migration, and thereby with majority/minority relations of power (A. PHILLIPS, 2008: 557).

Others, however, discard ‘culture’ as a useful concept. According to Thompson, it carries connotations of shared beliefs, norms, habits, and so forth, which may or may not be relevant in particular cases. For instance, a group may be formed by a process of racialization, where this process makes no reference to ideas of shared practices and values. Also, he finds culture not specific enough to describe the dynamics by means of which relations of inequality, exploitation and oppression are reproduced and recommends instead a range of important markers, including race and religion (S. THOMPSON, 2008: 544). Also Vertovec questions the importance of ‘ethnicity’, suggesting that it only plays a limited role in political reality. He points to a series of additional variables that are hidden beneath this general indicator of difference and that are sometimes more important to understand political reality, such as immigrant statuses, divergent labour market experiences, gender and age profiles, special

distribution, mixed local area responses, and so forth – a so-called ‘super-diversity’ (S. VERTOVEC, 2007: 1025).

Asides from culture and ethnicity, several other modes of differentiation are highlighted in political and social theory. Many authors point out that there is more than one group suffering from structural disadvantages, of which only some groups can be identified by cultural differences (see also F. ANTHIAS, 2002; N. FRASER & A. HONNETH, 2003; S. PHARR, 2000; I.M. YOUNG, 1990). For example, Vertovec and Wessendorf mention, among others, inequality surrounding racism (race), sexism (gender) and class (2006: 187). Current European Union thinking on discrimination focuses on sex (gender), racial and ethnic origin, disability, age, religion, and sexual orientation (A. PHILLIPS, 2008: 556). Griggs (1995) defines diversity as age, ethnicity, gender, physical abilities / qualities, race, sexual / affectional orientation, educational background, income, marital status, parental status, and religious beliefs. This coincides with the definition of Litvin (1997), who considers age, ethnicity, gender, physical attributes/abilities, race, sexual orientation, educational background, geographical location, income, marital status, military experience, parental status, religious beliefs and work experience. Finally, several more modes of differentiation can be distilled from diversity management literature, such as: life style, political opinion, union affiliation, thinking types, family status, health status, experience, and profession (S. POINT & V. SINGH, 2003), or organizational or team tenure, personality types, functional background, with a reference to the possible importance of other demographic, socioeconomic, and psychographic characteristics (L.R. WISE & M. TSCHIRHART, 2000: 387).

1.3 Analytical framework: collective or individual diversity

Another common debate in political and social theory, which can also be reflected in organizational diversity policies, is whether to focus on individual difference or group difference. As Jones suggests, this debate in liberal political theory can be summarized as the choice between attributing moral standing to individuals only (who can have collective interests) and ascribing moral standing to groups *qua* groups (1998: 48). Locating moral standing makes a difference in two very practical ways: it determines who we should listen to (all individuals in the ‘group’ or the authentic, authoritative

voice of a group) and it determines whether it is important for individuals to define themselves as a group or not (P. JONES, 1998: 48-49).

Several arguments can be distilled from political and social theory in favour of a focus on group diversity. First, there is ontological argument that groups simply exist: group differentiation is both an inevitable and a desirable aspect of modern social processes (I.M. YOUNG, 1990: 47). Hence, they have to be taken into account. Second, there is the normative argument that groups are more than the sum of individuals, thus groups should have moral standing as well (T. MODOOD, 2008: 549). Third, there is the historical argument that it is inevitable to define diversity as a collective concept, because that is how rights were attributed in the past and newcomers with a diverse profile will always define themselves as a group as well to achieve similar rights. Zapata, for example, describes the interesting case of Muslims as a new group in Spain striving for the same rights Catholics have (R. ZAPATA, 2009b). Also Vertovec and Wessendorf provide us with an illustrative example: “In fact, in many countries, the frameworks within which immigrant languages are discussed today have been shaped by earlier policy initiatives and ideologies concerning regional minority languages.” (S. VERTOVEC & S. WESSENDORF, 2006: 181) Finally, there is the practical argument that focusing on a single form of oppression, that is based on a shared group characteristic (such as gender and sexism, skin color and racism, or Jews and anti-Semitism) can have positive effects, for example: “...creating organizations based on identity allows disadvantaged individuals to have visibility and collective power, to advance concerns that otherwise would never be recognized because of their marginalization within the dominant society.” (S. PHARR, 2000: 255)

However, there are also arguments against defining diversity as a collective concept. First, it is said to lead to essentialism and a falsely homogenizing reification. For example, as Phillips says: “Culture is now widely employed in a discourse that denies human agency, defining individuals through their culture, and treating culture as the explanation for virtually everything they say or do...” (J. SQUIRES, 2008: 535) Moreover, the practical disadvantage is that it blocks many opportunities to create bridges of mutual understanding and instead emphasizes the differences between groups (S. VERTOVEC & S. WESSENDORF, 2006: 187). Second, a focus on groups could also be considered as unpractical and even ineffective, as there are many forms of difference in the real world, almost all of which cut across group boundaries. Most individuals have identities that are constituted by several forms of diversity. This is

what Crenshaw called ‘intersectionality’ (1989), a concept that has inspired many feminist theorists since then (A. PHOENIX & P. PATTYNAMA, 2006: 187-188).

One way to follow up on the concept of intersectionality, is to argue that what really matters, then, is not the source of difference, but the structural inequality that some experience as a result of those differences. Structurally disadvantaged groups are those who are in an unequal position because of the disadvantages that our benign liberal society often without bad intent has produced and reproduces for people who share a specific characteristic that makes them different than mainstream society or those in power. This situation is called ‘oppression’ (I.M. YOUNG, 1990; F. ANTHIAS, 2002). According to this line of thought, distinguishing between these groups by looking at modes of differentiation is irrelevant, because in reality many share the same types of oppression, as both Young (I.M. YOUNG, 1990: 63-64) and Nancy Fraser show (N. FRASER & A. HONNETH, 2003: 25). Hence, it is more effective to focus on how to solve the form of oppression, not on how to advance the interests of specific groups.

Others do not agree with this line of reasoning. For example, Verloo (2006) argues that the assumed similarity of inequalities is false; categories such as gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation and class, have different origins, are related to different mechanisms that (re)produce the inequality, claim different political goals and vary in political institutionalization (M. VERLOO, 2006: 217, 220). For example, in Scandinavia, gender segregation is usually described as mostly ‘natural’, whereas with regard to ethnic ‘others’, the employers’ explanation for leaving them out / not hiring them is most often a matter of the others not having the right qualifications and/or not being able to speak the language, etc. (Y.D. BILLING & E. SUNDIN, 2005: 104). In short, social divisions are not reducible to each other (N. YUVAL-DAVIS, 2006: 200). Hence, policy strategies should not only be grounded in the similarity, but also in the distinctiveness of inequalities.

Finally, some authors from diversity management literature seem to reject the group definition of diversity all together, advocating a focus on individual differences and the creation of an inclusive environment for all. This choice, however, has been criticised by (mostly political and social) researchers as a smokescreen or rhetoric which allows subtle discrimination to continue. According to these authors, it presents a universalistic approach which is more acceptable to males but which may not actually deliver change, as the social structures which initiated long-standing inequities are left

intact. Those who are different no longer have a legitimation to challenge their treatment as all are treated as individuals (A. LORBIECKI & G. JACK, 2000). This is the main reason why Mor Barak (2005: 132) defines workforce diversity as the division of the workforce into categories of distinction that have a perceived commonality within a given cultural or national context and that have an impact on potentially harmful or beneficial employment outcomes such as job opportunities, treatment in the workplace and promotion prospects, irrespective of job-related skills and qualifications. Such a definition emphasises the consequences of the distinction categories, which for Mor Barak overcomes the problem of over-broad definitions of diversity that include 'benign and inconsequential' characteristics in their diversity categories.

Faced with this dilemma, many political theorists explicitly reject choosing either one or the other. Phillips, for example, endorses representative measures that help to give voice to the subjects of inequality, gathered in groups, but at the same time rejects groups as authoritative and requiring representation of their distinctive voice (J. SQUIRES, 2008: 537-538). She clarifies: "The difficulty, as I see, is to steer a course between the kind of representation that installs group representatives as the definitive voice of 'their' group, thereby masking all kinds of internal disagreements, and an overly individualized alternative in which special initiatives for women or ethno-cultural minorities become little more than a way of opening up opportunities for a political career." (A. PHILLIPS, 2008: 558)

1.4 Empirical variance: modes of differentiation, individual or collective diversity

Which particular modes of differentiation are perceived as important for diversity in the practice of organizational diversity policies can greatly differ. This variance can also be seen in definitions of diversity as either a collective or as an individual concept.

First, empirical studies show some interesting similarities and differences in the modes of differentiation included in organizational diversity policies. In general, 'gender' seems to be the most cited mode of differentiation (S. POINT & V. SINGH, 2003; J. WRENCH, 2007). 'Race', 'ethnicity' and/or 'culture' are generally near the top in priority both for US and EU practitioners and politicians, often seen as the trigger for the introduction of the concept of diversity (J. WRENCH, 2007: 5; Y.D. BILLING & E. SUNDIN, 2005: 102). Even so, French and German companies used the broader notion of 'culture' whilst UK companies referred to 'race and ethnicity' instead (J. WRENCH,

2007: 63 / S. POINT & V. SINGH, 2003: 756). This shows how definitions of diversity, in spite of some similarities, do seem to vary from one country to another (L.R. WISE & M. TSCHIRHART, 2000). This is confirmed by the study of Point and Singh who found various differences in definitions of diversity on European corporate websites (2003: 756). For example, gender was shown to be a particular concern for companies in the UK, Sweden and Finland, while Dutch, German, British and Swedish corporate websites more often than others raised the issue of age. Also, many UK companies had statements regarding disability, but few companies in other countries dealt with this criterion within their online statements. Religion was a dimension cited more frequently in countries such as Finland, the Netherlands and Germany, but absent in French and Norwegian websites. Finally, British companies also lead in mentioning status dimensions on their websites, such as marital status, social class and caste. However, French companies never dealt with these dimensions in their diversity on-line statements.

Second, empirical studies showed diversity tends to be defined as collective in some contexts, and as individual in other contexts. In the US, for example, some practitioners are found to use narrow definitions which reflect American equal employment opportunity law; they define diversity collectively in terms of race, gender, ethnicity, age, national origin, religion, and disability. Others simply define diversity individually as ‘all the ways in which we differ’ (R.M. WENTLING & M. PALMARIVAS, 1997). Also, within the same contexts there could be attention for both collective and individual modes of differentiation. For example, Point and Singh found collective modes of differentiation in Britain, Germany and France (see paragraph above), but they also found statements about individual backgrounds were important in companies in those countries. In Germany and France many of the websites mentioned experience or education, while UK companies seemed to focus more on personal background (S. POINT & V. SINGH, 2003). All of which modes of differentiation that may vary greatly between individuals and that do not transform these individuals in a collective when they are similar.

1.5 Theoretical categories in modes of differentiation are not universally applicable

These empirical results reinforce the idea that diversity is a social construction and its use or meaning is highly dependent on the social-historical context. This also implies

dividing modes of differentiation into categories can certainly be a theoretically clarifying exercise, or important for normative purposes in a specific situation, for example, but one should be aware they are practically impossible to universalize; the categories are likely to be only valid in certain times and places. Still, there are many authors who formulate and use categories without explicitly warning their public about this limitation. Most distinguish between ‘primary’ (hard, biological fixed) as opposed to ‘secondary’ (soft, experiential, fluid) modes of difference (B. BARRY, 2000; C. DYKE & C. DYKE, 2002; L.B. GRIGGS, 1995; D.R. LITVIN, 1997), while a different example is Zapata, who distinguishes between ‘old’ and ‘new’ modes of differentiation (2009a).

Griggs (1995), for example, classifies diversity into primary and secondary modes of differentiation. Primary refers to those human differences that are inborn and/or exert an important impact on early socialisation and have an ongoing impact throughout life. According to Griggs, these cannot be changed; they shape our basic self-image and have great influence on how we view the world. Secondary refers to those human differences that can be changed, and these might include educational background, income, marital status, parental status, religious beliefs, and so on. Others have added ‘physical appearance’ to the first group and ‘language’ and ‘lifestyle’ to the second; some call the first group ‘biological’ dimensions and the second group ‘experiential’ (J. WRENCH, 2007: 8). This coincides with the observation of Litvin (1997), who found that diversity was frequently presented as composed of ‘six fixed primary dimensions of difference’ which are held to be inborn or immutable, and ‘eight fluid secondary dimensions of difference’ which help to distinguish the self from the other but are seen as less permanent and hence adaptable. Barry refers to this distinction as the difference between not having the opportunity and choosing not to use the opportunity, in other words ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ modes of differentiation (B. BARRY, 2000: 28-29). Finally, Dyke and Dyke add that one should pay attention to the depth of entrenchment of any of the dimensions of potential difference, because some things about us are more abiding than others; for example, it is easier to change a custom than to your gender (C. DYKE & C. DYKE, 2002: 66).

However, as stated before, this distinction is not necessarily relevant for all cases, because diversity is a social construction. In certain contexts ‘secondary’ modes of differentiation might indicate greater differences between individuals or groups than ‘primary’ modes of differentiation. For example, in the case of immigrants, modes of

differentiation such as ‘immigrant status’ or ‘spatial distribution’ which are likely to be labelled as ‘secondary’, might be more influential for the treatment they receive in political reality than ‘primary’ modes of differentiation such as skin colour (S. VERTOVEC, 2007). Moreover, the distinction between what is ‘primary’ and what is ‘secondary’ is not an easy one to make. For example, sexual orientation can be conceptualized in different ways: as a category, emphasizing that being gay or not is something a person is born with, or as a transgressive phenomenon, emphasizing that we are all more or less hetero and homo, downplaying the rigid distinction between heterosexuality and homosexuality (A. STEIN, 2002). Also, one can seriously ask him- or herself whether class or socio-economic difference is a ‘primary’ mode of differentiation, something you are born into and will always influence you, or a ‘secondary’ mode of differentiation, something more easily changeable (an example of the latter is R. ZAPATA, 2009a). Finally, modes of differentiation that have been considered as ‘soft’ are now argued to be considerably ‘hard’, for example culture. Developments in the sociology of knowledge, psychoanalysis and cultural psychology, have made us appreciate more than before that culture deeply matters to people and that their self-esteem depends on others’ recognition and respect. All this has led to a greater acceptance of cultural differences and a redefinition of the relation between politics and culture, making culture a relevant category (B. PAREKH, 2000: 8).

A different distinction one might make is between ‘old’ and ‘new’ modes of differentiation (R. ZAPATA, 2009a/b). However, whether a mode of differentiation is old or new depends, again, on the context. ‘Religion’ can be considered as a new mode of differentiation, when immigrants with other religions arrive in a country that has been homogenous in religious beliefs since its foundation, such as Spain. But in the Netherlands, for example, ‘religion’ is not a new mode of differentiation; it is merely a mode of differentiation that returns after some time of absence since the ‘pillarization’. Zapata seems to subscribe this himself, as he observes how the arrival of immigrants, with their different religions, languages, and cultures is reactivating debates that had remained unsolved since the period of democratic transition, such as those concerning the management of religion, linguistic pluralism and cultural pluralism (R. ZAPATA, 2009b: 2). However, as the other authors, he does not seem to make this consideration explicit. Therefore, also this distinction should be used with care, as any definition of ‘old’ and ‘new’ will only be valid for a specific place, after a thorough examination of local history.

In short, while it is possible to define diversity by choosing, categorizing and/or prioritizing specific modes of differentiation and this is sometimes very useful, it is important to remember (to avoid misunderstandings) that this definition is very unlikely to have universal value. It will be valid and valuable in a specific context, in a specific place, in a specific time. With this in mind, comparing definitions of diversity between different contexts is a valuable exercise, as these descriptions provide the basic material for further studies on the causes of possible similarities and differences.

2. Defining diversity policy

In theory, two approaches are often associated with diversity policy in organisations⁵: the equal opportunities approach and the managing diversity approach (G. KIRTON & M. GREEN, 2000; S. LIFF, 1997; J. SQUIRES, 2005; L.R. WISE & M. TSCHIRHART, 2000; J. WRENCH, 2007). The first is often related to social groups and employs predominantly moral arguments of justice and equality. The latter is often related to differences between individuals and employs predominantly practical arguments of effectiveness and efficiency. The first, diversity as a social issue, could be associated more with public than with private organisations. The second, diversity as a business issue, could be associated more with private than with public organisations. In theory, these approaches are presented as a dichotomy; organisations will support either one or the other. These approaches and the theoretical controversy (moral and practical arguments for and against diversity management as alternative for equal opportunities) around them will be outlined in the first section.

In the second section, however, some empirical analyses are displayed (S. LIFF, 1997; J. WRENCH, 2007) that lead to the conclusion that this theoretical dichotomy is potentially misleading. In practice, diversity policy can be more plural, both in public and in private organisations. In the third section, the typologies resulting from these empirical analyses are carefully outlined, as they add upon the analytical framework to study diversity, enabling systematic descriptive comparisons that form the basis for grounded theory-building.

⁵ policy measures to adapt the organization to diversity in society by introducing (more) diversity in the organisation itself

2.1 Equal opportunities or diversity management: a theoretical dichotomy

In general, the equal opportunities approach stresses the importance of treating people equally irrespective of differences, such as their sex or ethnic origin. However, in some cases equal treatment may be considered unlawful, if it has a disproportionate effect on members of one group. Even so, such an unequal effect can be defended if the criteria can be shown to be justifiable on grounds other than certain modes of differentiation. On the other hand, measures to promote equality, besides from 'just' eliminating discrimination, are based on the view that in many instances it is important to recognize social group differences which may lead to some applicants or job holders being disadvantaged. For example, in the UK, company policies relating to career breaks, child care, flexible working, and single sex training (positive action) have been encouraged, but are not a legal requirement. These are best seen as measures which allow organizations to reduce the likelihood that such differences will be seen as relevant to their decision making (S. LIFF, 1997: 12-13).

In contrast to equal opportunity approaches, which aim for workplaces where, for example, an individual's sex and race is of no greater significance than the colour of their eyes in determining the treatment they receive, the core idea behind managing diversity seems to be to encourage organizations to recognize differences (S. LIFF, 1997: 13), and to make practical allowances for such differences in organisational policies (J. WRENCH, 2007: 3). Diversity management was first seriously discussed in a European context at the beginning of the 1990s. The idea is that encouraging a diverse environment where differences are valued enables people to work to their full potential, resulting in a richer, more creative and more productive work environment. In other words, its rationale is primarily one of improving organisational competitiveness and efficiency, driven by business purpose and market advantage (J WRENCH, 2007; L.R. WISE & M. TSCHIRHART, 2000).

There are many practical advantages associated with diversity in a diversity management approach, such as: optimal use of skills and talent, avoiding internal problems (for example, conflicts and misunderstandings, high absenteeism, great staff turnover, and damage to staff development), making products or services more attractive to diverse customers and clients, increasing innovation and problem-solving, accessing international markets with more success, avoiding the costs of racial discrimination (damage to the organisation's image, and/or financial penalties) and

improving the image of the company in the eyes of potential investors who choose to invest in companies demonstrating their practices of corporate social responsibility (J. WRENCH, 2007: 10-11).

However, some researchers have questioned the validity of these practical advantages. They argue that many assumptions about the advantages of managing diversity have not been tested properly in empirical research, or have only been tested in very different contexts without any attempt to double-check the results with those of other studies (L.R. WISE & M. TSCHIRHART, 2000). Also, some warn that employers might not experience diversity as producing competitive advantage (S. FREDMAN, 2002: 17): the diversification of the workforce may create institutional tensions rather than increased productivity, in which case the pragmatic business case for diversity loses its purchase (J. SQUIRES, 2005: 15).

Then, there are also moral arguments in favour of a diversity management approach. First of all, it is seen as a positive approach, rather than the negative one of equal opportunities of simply avoiding transgressions of anti-discrimination laws. Second, it is said to favour social equality by avoiding some of the ‘backlash’ problems associated with previous equality strategies such as affirmative action (positive discrimination); diversity management is not seen as a policy solely directed towards the interests of excluded or under-represented minorities. Rather, it is seen as an inclusive policy, and one which therefore encompasses the interests of all employees, including white males (J. WRENCH, 2007: 3). Also in practice diversity management is said to facilitate the increased adoption of equality strategies by the corporate sector and extends the criteria of merit in employment practices to the advantage of previously marginalized groups. Moreover, it opens up the possibility of valuing diversity without assuming group homogeneity (J. SQUIRES, 2005: 14), leading towards a perspective which views social groups as heterogenic, overlapping and non-fixed⁶. From this perspective a diversity paradigm has the important ability to highlight intragroup as well as intergroup difference, enabling issues of social identity to be drawn out which have been neglected within traditional equal opportunity approaches (G. KIRTON & M. GREENE, 2000: 4).

However, also these arguments have been contradicted. First, to the extent that diversity management is separated from wider historical inequalities (for example,

⁶ See also ‘intersectionality’ in section 1.2

based on race, gender, ethnicity and class) it obscures the sources of the differences it seeks to exploit, focusing on the characteristics of employees or applicants rather than the structures that create and perpetuate these characteristics (J. SQUIRES, 2005: 15). The risk is, then, that attention is diverted from disadvantaged groups or the fact that the groups captured by a broader definition do not face equal prejudice or conditions in the workplace is glossed over. Alternatively, diversity management may be employed selectively if representatives of particular groups are perceived to offer greater business advantages than others. This way, 'diversity' would undermine rather than increase equality between groups. Also, it may strengthen stereotypes by assuming that a person's age, religion, gender, sexuality, race or disability can be unproblematically associated with certain characteristics, and customers of the same gender, age, orientation or religion share those characteristics or identity with employees (S. FREDMAN, 2002). To the extent that it relies on such assumptions, diversity management paradoxically affirms sameness (J. SQUIRES, 2005). Finally, critics object to a (perceived) emphasis on 'soft' policy measures in a diversity management approach, such as celebrating cultural diversity, rather than on the 'harder' equal opportunities measures (J. WRENCH, 2007: 115).

2.2 Equal opportunities and diversity management: a practical mix

From the summary on equal opportunities and managing diversity above, it remains unclear whether diversity management is a good alternative for equal opportunities or whether the defenders or the critics of diversity management are in the right. The reason these questions are impossible to answer, is that they are based on two possibly misleading affirmations: that there is a dichotomy between equal opportunities and diversity management and that the diversity management approach is homogeneous.

First of all, presenting equal opportunities and managing diversity approaches as polar opposites, seems an unnecessary confrontational approach and their differences have been somewhat overstated (J. WRENCH, 2007: 9). After all, both approaches have to find solutions to the same problems (ensuring fair assessments and changing structures and cultures that favour some and disadvantage others). So far, managing diversity has some new answers to these questions, but it also has areas where its rhetorical flourishes have not been translated into any systematic approach (S. LIFF, 1997: 24). In other words, in practice, diversity policy might just as well incorporate

organisational practices both from equal opportunities *and* from managing diversity; it is still in development. Also, organisational practices related to managing diversity can add upon those related to equal opportunities, as the latter is a highly procedural approach, focusing on changing behaviour, but leaving attitudes and beliefs relatively untouched (S. LIFF, 1999: 65-66). In contrast, from the view of a managing diversity approach the organisation has to recognise that it has to change to adapt to employee differences. This highlights the need to rethink structures, cultures and policies so that they are more compatible with the characteristics and needs of different employees and contrasts with the maintenance of a form of organisation which benefits the dominant group but has some add-on procedures designed to help out-groups to fit in. As such, it means that diversity policy cannot rely simply on procedural change - important as that might be in some circumstances - but must also engage in culture change (S. LIFF, 1999: 68).

Second, managing diversity (and consequently diversity policy) is not a homogeneous approach. Squires, for example, distinguishes between two narratives. The first is diversity policy as a politics of difference; it reflects the claims of marginalized cultural groups, social movements, and difference theorists, and signifies the recognition of difference, the acknowledgement of situated knowledge, and the acceptance of intersectionality (J. SQUIRES, 2005: 8). The second is diversity policy as a managerial strategy; it reflects a managerial strategy and modality of governance, devised as a means to pursue economic productivity with greater efficiency, and focusing on a better return on their investment in human capital, a way to capitalize on new markets, increase creativity, and secure economic gain (J. SQUIRES, 2005: 11). However, while Squires concludes the hegemonic discourse of neo-liberalism has rendered the first perspective subordinate (2005: 16), Liff distinguishes four approaches in diversity policy and sees two of them as dominant: 'dissolving differences' and 'valuing differences'. In the 'dissolving differences' approach social group equality is not accorded any specific significance as an object of organisational policies, and diversity includes a whole range of modes of differentiation, not just ethnicity and gender. The 'valuing differences' approach, on the other hand, acknowledges mostly socially-based modes of differentiation, and allows policies which recognise, for example, gender or ethnicity and their 'significance for the perpetuation of inequality' (S. LIFF, 1997: 14).

So, when critics say that ‘the vocabulary of managing diversity reduces all difference to equivalence’ (D. JONES, J. PRINGLE & D. SHEPHERD, 2000: 369), they only refer to one form of diversity policy: the dissolving difference approach, ignoring the existence of other approaches within diversity management. Another problem with some criticisms of diversity management is their over-reliance on critical analysis of the terminology and discourse: it may attribute too much significance to words and metaphors. There is only so much significance that can be attached to a discourse analysis alone, and this is best tempered with data from observations, investigations and case studies. Case studies and interviews with practitioners reveal a far greater variety and flexibility in reality than that suggested by the words which are seen to be significant by critical discourse theorists. Whether diversity policy operates as a subtle way of extending one-sided managerial control, or as part of a drive to increase equality and human dignity, is an empirical question, not simply a logical one, nor one that can be derived from discourse analysis alone. In practice, diversity policy may attempt to embrace both the individual and group dimensions (J. WRENCH, 2007: 125). As with diversity, the concept of diversity policy is a social construct: the precise form and use of diversity policy will depend on the particular perspective of its advocates, set amongst the constraints and enablers of broader factors of historical, cultural and institutional context, and encouraged or discouraged by political activity, both in the action and discourse of local and national politicians, and the activities of grass root activists (J. WRENCH, 2007: 130). This dynamic and plural nature can be illustrated with the historical analysis by Lorbiecki and Jack, who describe how different interpretations of diversity policy replaced each other over time: first the ‘demographic’ interpretation, then the ‘political’ one, then the ‘economic’ one and now a ‘critical’ one (2000).

In short, in practice diversity policy can be more complex and more flexible than many of its critics imply, and we would do well to let its particular form in specific contexts be the subject of empirical investigation. As Squires says, we need to be attentive to the detailed workings out of diversity practices – both public and private (2005: 19). Therefore, the following section contains a short summary of two typologies that might be incorporated in the analytical framework constructed in this article to guide these empirical studies.

2.3 Analytical framework: typologies of diversity policy

As mentioned earlier, Liff (1997) constructed a typology that contains four different categories in diversity policy approaches. While indicating the dominance of ‘dissolving differences’ and ‘valuing differences’, she distinguishes two more approaches on the base of the commitment to social group equality as an organisational objective and the perceived relevance of social group differentiation for policy-making: ‘accommodating differences’ and ‘utilising differences’.

Commitment to social group equality as an organisational objective	High	Accommodating Differences	Valuing Differences
	Low	Dissolving Differences	Utilising Differences
		Low	High
		Perceived Relevance of Social Group Differentiation for Policy-Making	

Figure 1.
Managing diversity approaches

(Source: S. LIFF, 1997)

These categories can be summarized in the following way (S. LIFF, 1997: 13-15):

- *Dissolving differences* refers to a series of initiatives which stress individualism, such as personalized training needs. The goal is to create an environment in which everyone feels valued, but social group equality is not any specific significance as an objective. Diversity issues are said to go way beyond obvious physical differences, to include differences in communication styles, problem solving, professional experience, and so forth.
- *Valuing differences* refers to a series of initiatives aimed at employees of under-represented groups, such as training, managers being given responsibility for developing such employees, adaptation of policies to recognise different holidays and diets, etc. Some focus on overcoming past disadvantages (training), others on changing the organization (flexible working hours, part-time jobs). The goal is to create an environment in which everyone feels comfortable, not just white males.

- *Accommodating differences* includes initiatives which are very similar to some EO approaches. Recruitment directed towards qualified members of under-represented groups and support for their career development once they are in post, to ensure that talent is recognised despite social differences. Or regular audits of processes and systems to ensure objectivity and fairness.
- *Utilizing differences* means that social-group based differences are recognised as the basis for different treatment, for example, parallel career tracks for “career” women (same as men) and “family” women.

Furthermore, Wrench (2007: 43-45) formulated a typology of six categories of organisational practices⁷. As he exclusively focuses on diversity related to immigration, the summary of his six categories below is slightly altered to be applicable as well on a broader conception of diversity in organisational policies, in society as a whole:

1. Training minorities
2. Making specific (cultural) allowances
3. Challenging intolerant attitudes
4. Combating discriminatory behaviour
5. Equal opportunities policies with positive action
6. Diversity management / mainstreaming

Wrench illustrates these categories with empirical examples from diversity policy measures related to immigrants. Language training to migrant workers, a migrant training school and training and mentoring programme for minorities would fall under the first category (J. WRENCH, 2007: 45-46). Allowing room for prayer in the changing rooms during breaks, longer (unpaid) leave period in summer to visit home-country, intercultural training for leaders of multicultural teams, intercultural weekends for all employees and their partners and adjusting the hours of Muslims during the Ramadan would fall under the second category (J. WRENCH, 2007: 47). A course on ‘Racism and Xenophobia at Work’ for work supervisors and teachers and internal campaigns or special newspapers about cultural diversity would fall under the third category (J. WRENCH, 2007: 48). Distributing reports to instruct personnel managers on how to base their recruitment and promotion criteria on principles of equal treatment

⁷ Although he remarks that a seventh category ‘0. Doing nothing at all’ would probably contain the biggest number of cases

and how to avoid inappropriate criteria for judgement, training to staff to make them aware of racial discrimination and instruct them how to respond to employers who made discriminatory requests, and training courses for staff who sit on recruitment and selection panels to help them avoid ethnic discrimination and bias in their procedures and decisions would all fall under the fourth category (J. WRENCH, 2007: 48). Policy measures such as audits of the workforce, special efforts to ensure opportunities are made known to under-represented groups, training or preliminary interviews to enable members of those groups to compete on equal terms for the opportunities available, adding extra wording to the recruitment advertisements to the effect that, all things equal, priority would be given to ethnic minorities, as well as women and disabled people, and training line managers in selection skills to avoid bias in selection interviews are all part of the fifth category (J. WRENCH, 2007: 49). Finally, instituting diversity throughout operations, including a multicultural training for all employees, efforts to include more work opportunities in the firm for minorities, adding diversity as part of the criteria for evaluating the quality of operations, and include diversity in the corporate philosophy, are all examples of the sixth category of organizational practices (J. WRENCH, 2007: 49).

3. Empirical research on the definition of diversity and diversity policy

The two sections above elaborate the argument that theoretical ambiguity and controversy about diversity and diversity policy can be diminished by recognizing and deploying the additional value of qualitative empirical analyses as the base for diversity theory. This last section provides a general overview of already existing empirical research in the field of diversity studies. First, it is shown that explanatory hypotheses are the most recurrent ones in the field of diversity studies. Second, comparative (qualitative) empirical descriptions are shown to be very scarce, especially in the European context and especially in public organisations. This is so, while, as argued before, sound (descriptive and comparative) empirical analyses could form a more solid base for theory-building on the definition of diversity and diversity policy.

3.1 Mostly explanatory hypotheses in the field of diversity studies

Many academic publications on diversity and organizational diversity policies contain explanatory hypotheses on the convergence or the divergence in definitions of diversity or diversity policies.

Several trends have been said to converge definitions of diversity and diversity policy. These are, on the one hand, globalisation, continuing post-industrial migration, ongoing demographic shifts and ongoing emancipation (J. WRENCH, 2007). On the other hand, some authors refer to the growing influence of the European Union, where policies on discrimination, equality and diversity are associated with six strands: sex, racial and ethnic origin, disability, age, religion, and sexual orientation (A. PHILLIPS, 2008; S. FREDMAN, 2002).

Yet most academic publications concentrate on factors that cause divergence. Several factors are said to influence the definition of diversity. The long *historical presence* of certain modes of differentiation in society (such as gender) can mean they will be considered as more important, but it could also imply that ‘new’ modes of differentiation (R. ZAPATA, 2009b) receive more attention, because they are seen as greater challenges to the unity of the majority population. Also, *spatial distribution* (S. VERTOVEC, 2007) might influence whether certain modes of differentiation are taken into account. For example, when immigrants or gay people cluster in specific neighbourhoods, the attention of local policy-makers for these specific groups could increase. This is indirectly confirmed by Kymlicka, as he finds the fact that national minorities are occupying a certain geographical area important for the attribution of self-governance rights (1995). Finally, it seems probable that the *social salience* of certain modes of differentiation also influences their role in diversity policy. For example, it seems that with the slow disappearance of socialism and the arrival of large-scale immigration the focus in political literature has shifted from class-issues to cultural issues (C. TAYLOR, 1992; W. KYMLICKA, 1995; W. KYMLICKA & W. NORMAN, 2000; B. PAREKH, 2002).

Finally, several contextual factors are said to influence the definition of diversity policy. Wrench, for example, comments on differences in the public *acceptance of the identification of diversity*. If gathering information on certain modes of differentiation is considered morally irrelevant (for example, sexual orientation), or even dangerous (for example, in the Netherlands, after an excellent registration of religion contributed to the

death of many Jews in the Second World War), this data will not be collected and not be available to base diversity policies on (2007: 67). Also, what is *perceived as the cause of racism*, either racist ideas or racist behaviour, could influence which organisational practices will be deployed in diversity policy (2007: 70). Furthermore, the *attitude of trade unions* might be very influential and this attitude will be conditioned by earlier experiences of equality policies, industrial relations traditions – cooperation and interdependence or conflict and confrontation –, and national political and social discourse on immigration, family, religion, and so forth (2007: 71). Additionally, some approaches and organisational practices might be more relevant for recently arrived groups, while others might be more relevant for groups with a longer *historical presence*. For example, education and training can be very appropriate for many newly arrived immigrants, but the problems many long-settled migrants and their children face are not easily explained by ‘supply-side’ arguments (J. WRENCH, 2007: 6). Also, when new groups are only recently incorporated into the labour force, especially for those jobs the majority population does not want, trade unions may at first be more concerned with issues of exploitation and legal security, than cultural change (J. WRENCH, 2007: 132).

Specifically for modes of differentiation related to immigration, the influence on diversity policy of national myths, political discourse on multiculturalism and citizenship status is mentioned. *National myths* could be different, for example, the US is built on immigration and would advocate ‘strength through diversity’, while the European Union experiences large numbers of immigration only recently and is traditionally more focused on ‘cohesion through nationality or ethnicity’ (J. WRENCH, 2007: 76). Also the *political discourse on multiculturalism* could vary, see for example the distinction between discourses of differential exclusion, assimilation and pluralism of Castles (J. WRENCH, 2007: 70) or the more recent categorization in assimilation, cosmopolitanism, interactive pluralism and fragmented pluralism of Hartmann and Gerteis (2005). As long as immigrants do not have a *citizenship status* equal to that of the majority population, as is many times the case in Spain, for example (J. WRENCH, 2007: 72) specific organisational practices in diversity policy might not be legally possible.

Specifically for the mode of differentiation of ‘gender’, the influence on diversity policy of the ‘bread winner ideology’ is emphasized. This ideology is said to differ from state to state (Y.D. BILLING & E. SUNDIN, 2005: 100). As a consequence,

welfare regimes were established differently and the accompanying discourse on families meant (means) a great deal for women's, not only mother's, work possibilities and the conditions under which they were, and are, on the labour market. One key element in the Nordic model, for example, has been the normalization of women's participation in gainful employment and a weak male breadwinner role, this, in contrast to Western and Southern Europe.

3.2 Descriptive comparisons lack in the field of diversity studies

The hypotheses above so not seem to be based on elaborate systematic empirical analyses (at least this is unclear from the text that accompanies the explanatory hypotheses). Instead, some of them seem to be general impressions deduced from empirical explorations of real-life contexts. Interesting as these might be, a far more ambitious approach is to develop systematic comparative studies based on shared methodological instruments, used to collect and produce truly comparative data. Only then can differences be used as variables to test hypotheses and build theory (H. JASCHKE ET AL, 2007: 91). This kind of study is very likely to be descriptive at first; when the state of knowledge in a certain field is not very advanced, description is a highly necessary step before explanation. After all, it is pointless to explain what is not described with a reasonable degree of precision (G. KING, R.O. KEOHANE & S. VERBA, 1994: 15, 18, 44). Yet descriptive empirical comparisons, especially qualitative ones, are very rare. As these could greatly enhance the strength of theoretical affirmations (whether explanatory or aimed at other objectives), this is a serious gap in the field of diversity (policy) studies.

Also, most studies appear to have been undertaken in the United States (S. POINT & V. SINGH, 2003: 752), where there is a very specific cultural, social and historical context. For example, the size of the US minority ethnic population is more than a quarter whereas in EU countries it often lies around five or six per cent (J. WRENCH, 2007: 23). Also, the US has long had a relatively strong anti-discrimination legislation, contract compliance and affirmative action which have set the historical context for diversity policy. Additionally, there is much greater readiness to resort to the courts in cases of 'race' and sex bias, and the existence of far greater financial penalties for transgressions. In Europe there has been nothing like laws and practices of this strength, not even in the UK (P. RATCLIFFE, 2004). Furthermore, the European

context is one of nation-states and Europe's dominant focus is on the 'problems' of migrant workers and strategies to 'integrate' immigrants into the existing labour market and employment structures of individual countries. While the region of North-America and Oceania have a 'historical role in absorbing immigrants' and 'a value system rooted in equal employment opportunity, antidiscrimination and fairness paradigms' (M.E. MOR BARAK, 2005: 155). When, as in this case, contexts are different, it is important to refrain from universalizing ideas and knowledge and focus on the context at hand instead to gain more insight into the matter (T. MODOOD, A. TRIANDAFYLLIDOU & R. ZAPATA, 2006). This calls for more empirical studies in the European context.

Finally, the few studies that have been done on the definition of diversity (for example, S. POINT & V. SINGH, 2003) or diversity policy (S. LIFF, 1999; J. WRENCH, 2007) are all based on analyses of private organisations. The first focuses on the definition of diversity on corporate websites, the latter draw their information from surveys and analyses of one or more 'good practices' from the private sector. This calls for more empirical studies of public organisations.

Conclusion

In sum, the concepts of diversity and diversity policy are social constructions: they are dynamic and plural in nature and their use and meaning is dependent on the social-historical context. Diversity can be considered as an individual or a collective concept, it can be associated with different modes of differentiation and these modes of differentiation can be prioritized and/or categorized in various ways, all depending on the context or the needs of the observer. Diversity policy can be seen as a social issue (related to moral arguments) or a business issue (related to economic arguments), it can be based on different approaches (dissolving differences, valuing differences, accommodating differences, or utilizing differences), and it can contain various types of policy measures (training minorities, making specific allowances, challenging intolerant attitudes, combating discriminatory behaviour, equal opportunities policies with positive action, diversity management / mainstreaming). Again, this depends on the context. These affirmations support the main argument of this article: it would be wise to take the additional value of empirical analyses as the base for diversity theory into account to avoid unnecessary theoretical ambiguities and controversies.

Structured descriptive qualitative comparisons of empirical realities form a more solid base for explanatory hypotheses on similarities and differences in definitions of diversity and diversity policy, besides from providing valuable material for many other purposes. However, this type of empirical research is scarce, especially in the European context and especially among public organisations. This article hopes to provide an analytical framework that contributes to the growth of the field of diversity studies, by enabling scholars to systematically analyse their empirical cases. These cases could be public organisations of all kinds, for example, police forces, health services, but also institutions such as the European Union⁸. Appropriate questions could then be: “Which modes of differentiation are associated with diversity in diversity policies of the police force in Hamburg, Utrecht, and Bristol?” or “What modes of differentiation receive more attention (in communication and policy measures) in the diversity policy of public hospitals in Paris, London and Barcelona?” or “What arguments are employed to defend the diversity policy of the Ministry of Education in Italy, Denmark and Ireland?” or “What diversity policy measures of the municipality of Lourdes and the municipality of Stockholm are aimed at collective modes of differentiation and what diversity policy measures are aimed at individual modes of differentiation?”

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⁸ The European Union, for example, associates diversity with six modes of differentiation: sex, racial and ethnic origin, disability, age, religion and sexual orientation (in Article 13 EC). Following up on this article, in 2003, the European Commission launched a five-year, EU-wide information campaign, ‘For Diversity – Against Discrimination’, aiming to ‘promote the positive benefits of diversity for business and for society as a whole’ (EC Green Paper 2004: 10), which on first sight could be seen as a valuing differences approach.

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