

*Diversity University: Approaches to diversity from the theory and practices of Dutch universities*

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## Abstract

Currently, there is little research on the diversity practices of universities. In order to deepen understanding of where the policy ideas come from and what they are based on, this research focusses on the question: what conceptualisations of diversity are underpinning the policies and practices of universities? The sample for this research come from The Netherlands: Utrecht University, Amsterdam University (UvA), and Groningen University. The research investigates this question through the collection and analysis of three types of documents: public communication, policy, and activity-related documents. All locatable documents pertaining to public-facing communication, internal policy communication, and activities centred on diversity themes were collected and notes about relevant parts were taken. Each of the preceding types of documents were collectively reviewed for each university using the three diversity concepts introduced in the theoretical framework as analytic instruments.

The results found that all three universities, to varying degrees, make use of Diversity & Inclusion offices and want to incorporate the input and feedback from students and staff to inform policy decisions. Utrecht and Amsterdam have more plans established than Groningen, which is still in the process of setting up a Diversity & Inclusion office. Utrecht and Amsterdam both have policies related to hiring of new employees and increased diversity; however, all three universities also have policies centred on retention of employees from diverse backgrounds. While part of Groningen's policy is based on other universities, the three are effectively pioneering diversity policy among Dutch universities.

The universities were mostly similar in their use of both Liberal and decolonial conceptualisations of diversity. The definitions of diversity were mostly based on a Liberal framework, but policies, communication, and activities showed a mixed approach. Utrecht and Amsterdam also work with external groups, whose definitions of diversity were mostly based on decolonial concepts. Consequently, the universities may be limiting the success of their diversity policies by choosing to mix approaches: the Liberal and decolonial approaches are largely incompatible in terms of what problems diversity faces and what actions should be taken to resolve them. A commitment to either a Liberal or a decolonial approach to diversity will allow the universities to make more consistent and cohesive policies, as well as deepen their understanding of the methodology of their chosen school of thought.

Keywords:

Othering

Intersectionality

Diversity

Decolonisation

## **-Chapter 1: Introduction**

In recent years, there has been a trend of increasing attendance of students with international backgrounds at European and North American universities. The contributing factors are likely a combination of trends all connected to globalisation: global migration, refugees seeking asylum in Europe, and studying abroad to get a degree from a prestigious (Western) university. Alongside this upward trend of international attendance, there has been increasing attendance among domestic students from a broader range of backgrounds: students who are non-white, non-wealthy, and who have a disability are attending universities in greater numbers as well. The result of these changes is a diversification of universities in terms of their students. In light of this increased diversity, both university administrations and relevant governmental institutions have been making efforts to adapt in some way to better accommodate minority populations among both staff and students. The motivations of these efforts are rooted in both economic and moral goals. Economic goals are predicated on the supposition that managing diversity effectively will lead to greater workforce efficiency among staff, and will increase appeal to prospective students (Faria, 2015; Last, 2018). This mindset can instigate changes at various levels: both government policy and university action plans can seek to change academic culture to support changes which are thought to produce both moral and economic gains.<sup>1</sup>

Astrid Homan's (2017) interpretation of diversity can be simply defined as differences between people. It identifies a lack of diversity in the workplace and seeks to remedy it with effective management practices by adding people of different backgrounds. It is ultimately up to the people running an organisation to make changes to the workplace so that all team members feel included. This mostly leads to managers bearing the responsibility for making changes, which could be why this form of diversity in the workplace was originally referred to as diversity management (Faria, 2015).

However, this Liberal interpretation has some limitations. Why is there a lack of diversity to begin with? Will simply adding people from more diverse backgrounds be

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<sup>1</sup> Moral goals would include, for example, increasing inclusiveness to ensure that employees from marginalised groups receive fair treatment and greater satisfaction with their work. This would be as the goal in and of itself, rather than as a means to benefitting the company, such as increasing productivity or reducing high turn-over rates. It is about the motivations for instituting changes, rather than about outcomes which differentiates the two.

sufficient to truly solve the lack of diversity? Decolonial school of thought scholars, Edward Said (1974) and Homi Bhabha (2004), focus on the causes for a lack of diversity and propose that significant systemic change is necessary to remove barriers of access for people from diverse backgrounds.

Different diversity experts posit the problem of a lack of diversity in the workplace in different ways, which necessitate different measures to address this problem. Universities will similarly vary in their approaches to diversity communication, policy, and activity based on their understanding of diversity. The goal of this research is to critically examine the approaches to diversity that universities in The Netherlands have taken by analysing documents they produced involving diversity-focussed public communication, policy development, and activities for university students and staff. This process seeks to uncover which conceptualisations of diversity are being used when attempting to accommodate students and staff from various backgrounds.

In the section below, the research questions will guide the research process. The main question is about the conceptualisations of diversity at Dutch universities. This will be investigated through the collection and analysis of three different types of documents: public communication documents, policy documents, and activity documents. Public communication documents reveal how universities choose to portray their own ideas about what diversity is and how to approach it to the public. This may contrast with internal communication and plans, which are expressed through policies which reflect decision-making processes. Activities documents are an application of the policies of universities, which may also contrast with how the policies were designed. To be able to review each university holistically, the universities will also be compared with each other.

### *Research Questions*

1. What conceptualisations of diversity are underpinning diversity practices at Dutch universities?
  - a. How are diversity conceptualisations expressed through public communication documents?
  - b. How are diversity conceptualisations expressed in diversity policy?
  - c. How are diversity conceptualisations expressed in activity-related documents?

- d. How do the universities differ in their conceptualisations of diversity as expressed through the different types of documents?

## Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework<

### **Introduction**

In this section, conceptualisations of diversity based on two primary schools of thought will be studied at length: Liberal and decolonial. Studying conceptualisations of diversity helps to build a foundation for understanding what diversity is, why it is lacking, why more is needed, and how to achieve it. The two schools of thought differ in view on each of these points, which fundamentally alters how universities see and approach diversity. It should also be noted that within discourse on diversity, the themes of equity and inclusion also feature prominently. Within the scope of this research, emphasis has been placed on diversity at the expense of equity and inclusion to keep the research more focussed.

### **Background**

The Liberal view of diversity is people from different backgrounds coexisting (Homan, 2017). However, this generalisation simply identifies the symptom of an underlying problem; the decolonial school of thought endeavours to locate the root cause for a lack of diversity. Decolonial scholars research sociological, anthropological, and historical aspects of discrimination to diagnose the present absence of diversity in the workplace today.

Within the decolonial field, Said's (1974) theory of Orientalism focusses on how the West views the East by demonstrating the one-sidedness of the power dynamics between the two cultures. Said (1974) talks about how Orientalism - a lens developed by Europeans in the 19th century through which to understand Eastern countries - causes the West to present their interpretation of Eastern culture and people without any input from Easterners. Western scholarship based solely on Western sources effectively excludes an Eastern perspective within academia. Scholars in the same camp as Said argue that European narratives have historically superseded those of other cultures, which causes non-European narratives to be sidelined and ignored, which in turn marginalises these groups. Diversity is more than allowing a few representatives of marginalised groups to participate in Western-led present-

day society; it is about opening up present-day society to everyone (Holmwood, 2018; Maldonado-Torres et al., 2018; Pete, 2018).

Based on this Western-centric view of the world, Bhabha (2004) posits that diversity policy, however well-intended, will reproduce the one-sided power dynamics between dominant and non-dominant groups (C.F. also Andrews, 2018; Last, 2018; Maldonado-Torres et al., 2018). For Bhabha, when the focus on diversity is only on including people from different backgrounds, the structures built up over time within the framework of a Western-centric worldview will remain intact. Thus, the most a diversity policy can achieve is token representation. Within Western universities, individuals with a different background being included by diversity policy will likely feel tokenised because of being forced to operate within the university's cultural milieu, which is influenced by its position as an institution of (white) history, law, and culture (C.F. Icaza & Vázquez, 2018; Shilliam, 2018).

Kaasila-Pakanen (2015) claims that the Liberal concept of diversity focuses on differences and unintentionally pigeonholes people from different backgrounds. She combines Said's and Bhabha's critiques with her own, arguing that this model of diversity emphasises differences between people and groups, which not only fails to reduce othering<sup>2</sup> which already exists in modern society, but even reinforces it (Andrews, 2018; Gebrial, 2018; Pete, 2018). This stems from the universalising tendency of diversity - more specifically, to take Eurocentric disciplines and standpoints, and presenting them as objective fact and principles to which everyone does, or should, adhere to (Maldonado-Torres et al., 2018). Consequently, diversity management is more about making people of all backgrounds fit into a Western-cast mould.

In light of these criticisms, Bhabha has proposed an alternative: his concept of Third Spaces. Within this context, diversity centres on identities being something that one comes into, rather than something pushed onto and defined for them. Every third space creates its own culture collaboratively from the members. Additionally, the "third space" is a physical area which is meant to exist outside societal power dynamics, allowing for co-construction of identities to take place (Bhabha, 2004). In this model, there are no universal principles to adhere to, no attempts to categorise and define. It calls for the deconstruction of the power structures in place and calls on collaborators from inside and outside the university, to make a

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<sup>2</sup> Here utilised in a way similar to Fisher (2015, p. 229): "a process often, if not always, undertaken for the creation and maintenance of a 'correct' identity by a dominant party". It is a form of exclusion of others.

new collective culture, resulting in a more truly egalitarian institution (Andrews, 2018; Aparna & Kramersch, 2018; Gebrial, 2018; Icaza & Vázquez, 2018; Richardson, 2018). The boundaries are areas of contact interaction, co-construction

Homan's conceptualisation of diversity is that it centres on including more people from different backgrounds within an organisation. A predecessor to Homan is Hofstede, who helped popularise the Liberal conceptualisation of diversity with his Cultural Dimensions Model. At its core, it is designed to help leaders of organisations understand different cultures and provide a workplace culture which can accommodate this diversity thereby furthering the financial interests of the organisation (Hofstede, n.d.a). It uses composite analytic data to make generalisations about different countries and thereby predict the dispositions and behaviours of individuals from those places. The primary motive for achieving diversity in this model is to help increase the profitability of an organisation.<sup>3</sup>

### *Frameworks of Diversity*

#### **Said's Orientalism**

Said's concept of Orientalism in its simplest form is an in-depth analysis of the historical, political, cultural, and academic connections between the Orient (in Europe, commonly seen mainly as the Middle East and spanning to India, while in the US it is centred on East Asia) and the Western world. Orientalism is about power in nearly every capacity (political, cultural, moral, etc.). Due to the multifaceted nature of Orientalism, it is difficult to gain a complete understanding of it, and even more difficult to address. More specifically, the following subsections will address various dynamics of Orientalism and connect them to modern-day diversity.

#### *Basic Concept of Orientalism*

Orientalism is the lens through which the West, and Westerners, view the East and Easterners. Fundamentally, the West sees itself as the 'self', while the East is the 'other'. Through this classification, the West makes its own interpretation of the East with no input

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<sup>3</sup> McKinsey & Company corroborate the view that increased diversity can lead to increased productivity, and therefore profitability of an organisation (Dixon-Fyle et al., 2020).



from the Easterners they observe (Said, 1974). Othering is a dehumanising reduction of Easterners to mere subjects for observation. Consequently, a strong emphasis, regardless of intent, is on the difference between the self and the other. This legacy forms the basis of both common knowledge of the East and present-day knowledge production about the East within Academia (Middle Eastern Studies).

### *Political Aspect*

European Imperialism was largely founded on the principle of expanding as much as possible, specifically into realms which were not European. Cultural difference has been and remains a major dividing factor among European countries. As justification for imperialism, a collective othering of non-European lands and people was appropriate for legitimising their domination and exploitation. By othering non-European peoples, it provided justification for their colonisation. This motivated not only academic othering of foreign lands, but also the political dynamics between the Occident and Orient.

The relationship between the West and East based on European othering led to an unequal power dynamic and cultural exchange. Western culture was exported to the East as a superior product, whilst Eastern culture was cherry-picked for the monetary, entertainment, and scholarly gains they could contribute to the West.

### *Academic and Social Aspects*

The study of the Orient has been an academic tradition since political contact was established. Oriental Studies (now Middle East Studies) has historically been a field dominated by Westerners making their own claims about the East. This established a norm in which Western scholars proclaimed to be utilising objective, empirical research, while relying entirely on the academic writings of other Western scholars to make their own claims about the Orient (Said, 1974). By claiming that their research was objective, they also claimed that it was apolitical, in spite of the origins of all their research being conducted from a biased, Western view of the East. As this practice continued, the constructed reality of the

East as depicted by scholars of Oriental Studies became insular, it evolved and grew without much influence from the people who identify as Oriental.

What exacerbates this problem is the overall commitment to, and belief in, the objectivity and empiricism of their research. Oriental scholars do not question their positionality and the biases their discipline is based on, and so their claims are taken as fact by other scholars, the public, and policy-makers. The accumulation of knowledge does not happen in a vacuum; rather, it happens through the lens of one's political identity - even when trying their hardest to maintain objectivity, researchers will observe with preconceived notions about the Orient and be looking through a lens formed by the political relationship between the Orient and Occident (Said, 1974). While Oriental Studies should not be taken as the empirical discipline it claims to be, it also cannot, or at least should not, be rejected as completely useless. Said suggests that it best be thought of as a lens through which one can understand power dynamics between the East and West (and thus the power the West has held over the Orient; it cannot merely be dismissed as lies, but the academic study of the East should not be trusted, either) (Ibid.).

### **Bhabha's Third Spaces**

Said's Orientalism seems to have been at least part of Bhabha's foundation for his understanding of diversity, given his numerous references to Said in his works (Bhabha, 2000, 2004). Additionally, every point of Orientalism seems to be addressed by Third Spaces. The core of the solution Bhabha proposes emphasises self-reflection, which counteracts the assumed impartiality and empiricism of Oriental Studies. Orientalism can fragment the identity of individuals labelled as Oriental by centring their otherness, extrapolating e.g. their Oriental identity from their identity as a citizen of a Western country; in Third Spaces, culture is co-constructed, which enables the simultaneous expression of multiple identities (Zaver, 2013).

Orientalism describes the construction of the identity of the near/far East in Western society; a creation of difference and filling in of the blanks in the gaps of knowledge. Third Spaces are designed to be co-constructive, not dictatorial. They seek to overcome stereotyping and defining of the unfamiliar by open and equal interaction, which is also an

attempt to take down Orientalism. It is a ‘third’ space because it belongs neither to one’s own self or identity, nor to that of someone different; instead, it is a space where the two converge and interact (Bhabha, 2004). In addition to working past stereotypes, Third Spaces are meant to remove institutionalised power dynamics. Orientalism is not just about stereotypes, but also about control over the Orient; Third Spaces seek to equalise the power of participating parties.

For if it is true that no production of knowledge in the human sciences can ever ignore or disclaim its author’s involvement as a human subject in his own circumstances, then it must also be true that for a European or American studying the Orient there can be no disclaiming the main circumstances of his actuality: that he comes up against the Orient as a European or American first, as an individual second” (Said, 1974, p. 19).

### *How it works*

A fundamental aspect of Third Spaces is self-reflection. While not Bhabha’s own words, the value of self-reflection is highlighted by Keating, with additional commentary by Zaver, connecting self-reflection to Third Spaces:

A dialogue that invites students to identify what their own perceived worldview is and learn new ways of looking at realities. Transcultural dialogue in tandem with self-reflection serves to disrupt the ‘discourse of dominance.’ Transculturation stems out of transcultural dialogues in which articulations are so profound they lead to the creation of new culture(s). Inevitably this process comes with change and pain (Zaver, 2013, p. 93).

Part of this self-reflection is that people can see how identities form associations and add to a self-created perception of reality, but how they do NOT divide people; identities do NOT separate people. To counteract the power dynamics in Western spaces, it is not necessarily a requirement that all functionality be completely removed to make room for other cultures; instead, a sensitivity to the cultural differences and an emphasis on immersion - wherein intercultural or transcultural communication helps individuals to acclimate to the environment and allow others to learn about their situation. Within this framework, the local culture can still be part of a third space, but it is something everyone is invited to immerse themselves in, rather than being forced to assimilate to its norms and expectations (Zaver, 2013).

## **Homan's Four Differences, Inspired by Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Model**

At its core, Homan's and Hofstede's diversity management is focussed on data (about national cultures) to make decisions, the engagement to be centred solely on managers (and consultants), and making a profit. While Homan does not directly utilise the concepts brought forward by Hofstede, they share similar concepts: the use of data to inform decisions, an emphasis on what to do about diversity (rather than why there is a lack of it), and using the differences in people to benefit companies. Understanding diversity through Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Model is an empirical approach which seeks to categorise countries and understand organisations at an aggregate level. While this has the potential to unfairly fold independent cultures into a national image, it also encourages looking to the data first for answers, and it does call for listening to team members, albeit in a non-personal manner. It gives a prescriptive methodology for collecting and utilising data, although it tends to avoid personal experience and the mixing of roles in designing policy, likely to maintain objectivity.

With both Homan and Hofstede, the data is meant to be used by management to make changes as they see fit. While the goal may be to have a workplace culture that is inclusive, it is the administration that shapes the culture of the workplace themselves. The only cultural exchange which can take place is that which is tolerated by people in management positions. Within this model, there is encouragement for hiring and promoting people with diverse backgrounds to managerial positions, essentially allowing them to have a say in the shaping of an organisation's culture. It is also important to remember, however, that whether or not this will fundamentally change the organisation's culture is not guaranteed.<sup>4</sup>

Even as they may work toward understanding the influences of their own culture, administrations are effectively taught to find ways to more effectively fit employees from different backgrounds into their own culture, even if modifications are made to make them fit better. The Cultural Dimensions approach encourages managers to accept divergent points of view and use data to inform decisions, rather than relying on personal biases and

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<sup>4</sup> In studies analysed by Dobbin & Kalev, themselves liberal diversity thinkers, many methods designed to reduce discrimination and to increase diversity in hiring and promotion had the opposite effect.

assumptions. While this benefits the process of improving diversity, including identity groups in the policy-making process can also help with the policy's efficacy.

### **Synthesis of concepts**

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions emphasises developing a robust plan for improving diversity in the workplace using empirical, company-wide data. This theory centres on how to increase diversity, but less theory is dedicated to exploring what diversity is. Similar approaches to diversity can result in a focus on symbolic gestures and an emphasis on hiring without consideration for the conditions of people from diverse backgrounds at the organisation already (Andrews, 2018; Faria, 2015; Gebrial, 2018; Last, 2018; Maldonado-Torres et al., 2018; Pete, 2018). Where Hofstede's model is less focussed on theoretical background, Orientalism and Third Spaces offer strong theorisation of diversity and extensive critiques of the history and nature of systemic discrimination and have sophisticated explanations for why diversity is lacking in the first place. In exchange, they offer far less clarity in the realm of what to do. While there may be prescriptions for what to change, there is less guidance on how to change it, and even less on what to do after. The Cultural Dimensions Model may be too impersonal and inflexible, but it proposes solutions. For developing a theory of diversity, Orientalism and Third Spaces have a lot of argumentation to offer and useful resources for critiquing policies and proposals; however, the reader has more responsibility in developing solutions based on this theory. Both approaches to diversity have their advantages for universities looking to make improvements to their diversity policies. Perhaps taking both into consideration when constructing policy could be helpful.

The approaches to diversity between these theories differ because the conceptualisation of diversity itself is different, particularly between the more decolonial schools (Third Spaces, Orientalism) and the more Liberal schools (Cultural Dimensions). Gallie (1955) calls instances of this differentiation in definitions “essentially contested concepts”. The way in which each of these schools of thought would assess the effectiveness of diversity policies differs because their definitions of diversity itself are different. What makes diversity an essentially contested concept is that there is presently no consensus on what diversity means. Within this framework, it is still possible for opposing sides to make use of logical argumentation which third parties may reasonably be convinced to accept.

*For additional consideration: Intersectionality*

The term Intersectionality was originally coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (2015) to illustrate how discussions of discrimination against a particular group tend to centre on the most privileged members of that group. Crenshaw claims that this is problematic because a Black woman suffers not only as a woman, but as someone who is Black. The significance of this is that in addressing the issue of race discrimination, the focus tends toward Black men; in the case of gender discrimination, on White women. A Black woman is sidelined both in policies addressing race discrimination and gender discrimination. This bias toward the most privileged member of each group also invalidates the idea of understanding the situation of a Black woman by combining the experiences of being Black and being a woman. “Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated” (Crenshaw, p. 140). Without intersectionality, diversity policy will tend to benefit the most privileged people eligible for these policies, because they have the greatest access to them (Crenshaw, 2015; Lockley, 2018).

Intersectionality has become something of a buzzword in diversity - organisations may invoke the term without understanding what it means and claim to be intersectional without clear evidence supporting their claim. The application of intersectionality to diversity policies will enrich the depth and quality of the policies, since they will consider the underrepresentation of groups with multiple underrepresented identities. Assessment of the intersectionality of public communication, policies, and activities will be part of the review of documents for each of the universities studied.

### -Chapter 3: Research Methodology

#### *Selected Samples*

In order to gain insight into the conceptualisations of diversity at universities, The Netherlands was chosen because of a policy which had recently been passed by the Dutch government, requiring universities to develop more plans for increasing diversity (Rijksoverheid, 2020), providing an interesting opportunity to see what diversity policy may already be in place at Dutch universities, as well as if any of the universities cited the government policy in their own documents. Once a country was selected, guided by Stebbins's (2001) method of exploratory research, all Dutch universities were surveyed by searching for diversity-related topics on the university websites. The goal was to obtain approximately three universities to make use of a case study (Yin, 2014). The reason for choosing Utrecht, Amsterdam,<sup>5</sup> and Groningen was because in the initial survey of Dutch universities, Utrecht and Amsterdam had a lot of policy- and activity-related documents available, including policies from before 2020, as well as offices for (Equality, in the case of Utrecht) Diversity & Inclusion. The University of Groningen had developed plans for students with functional impairments in 2018, but in contrast to Utrecht and Amsterdam, had plans to create their own Diversity & Inclusion Office, modelled after the works of other universities, which can be taken to include Utrecht and Amsterdam (Groningen University, 2021).

In addition to searching for documents for each university to analyse, the Diversity & Inclusion offices were each contacted with a request for a list of documents they use to inform their practices. None of the universities replied with sources; however, in some documents, citations were made to diversity-related literature.<sup>6</sup> This literature will be used to better understand the theoretical perspectives of the universities when possible, since the Diversity & Inclusion offices<sup>7</sup> are involved in each university's policy-making process.

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<sup>5</sup> Amsterdam is meant as the Universiteit van Amsterdam (UvA) and not Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU). Any references to Amsterdam throughout this research applies specifically to UvA.

<sup>6</sup> The two universities who replied at all were Groningen and Utrecht. Both of them said that they did not have a literature list. In the case of Groningen, the cited reason was that the team working on policy was from a broad range of academic backgrounds; for Utrecht, the reason was that literature was not used for making policy decisions.

<sup>7</sup> In the case of Groningen University, the Diversity & Inclusion office was not established by the time of their action plan, but they had a diversity dean who was involved in the policy-making process. Groningen

### *Data Collection*

Due to the selected universities all having (Equality) Diversity & Inclusion pages, documents were first collected by visiting these pages for each university and extracting all documents pertaining to diversity policies and diversity activities. The method of collecting documents was based on two conceptualisations of theoretical sampling: Flick's (2018) theoretical sampling for document analysis, wherein the researcher starts with a base collection of documents (in this case, stemming from the Diversity & Inclusion pages) and adding documents to the corpus via adding documents referenced within the documents already collected; and a more expansive one by Corbin & Strauss, who view theoretical sampling as "rather than being used to verify or test hypotheses about concepts, (it) is about discovering relevant concepts and their properties and dimensions" (2008, p. 144). As notes were being taken, university documents referenced in the initial documents were also searched for and researched.<sup>8</sup> Notes specifically focus on getting an overview of references to diversity or concepts within diversity, as well as to specific policy proposals and activities, which may include copying lists of plans for clarity and brevity.<sup>9</sup> After collecting all relevant documents using this method, documents generally were able to fit into at least one of three categories: public-facing documents (documents which seem constructed to inform or engage the public on diversity matters at the university), policy-related documents (those which seem intended for internal communication about operation of the university), and activity-related documents (documents which centre on actively carrying out diversity-related functions for the university).<sup>10</sup>

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has since begun operation of their Diversity & Inclusion office, although it is still working on implementing all of their operations as of August, 2022.

<sup>8</sup> There was one exception: the Gender Equality Plan from the University of Utrecht mentions an Utrecht University Gender targets for 2021-2025, which could not be located. It is unclear whether this is its own document or if it was a misnomer for the Strategy and Action Plan, 2021-2025, given the similarities in their names.

<sup>9</sup> Specifically, it was references to diversity, inclusion, gender, sexual orientation, migrant status, abledness, ethnic background, race, or socioeconomic status. Nearly all documents from the Diversity & Inclusion websites were relevant, but these references were also helpful later for selecting a sample from collected documents.

<sup>10</sup> This distinction of activity-related documents has an interesting effect on one particular document: at Groningen University, they offer a course for professionals in the field of diversity management; because it is intended for external candidates, it seems less suitable as an activity-related document. Additionally, by offering the course to external candidates, the university is suggesting that everything taught within the course has already whole-heartedly been embraced by Groningnen, which acts as a sort of public communication, suggesting it is a type of public-facing document.



*Documents Collected and Annotated:*

Table 1: Document Collected Matrix

	Utrecht University	Amsterdam University	Groningen University
Public-facing documents	-Annual Review (2021a) -About Utrecht University (Chinese) (n.d.a)	-Facts and Figures on Diversity at the UvA (n.d.c) -Global Exchange Programme (n.d.d) <sup>11</sup> -Cultural Exchange Ambassador Programme (n.d.b)	-Diversity Management for Social Justice Course, 20-24 June, 2022 (2022a)
Policy documents	-Strategy and Action Plan, 2021-2025 (2020) -Gender Equality Plan (2021b)	-Diversity Document (2019)	-University Action Plan: - Diversity and Inclusion (2021) 2018 Policy Plan for Students with a Performance Disability (2018)
Activities documents	-Inappropriate Behaviour (n.d.h) -Accessible Academia (Accessible Academia, n.d.) -Netwerk USP Inclusief (n.d.i)	-Global Exchange Programme (n.d.d) -Building Accessibility (2022) -Academic Diversity Programme (n.d.a)	-PhD Support (2022c) -A Woman's paths to leadership (2022d)

<sup>11</sup> N.b. The Exchange Programme has two parts: one for foreign students, which is a public-facing document; the other is information for students at Amsterdam University, which is an activity document.

### *Data Analysis*

The three categorizations of documents are represented in this paper by three separate chapters, divided into one section per university. The method through which the documents were analysed was based on Flick's (2018) method of document analysis,<sup>12</sup> wherein the documents were seen as narratives by their authors and their intentions were uncovered by closely examining the documents. The three conceptualisations of diversity referenced in the Theoretical Framework - Orientalism (focussing specifically on othering), Third Spaces, and Cultural Competences serve as lenses through which the universities are analysed. In order to investigate the conceptualisations of diversity in the three types of documents (public-facing, policy, and activity-related), conceptualisations of diversity in language and practice were analysed by comparing them to a condensed version of each of the three lenses:

-Orientalism: focus on othering - emphasis on policies and activities which seek to make people feel more included.

-Third Spaces: focus on co-construction - emphasis on redistributing power and influence in making decisions for more equitable input from oppressed groups.

-Cultural Competences: focus on optimisation - emphasis on utilising empirical data and tweaks to the status quo to improve the diversity conditions while increasing productivity.

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<sup>12</sup> The term 'based on' is used here because it should be noted that Flick's method does not accommodate for the analysis of web pages, which formed a part of the data collection; however, Flick acknowledges in his conceptualisation that other definitions of document exist, going so far as to include a broader definition by Prior (Flick, 2018). This is also justified by Caulley's (1983) definition of "document" to incorporate any and all sources, which can thus include web pages.

## **-Chapter 4: Findings (Public-Facing Documents)**

### *Introduction*

In this section, documents which are aimed at communication with the public will be analysed. Through this type of document, universities are able to present an image of themselves to the public through both their presentation of what diversity means and what activities the universities are engaging in with regard to diversity. The universities took different approaches to the type of presentation they made to the public, which offers varying levels of exposition between universities.

## Utrecht University

### *Introduction*

In this section, the research investigates the question of how Utrecht expresses its conceptualisations of diversity through public communication documents. This includes the Annual Review (2021a) and About Utrecht University (Chinese) (n.d.a). The Annual Review is a magazine produced for the public, with a focus on diversity-related policies and activities at Utrecht that have been enacted within the past year. The page in Chinese about the university gives information about the university in Chinese, although all of the links to specific information on the page were to other pages that were only available in English.<sup>13</sup>

### *Othering*

One way in which Utrecht seeks to reduce othering among students and staff from diverse backgrounds is through the creation of groups (2021a). USP Netwerk Inclusief was founded for staff with a physical or psychological impairment. Students created the African & Caribbean Heritage Network (n.d.b).<sup>14</sup> For refugees, the organisation InclUUsion started offering traineeships for refugees who are receiving benefits in The Netherlands. They also mention that InclUUsion is working on creating a preparatory programme to help students who are refugees transition to study at the university.

Additionally, the university mentions their EDI Stimulation fund, wherein applicants can apply for grants for diversity-related projects. They claim the creation of five projects, but only mention three: Accessible Academia (which will be discussed in the Activities Document section), the Class-Conscious Academics Network, and the podcast, “Unsettling Knowledge” by the Decolonisation Group (2021a). These groups all demonstrate a willingness of the university to support decolonial, grassroots groups, but there is no information about the nature and extent of the relationship between Utrecht and the groups.

The magazine mentions all of these groups and projects, but does not explain them. How much impact and reach can these groups have? Is a lack of clarity on this for brevity or to hide their limitations?

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<sup>13</sup> While it was not possible to read the page in its entirety, next to all of the links on the page was this character, which translates to “English”: 英. After checking all of the links, indeed every web page linked was available in English, not in Chinese.

<sup>14</sup> The Network’s website was under construction when it was visited; as such, there are no notes about their operations.

### *Third Spaces*

Mentioned in the Annual Review (2021a) is the creation of a repository for curriculum tools for educators called the Developing an Inclusive Curriculum and Learning Environment Curriculum Reflection Tool (course level) (n.d.d). The project is a cross-discipline collaboration to help interested professors improve the inclusiveness of their courses. Below is an image showing the landing page of the Curriculum Reflection Tool. Further information is not included on this page.<sup>15</sup>

The Annual Review also indicates that the university held a celebration of Women's Day, which included a round table discussion (2021a). Round table discussions are typically chosen for equal standing and participation between hosts and participants. The results of the discussion do not appear in the Annual Review; if they have bearing on Utrecht's policy, it may be cited in their policy documents.

Image 1: Toolbox Diversity in Education: Main Page (n.d.d)

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<sup>15</sup> Another tool was found, however: the Toolbox diversity in education (2019), which appears to be the same, but under a different name. The page references a toolbox, so the comments about the reflection tool were based on this other toolbox.



### *Cultural Competences*

Among the activities shared in the Annual Review, most would, at least in isolation, count more as symbolic gestures (2021a). This includes the Rainbow Bike Path opening (which occupied an entire article), a week of voluntary courses about diversity-related topics, the celebration of Diversity Month in October, which included Diversity Day, Coming Out Day, Safety Week, and Accessibility Week (2021a). They have also created the Diversity & Inclusion Award, for which they have announced their first winner, although they did not include the winner's project or criteria for their selection process.

Included in the Annual Review is an exposition of their Gender Equality targets, based on their Gender Equality plan (2021a). They show the male:female ratio of (full) professors, associate professors, PhD candidates, and students. This series of pie charts demonstrates a trend: the more senior the position, the more the ratio skews male. The university mentions that all faculties have a gender quota and plans on how to reach it, as well as achieving a total of 35% female professors by 2024, up from 31% in 2021 (2021a).

The Curriculum Reflection Tool may be considered Third Spaces in the theories that inform it, but could be considered more in-line with Cultural Competences in practice. With the tool, self-reflection is operationalised, with prescribed procedures to follow (albeit with the user's choice in which order to follow them). Because self-reflection is made into a tool to think about broad concepts, it seems less in-line with the localised level of self-reflection espoused by Bhabha (2004).

Additionally, Utrecht now offers a welcome page in Chinese (n.d.a). While this reads as more welcoming to Chinese students, all links to other pages on the website are in English. Last (2018) notes that direct appeals like this often stem from a marketisation of internationalising universities, wherein adaptations are made to attract particular demographics to make a profit. By making a Chinese page for prospective and not current students, the motivation suggests more market appeal to Chinese students than to helping Chinese students feel welcome.

### *Synthesis of findings*

Through the Annual Review, Utrecht perhaps puts the most effort of the universities studied into trying to shape public perception of diversity at their university. The primary emphasis of the university in their documents for the public appears to be on symbolic action. What is suggested through this prioritisation is that this is what the university wants the public to focus on. The motivations for this could be driven by a more liberal, 'Hofstedian' approach to diversity, but it is also true that decolonial diversity scholars also appreciate symbolic gestures, so long as they are part of a wider framework of change (Dennis, 2018; Gebrial, 2018). Additionally, the reasoning behind focussing on perhaps more inoffensive forms of change may be less controversial in the public zeitgeist, and therefore safer for the university to give heightened attention to in public documents (Gebrial, 2018).

One of the interesting aspects of Utrecht's use of data, which is common among Cultural Competences, is the extrapolation of data into a hierarchy of academic positions. This deeper level of analysis is more transparent in the exposition of gender ratios, exposing an increasing male bias the more senior the position. It is commendable that Utrecht would include such transparent reporting on their statistics in a public document. However, a limitation of their approach is its lack of intersectionality: the gender ratios do not account for other factors, such as abledness, sexual orientation, race, nationality, ethnicity, or



socioeconomic background. It should be noted that intersectionality was not mentioned in the Annual Review.

## Amsterdam University

### *Introduction*

In this section, the research investigates the question of how Amsterdam expresses its conceptualisations of diversity through public communication documents. This includes the Facts and Figures on Diversity at the UvA (n.d.c), Global Exchange Programme (n.d.d),<sup>16</sup> and the Cultural Exchange Ambassador Programme (n.d.b). The Facts and Figures page focusses on statistics, primarily about attendance at each of the university's faculties. Information by year and by first year enrolment are accessible, while demographic data focusses primarily on Dutch vs. Non-Dutch and male vs. female. The Global Exchange Programme assessed in this section is for students at universities abroad looking to study at Amsterdam University for a semester. The Cultural Exchange Ambassador Programme is available to both Amsterdam abroad and exchange students at Amsterdam to both represent the university and to connect with other internationals, which also includes some diversity-related activities.

### *Othering*

Beyond the statistical data included in the Facts and Figures Document, Amsterdam University notes that with mentions of male and female in their statistics, they mean that “those who identified themselves as either male or female when joining as a member of staff or enrolling as a student” (n.c.c, no page). This also suggests either that only a male/female binary is accepted at registration, or only that people who identified as male or female were considered in their statistics; it does not explain the criteria for how people can self-identify.

The Global Exchange Programme (n.d.d) gives priority in housing to students who are from a country outside the European Union (EU). This makes the process for foreign students to find housing easier, which in The Netherlands is often something students must not only arrange independently, but something that is difficult due to the high demand for housing.

### *Third Spaces*

Nothing to report.

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<sup>16</sup> N.b. The Exchange Programme has two parts: one for foreign students, which is a public-facing document; the other is information for students at Amsterdam University, which is an activity document.

### *Cultural Competences*

As a document about diversity, the Fact Book is based on concepts from Cultural Competences, primarily through the use of statistics (n.d.c). They show the gender ratio for all employees collectively, not divided by seniority level. Amsterdam mentions that they aim to fill 50% of all professorial vacancies with women. In the categorisation of students and staff by nationality, Amsterdam separates them by non-Dutch and non-Dutch, non-EU (n.c.c.). The Fact Book does not offer specific information about the backgrounds of students, but does show an approximation of the proportion of students paying international fees.<sup>17</sup>

The Global Exchange Programme also makes six courses available to students interested in learning more about Dutch culture, emphasising the Dutch Golden Age and art (which includes literature). It seems to emphasise positive aspects of Dutch history and may present a non-critical lens for looking at history in the Golden Age. While there is an opportunity listed for foreign students to learn more about Dutch culture, there does not appear to be an opportunity in the programme for exchange students to share their own culture with others.

### *Synthesis of findings*

In terms of what Amsterdam wants to emphasise to the public, based on the documents found, is a use of empirical data and a commitment to the Gender Equality Plan, based on a mandate by the EU (n.d.c). The presentation of gender ratios among employees only at a macro level can obscure gender discrimination in promotion due to its lack of differentiation. By aiming to fill 50% of all new vacancies with women, they are looking to equalise the gender imbalance; however, a policy this broad does not address potential differences in the degree of imbalance by seniority level like was shown at Utrecht. The data here does not show if there is such an imbalance, either. The Global Exchange Programme (n.d.d) is mostly limited to facts, but also mentions courses showcasing positive aspects of Dutch culture. Through these documents, it is difficult to accurately assess the theoretical underpinnings of Amsterdam's conceptualisation of diversity.

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<sup>17</sup> EU law stipulates that citizens of any member state are entitled to paying the domestic tuition fees while studying at the university of any other EU country. The word "approximate" is used however, since there may be exceptions which cannot be accounted for with the data available.



## **Groningen University**

### *Introduction*

In this section, the research investigates the question of how Groningen expresses its conceptualisations of diversity through public communication documents. This includes the Diversity Management for Social Justice Course, 20-24 June, 2022 (2022a). The course takes place in both the summer and the winter, aimed specifically at professionals in the field of diversity. Groningen had no other locatable public communication documents; because this course is aimed at professionals in diversity and not members of the university, it serves as a substitute public communication document.

### *Othering*

The course, offered by the Linguistics Department, is a five-day programme, with each day covering a new topic. On the fourth day, a course titled “Diversity management, language planning, and indigenous minorities” is offered (2022a, no page). While information about the contents of the courses is limited,<sup>18</sup> a course emphasising indigenous minorities could be informed by the principles of Othering due to it paying special attention to a particular type of minority group.

### *Third Spaces*

Instead of offering a course on the fifth day, instead “a special session will be devoted to decolonizing research, management practices, and policy writing” (Ibid., no page). The mention of decolonising does reveal that to some extent, decolonising theory will be taught. Third Spaces diversity theory is couched within the decolonial framework of diversity because of its investigation of the causes of structural inequality and its solution proposed in relation to addressing structural inequality. Even so, information about the nature and extent of this special session is lacking, so it is difficult to see the nature and extent of study for this course on decolonisation.

### *Cultural Competences*

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<sup>18</sup> There is no specific information given about any of the courses offered and there is not a list of recommended or required literature.

The course titles for the first three courses do not necessarily confirm that they are taught from a similar theoretical perspective to Cultural Competences (Diversity management and urban policies, Diversity management and policies in (higher) education, and Diversity management in the workplace); however, language contained in the course description may offer insight into the theoretical underpinnings of the course:

”We conceive of ‘social justice’ as fairness manifested in society, thus including equal access to wealth, opportunities and privileges in healthcare, education, employment, housing, and more. We define ‘management’ as the actions undertaken to influence or intervene on language and cultural practices in specific environments” (Ibid., no page).

‘Equal access’ is language which is frequently invoked in the name of more Liberal types of diversity theories. Another Liberal comment is from the learning objectives: “Devise and implement effective techniques to favour intercultural communication and multicultural management” (Ibid., no page). The emphasis on management suggests a top-down approach without making structural changes. If only the managers are making the changes, how much change are they willing to make?

While perhaps devised by the university, two scholarships are offered to applicants from middle- or low-income countries (Ibid., no page). These scholarships subsidise the tuition fees of the course. This does not include the cost of accommodation for the week of the summer course, nor does it cover transportation costs.

### *Synthesis of findings*

It is important to remember that the professors may not have final say over the presentation of their courses or complete control over the course content or layout. The university is, however, assumed to endorse the messaging available on the web page. The university seems to favour Cultural Competences as a guiding principle for diversity for three reasons: the language used in the course description aligning closest with this theory of diversity, the high quantity of coursework which seems to align with Cultural Competences, and these courses coming ahead of the more Othering and Third Spaces-oriented coursework imply greater importance for the Cultural Competences view, while the other two are offered as auxiliary considerations. The course on indigenous people suggests a more nuanced understanding of cultural differences beyond nationality and a sincere effort to give proper attention to populations which can be overlooked even when discussing diversity pertaining to their countries. In contrast to the indigenous minorities course, it is interesting to note that the decolonising day is not given a course name, unlike any other day.

The scholarship is, in practice, a liberal diversity gesture. The scholarship covers only the tuition for the course, not the airfare or accommodation, both of which likely being more expensive than the course itself. While a considerate gesture to help less privileged people attend, it seems to only be an option for those who can afford to travel to The Netherlands already. Essentially, only the most privileged people eligible for this scholarship will be able to make any use of it. Only the most privileged residents of middle- and low-income countries could make use of this offer. This also does not accommodate people in higher-income countries whose personal financial situation matches that which the scholarship seems to assume of its demographic audience.

## **-Chapter 5: Findings (Policy Documents)**

### *Introduction*

In this chapter, the conceptualisations of diversity at the three universities will be analysed through documents pertaining to diversity policy. In these documents, universities are engaging primarily in internal communication; as such, the definition of diversity and the types of policies emphasised may contrast with the public communication of the university. The three universities all had at least one document specifically focussed on diversity policy, though other policy documents with links to diversity may be included where applicable.



## Utrecht University

### *Introduction*

This section investigates the diversity conceptualisations underpinning diversity-related policies at Utrecht. This is conducted through analysis of the following documents: the Strategy and Action Plan, 2021-2025 (2020) and the Gender Equality Plan (2021b). The Strategy and Action Plan lays out the diversity-related policy goals that the university wishes to achieve by 2025. The Gender Equality Plan is in connection with a European Union initiative to incentivise universities to achieve gender parity among professors by necessitating plans for achieving this to receive special funding. The policy is assessed primarily on its engagement (or lack of engagement) with intersectionality and diversity-related issues beyond gender equality.

### *Othering*

The university offers the Westerdijk Programme for female Assistant Professors, with the goal of their retention and promotion to Full Professor status (2020; 2021b). This is part of their goal of balancing the gender ratio of professors at the university. An additional measure taken regards their appointment committees: at least one member of the committee must now be a woman, and in their report need to explain how women were included in the candidate list (2020). In the Strategy and Action Plan, they also have a PhD candidate scheme to take in more PhD candidates from non-Western countries: through Mozaïek, they offer five places to applicants whose proposals were good but not approved by the Dutch Research Council (Ibid.).

For EU students, they offer the Flexible Study Programme (n.d.g) in some degree programmes, which grants students with barriers to full-time study the option to take fewer courses at a time and only pay for the courses they are enrolled in.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, the university has also enhanced their policies regarding Inappropriate Behaviour (n.d.h) and hired an ombudsman to handle discrimination-related issues, discussed as part of Utrecht's Activities Documents.

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<sup>19</sup> Barriers can include needing to work alongside study to an extent where full-time study is no longer possible and needing to care for family members, such as parents or children. Normally, when enrolled as a part-time or full-time student, tuition is set at a fixed rate; therefore, a part-time student taking one course in a semester will normally pay the same as a student taking three courses.

### *Third Spaces*

The language used in the Strategy and Action Plan suggests some influence by decolonising perspectives. They state that they want to “listen to the experiences of people both inside and outside the Utrecht University community when it comes to racism and discrimination” (2020, p. 2). While the extent to which the university plans to listen to others is not clearly defined, they named racism as something they want to combat, which is a facet of diversity which is typically overlooked in more liberal conceptualisations and emphasised in decolonial conceptualisations (Gebrial, 2018).<sup>20</sup>

### *Cultural Competences*

The language of the Diversity and Action Plan suggests more Cultural Competence-esque underpinnings: “a diverse population of students and staff enriches the quality of the academic debate” (2020, p. 2). They feature a quote prominently: “diversity means everybody has a seat at the table” (Ibid., p. 5). While from a student, the university attributes significance to the quote by making an enlarged graphic with it. The statement suggests that a base level of inclusion will achieve diversity.

In both the Gender Equality Plan and the Diversity and Action Plan, workshops and trainings are included as part of their diversity plans (2020; 2021b). Trainings tend to be more common in Liberal approaches to diversity. The same is also true of data: Utrecht would like to implement a monitoring system to keep track of the flow of students and staff coming to and leaving the university to assess how their diversity levels change over time (2020). That said, the focus thus far has been on intake, which is often emphasised in Liberal diversity.

### *Synthesis of findings*

Utrecht has plans which stem from both decolonial (Othering and Third Spaces) and Liberal (Cultural Competences) perspectives. The language of the motivations for diversity are much more solidly related to Cultural Competences, stating for example that diversity benefits the university. The language and at times the policy which is more decolonial is more vague: “besides gender, faculties focus also on other forms of diversity” (Gender Equality Plan, p. 10). Regarding listening to students and staff, only the general intention is clear, not how they plan to elicit the feedback or what they will do with it. They mention

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<sup>20</sup> For clarity, it is racism that is typically avoided in (neo)liberal diversity ideologies, not race itself.

looking into intersectionality within representation, but intersectionality is not defined and there is no example of what they mean with this process. The disconnect between the language and practice suggests a sincere attempt to enact policies which address Othering and create Third Spaces, but operating from a framework based on Cultural Competences. The quote about diversity and seats at the table reads as a platitude. Will allowing the presence of people from all backgrounds be egalitarian if that is the end of the process? It suggests making accommodations without enacting structural change - there is still a gatekeeper deciding who gets to be included and to what extent.

## **Amsterdam University**

### *Introduction*

This section investigates the diversity conceptualisations underpinning diversity-related policies at Amsterdam. This is conducted through analysis of the following documents: the Diversity Document (2019). This policy document was written with inspiration from both the Diversity Council and diversity scholars at Amsterdam (Wekker, who is part of the Diversity Council, and Homan, who authored a document cited in the Diversity Document). The document does not include many specific details about the diversity-related policies the university intends to enact. While lacking in specific information, it contains an exceptionally thorough coverage of all diversity-related policy that has been and is planned to be implemented at Amsterdam. The document also contains a few citations to literature about diversity theory.

### *Othering*

Evidence of the influence of the Diversity Committee can be seen in a few different places of the Diversity Document. They suggest agreeing with the Diversity Committee on diversity extending beyond individuals and their interactions with others by referencing the Committee after this statement: “What matters are the mechanisms and culture within the UvA that either promote or hinder inclusion. It is more than just an individual and moral issue” (2019, p. 14). The Diversity Committee is the only source listed which is decolonial in nature, and comments of this nature seem to only exist alongside references to the Diversity Committee.

Among policy actions, Amsterdam provides support to students to support students from diverse backgrounds. They help students beginning their studies with summer courses, offering grants for students with financial need; help finding internships and traineeships for both disabled and refugee students; and allowing for adaptations to a study programme for parents, with the possibility for financial compensation for expectant mothers (Ibid.). Similar to Utrecht, they hired an ombudsperson to make the reporting and investigation of discrimination incidents (Ibid.).

### *Third Spaces*

For some of the policy plans themselves, Amsterdam cites the Diversity Committee’s report, *Let’s Do Diversity*. Influence can be seen in the composition of the document with

language such as wanting people from diverse backgrounds to “have an equal say in how things are done” (Ibid., p. 12). They also “prioritise changes in organisational standards and values and not changes in personal attitudes and convictions” (Ibid., p. 13). They also express a conviction to make systemic change to their appointment committees for professors, noting “a committee with only one female member is insufficiently diverse” (Ibid., p. 24).

Activities mentioned in the document are the Academic Diversity Programme (n.d.a), which they cite as a joint effort with Amsterdam United. They also offer the Meet Your Mentor programme; while optional, it is cited as an opportunity for both professors and students to openly share with and learn from each other (Ibid.). Amsterdam is also working on creating physical spaces which exist as Third Spaces: Contemplation Rooms and gender-neutral bathrooms are being installed on all campuses (Ibid.).

### *Cultural Competences*

The majority of citations for Amsterdam are informed by similar viewpoints to Cultural Competences: Shore et al. (2010), Homan (2017), Bohnet (2016), and Dobbin & Kalev (2016). These sources are mostly critical of standard Cultural Competence practices whilst remaining within a Liberal theoretical framework of diversity. This also results in an interesting interaction: Amsterdam seems to try and integrate the language and practices of the decolonial Diversity Committee, but their only frame of reference for such thinking and planning is from the Committee’s report (2019).

### *Synthesis of findings*

Amsterdam offers multiple new, specific projects which help create a more diverse university. While perhaps more rich in decolonial perspectives and action than Utrecht or Groningen, the sources cited (aside from the Diversity Committee) are arguably all more market-oriented. They were used primarily to gravitate away from policies which fail to meet their intended aims. Some policies seem to demonstrate real influence of the Diversity Committee; other policies are still more Liberal and even contradict the recommendations of the Liberal sources: the articles cited denounce the use of workshops for diversity, but Amsterdam is offering diversity workshops anyway.<sup>21</sup> The goals and aims sound overall

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<sup>21</sup> Amsterdam is aware of this irony. They include this citation in reference to one of their notifications about workshops being offered: “ For an overview of the undesired effects of ‘one-off’ workshops, see

related to addressing Othering and at least partially creating Third Spaces, but most of these policies are lacking an explanation of how they intend to achieve these goals. They are aims, not plans. This could partially stem from a lack of literature to inform these positions; while Amsterdam are deserving of praise for adopting a more ambitious goals based on the demands proposed by the Diversity Report, it is difficult to confirm the extent to which they will be able to achieve these aims or the rigour with which they will attempt to.

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publications such as Bohnet, I. (2016). *What Works: Gender Equality by Design*. Cambridge/Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, p. 44-61” (pg. 21).

## **Groningen University**

### *Introduction*

This section investigates the diversity conceptualisations underpinning diversity-related policies at Groningen. This is conducted through analysis of the following documents: the University Action Plan: Diversity and Inclusion (2021) and the 2018 Policy Plan for Students with a Performance Disability (2018). The Action Plan outlines the plans the university has for establishing its own Diversity & Inclusion Office, as well as other diversity policies. Because the D&I Office is seen as an important step to actualising diversity policies, there is room in the plans for change based on the guidance of the Office once it is established. The plan for Students with a Performance Disability mostly focusses on inclusion of students with performance disabilities, which reaches a bit outside the scope of the research; however, it still reveals somewhat how the university approaches inclusion, as well as gives insight into how the university at least considers international students as part of their policies for students with disabilities.

### *Othering*

Groningen is hiring an Ombudsperson. In addition to having someone to handle reports of misconduct, the university would also like to create approximately six advocacy groups,<sup>22</sup> which would operate independently and for which participation would elicit remuneration (2021). What these advocacy groups will be able to do explicitly is unclear based on the contents of the Action Plan.

In the Policy Plan for Students with a Performance Disability, they mention that students have their own expectations about the accessibility services the university offers and that they would like to match the level of services provided to what is expected by students (2018). It suggests that the university has or (more likely) would like to gather input from students to get ideas for what services to provide (Ibid.).

### *Third Spaces*

In addition to the advocacy groups which would operate independently, the university would like to install an advisory committee and an external board of trustees to oversee the

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<sup>22</sup> The groups they listed as examples were: LGBTQ+, first generation staff/students, people from minority/cultural minority groups, staff/students with different abilities, and young researchers and staff.

development, implementation, and revision of diversity initiatives (Ibid.). The stated aim is to maintain impartiality in decisions pertaining to diversity. As written, it would embody the principle of collaboration with individuals and groups outside of university administration.

### *Cultural Competences*

The language of the Diversity Action Plan is particularly couched in the linguistics of Cultural Competences. There are frequent mentions of the value of diversity and on the benefits it can provide (2021, pp. 1, 2, 5, 6). Interestingly, while the language appears frequently in the first half of the document, it is hardly visible in the rest of the 13 pages. In terms of activities, the university offers a Training and Support page, which offers trainings on intercultural communication and other Liberal diversity themes. They would also like to reach 33% of full professors being female. They mention wanting to work toward this goal “with attention to intersectionality”, but it is not explained (Ibid., p. 6). What do they mean by intersectionality? By paying attention to it? Without further explanation in the document, it is difficult to understand what they mean.

### *Synthesis of findings*

The language of the University Action Plan, especially the motivation for implementing diversity policies, is highly centred on providing benefits to the university (Ibid.). While the advocacy groups and external board of trustees are promising, they may fail to have much influence due to the lack of an explicit mandate. It seems here there exists a desire to include non-administrators in the decision-making process, following decolonial theory, but Groningen may leave the influence of these groups undefined because this approach to diversity differs from the Liberal viewpoints which seemed to inform their motivations for increasing diversity and offering the workshops and training courses on diversity. Additionally, the establishment of an external board of trustees also seems like the implementation of a Third Spaces concept - collaboration - within a Liberal administrative framework, so it may be structurally difficult to maintain the collaborative nature of the idea.



## **-Chapter 6: Findings (Diversity-related activities)**

### *Introduction*

This chapter analyses the conceptualisations of diversity at universities through their engagement in diversity-related activities, through relevant documents. Policies are intended to inform the actions undertaken by universities, but the activities engaged in may differ from what is expressed in policies. This can be especially true in instances in which activities are undertaken by third parties, which some documents in the study cover.

## Utrecht University

### *Introduction*

This section addresses the question of how diversity conceptualisations are expressed at Utrecht through their activities. The documents which represent diversity activities at Utrecht are: Inappropriate Behaviour (n.d.h), Accessible Academia (Accessible Academia, n.d.), and Netwerk USP Inclusief (n.d.i). The page on Inappropriate Behaviour is a newer addition to Utrecht's website and it makes clear that the university is strongly committed to handling cases of discrimination. Accessible Academia is a project started through funding from Utrecht University to support students and staff with disabilities, but its website and operations are independent. Netwerk USP Inclusief is an association for university staff with disabilities, although the page is only available in Dutch.

### *Othering*

Utrecht has a reporting system for inappropriate behaviour (n.d.h), centred on discrimination and harassment. This service, run by their Ombudsperson, is extended to both current and former students and staff. The language of the web page Inappropriate Behaviour (n.d.h) does not suggest particular theoretical underpinnings of diversity, but in practice demonstrates Utrecht seeks to address Othering by handling cases of discrimination. They also granted the funding necessary to start up Accessible Academia, which grounds their theory of disability and intersectionality in works<sup>23</sup> by Alison Kafer (2013) and Kimberle Crenshaw (2015). They are an advocacy and networking group for disabled people and allies, providing (un)solicited feedback and policy advice to universities about accessibility. Netwerk USP Inclusief is specific to Utrecht and is meant for disabled staff, although their emphasis is on employees who speak Dutch (n.d.i).

### *Third Spaces*

Accessible Academia demonstrates how to make spaces more inclusive by making their website more accessible. This includes, in addition to the website being available in both Dutch and English, options to enlarge text and make the pages high contrast for heightened readability (Accessible Academia, n.d.). This also sets an example for universities visiting their pages about what resources can make them more accessible by integrating these features

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<sup>23</sup> They have additional sources as well, but only including what seemed to be the most applicable to the topic discussed.

into their website. They also openly profess that they are intersectional. Within their explanation, they offer “we follow Alison Kafer’s ‘crip’ approach to upset the binaries between disabled/ able-bodied/able-minded, and the sick/healthy” (Ibid., n.d., ‘Intersectionality’), which is in line with the decolonial position that backgrounds are not limited to immutable and insurmountable differences between people (Gebrial, 2018). The organisation seems to be free to maintain a critical view of the university, as well. Their Twitter account made a post directly aimed at university life at University Utrecht, for which they appear to have received no backlash:

Image 2: Accessible Academia et al.’s Utrecht University Bingo Card

([https://twitter.com/AccessibleAc/status/1553286284017340419?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Eembeddedtimeline%7Ctwterm%5Escreenshot%3AAccessibleAc%7Ctwcon%5Es1](https://twitter.com/AccessibleAc/status/1553286284017340419?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Eembeddedtimeline%7Ctwterm%5Escreenshot%3AAccessibleAc%7Ctwcon%5Es1))



### *Cultural Competences*

Nothing to report.

### *Synthesis of findings*

The instalment of an ombudsperson to address discrimination is more reactive, but shows commitment to creating a more inclusive environment (n.d.h). It would be reassuring to see the extent to which Utrecht ensures that their ombudsperson is equipped to handle issues pertaining to othering on the grounds of, for example, race, gender, or a combination of the two. Information about what Netwerk USP Inclusief does is limited, and while they may be welcoming to employees who do not speak Dutch, it is clear that their website and activities are intended for Dutch-speakers. Utrecht demonstrates a willingness to support decolonial organisations by supporting Accessible Academia. Interestingly, Accessible Academia maintains an independent status, rather than integrating into Utrecht University's organisational structure. There is a real possibility that the institutionalisation of initiatives can limit their success because they can be observed and moderated by the institution, so allowing Accessible Academia to maintain independence could help the organisation maintain its critical edge, which can in turn help Utrecht maintain accountability.

## **Amsterdam University**

### *Introduction*

This section addresses the question of how diversity conceptualisations are expressed at Amsterdam through their activities. The documents which represent diversity activities at Amsterdam are: Global Exchange Programme (n.d.d), Building Accessibility (2022), and the Academic Diversity Programme (n.d.a; Multininclude, n.d.). This portion of the Global Exchange Programme focusses on the opportunities afforded to students of Amsterdam University. Building Accessibility is a page outlining the ways in which Amsterdam's campuses have been made accessible for students and staff who may need physical accommodations. Currently, the page is operating as a contact page, asking visitors to email the university to get specifics about their accommodation efforts. The Academic Diversity Programme (n.d.a) is a project started by a student group, Amsterdam United. The webpage on the university website outlined details of the programme, but is currently inaccessible; details about the operation of the programme is available through an external site, Multininclude, where a transcript of an interview with a member of Amsterdam United was uploaded.

### *Othering*

Amsterdam has a page about accessibility and mentions that they are striving for more of it on their various campuses (2022). The Global Exchange Programme includes information about options available to Amsterdam students (n.d.d). Importantly, it connects to the Global Ambassador Programme, which in addition to promoting the university, offers students a chance to collaborate in diversity-themed activities, as well as provide a more accurate representation of the experience of studying abroad to prospective students. While the Academic Diversity Programme is about activism and structural change, the page adds that it is for all students who feel left out at the university (n.d.a; n.b. The page is currently unavailable).

### *Third Spaces*

Through an interview with Multininclude (n.d.), Amsterdam United, who created and manage the Academic Diversity Programme shared the literature of their theoretical framework: Crenshaw (Intersectionality), Ahmed (sense of belonging and being included), De Oliveira Andreotti (Decolonisation), Wekker et al. (doing diversity at Amsterdam

University), and Wolff (study success).<sup>24</sup> The Academic Diversity Programme provides mentees with both mentors to help immerse them in university life, but also offers monthly meetings for discussions about diversity-related topics. It is still in operation by Amsterdam United after Amsterdam expanded the programme to cover all faculties at the university. Part of the expansion involved placing Amsterdam United under the supervision of the Chief Diversity Officer though, which may have an inhibiting effect on their activities (Multinlude, n.d.).

### *Cultural Competences*

Nothing to report. This contrasts heavily with the other documents of Amsterdam to this point, which have at least maintained a perspective firmly rooted in Cultural Competences.

### *Synthesis of findings*

The expansion of the Academic Diversity Programme and allowing Amsterdam United to maintain their management of the programme shows that Amsterdam University is willing to work with decolonial groups. But by institutionalising Amsterdam United's programme, it is also possible that they have deliberately placed the organisation in a position where their activities can be monitored and possibly inhibited, since they now fall under the purview of the Chief Diversity Officer. Based on the documents found for Amsterdam, there is a rather significant disconnect between the language and conceptualisation of diversity between their policies and their activities - while in the policies there was a significant presence of both cultural competences-derived language and approaches to diversity, here they seem completely absent.

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<sup>24</sup> The works were written in a way that suggests that there was a bibliography, but the full names of the works by these authors was not available on the interview's web page any of the times it was visited.

## **Groningen University**

### *Introduction*

This section addresses the question of how diversity conceptualisations are expressed at Groningen through their activities. The documents which represent diversity activities at Groningen are: PhD Support (2022c) and A Woman's paths to leadership (2022d). The PhD Support page includes resources aimed at helping (mostly) PhD students with both academic and psychological issues. The majority of services offered are workshops. The page also links to the course A Woman's paths to leadership, which is a course designed specifically for female PhD students to help them be promoted to management positions.

### *Othering*

The main activities are all workshops, which are shown to be ineffective at helping reduce bias and discrimination. Among the workshops, however, is one titled "The Portable Profession", aimed at supporting the partners of people who need to frequently move for work (2022c, no page). This workshop is aimed at people typically marginalised in labour dynamics, which is in the spirit of countering Othering.

### *Third Spaces*

There are two courses pertaining to Dutch Culture: Discovering the Dutch, which is a workshop, and Discovering the Dutch: Personal Training Programme, in which the trainer is intended to learn about the personal perspective of participants and fill the personal gaps in their understanding (n.b.). While the former sounds like a possible example of cultural assimilation, the latter may emphasise more cultural immersion, since the background of the participants are part of the learning process. However, it could also be the same content as the workshop but with more personal engagement.

### *Cultural Competences*

Many of the courses offered in PhD support are diversity-related: Communicative Skills for Managers of an International Team, How to deal with intercultural differences in your team, Train the trainer, and Inclusive leadership; there is also both an Intercultural Competence Learning Lab (ICLL) and an Intercultural Competence Testing programme (2022c). The majority of activities are thus workshops and based on Cultural Competence principles. A Woman's Paths to Leadership (2022d) may help individual women earn

promotions, but does not seem to be aimed at fundamentally changing the systems which necessitate giving women extra support to enable them to be considered for these promotions.

### *Synthesis of findings*

It is clear that the university has made significant effort and attention to supporting PhD students; currently, a majority of that support is workshops. When it comes to diversity, even sources from a Cultural Competences viewpoint argue that workshops are not effective at improving diversity. The programme to empower women does not demonstrate having any intersectional underpinnings, which will likely result in limiting the benefits of the programme to primarily the most privileged women in the course.



## **-Chapter 7: Conclusion**

### **Summary of Findings**

The influx of students and staff from diverse backgrounds has led to a universal desire to accommodate diversity at the university level. Economic and moral goals have contributed to implementation of diversity programmes - diversity takes multiple forms based on what conceptualisation of diversity is used, e.g. Liberal or decolonial. The ways universities conceptualise diversity as expressed through their public communication, internal policies, and activities were reviewed in the preceding three chapters and results will be discussed holistically in this section. This includes a comparison between the universities.

Generally, all three universities used a combination of the three conceptualizations of diversity - Othering, Third Spaces and Cultural Competences. However, they each presented a Cultural Competences bias in their public-facing documents. This bias remained apparent even though the approaches to public communication varied between the universities. Policy documents have more instances of Othering and Third Spaces than public communication documents, but Cultural Competences form a consistent part of both the rationale for policies, as well as specific policy decisions. Documents from third party organisations, which appeared mostly in the universities' activities documents section (at Utrecht and Amsterdam), were instead centred on Othering and Third Spaces rather than Cultural Competences.

All three universities show an interest in listening to input from their student/staff populations, but specific information about how this would be implemented is lacking for all. This may be due to a lack of theoretical basis for making institutional changes. Devoting more resources to learning about decolonial conceptualisations of diversity, such as Othering and Third Spaces may be advantageous to a strong theoretical foundation for implementing these changes. The same appears to be true of intersectionality - all three universities mention intersectionality in at least one type of document, but the documents made by the universities do not provide a coherent definition or demonstrate implementation of intersectionality in their policies. Documents produced by third parties consistently cited Crenshaw's works about intersectionality to ground their use of the term in a theoretical framework.

Utrecht chose to allow Accessible Academia what appears to be full autonomy, but they offer “(un)solicited advice” (Accessible Academia, ‘Advocacy’, n.d.). There does not seem to be a way for them to make reports or requests that necessitate action; therefore, their advice can be ignored. The power is still in the university’s hands with regard to policy and implementation of the advice.

Amsterdam's idea to institutionalise the Academic Diversity Programme allowed the programme to expand to all campuses, but it also limited the grassroots nature of the programme and Amsterdam United itself, who still manage the project, but under the auspices of the Chief Diversity Officer. This enables the university to monitor, and if desired, control the operations of Amsterdam United by institutionalising them.

Groningen wants to implement interest groups, but they did not outline what these groups would do. By default, they could end up like Netwerk USP Inclusief at Utrecht, which is less about influencing diversity policy at the university and more about allowing university employees to connect as members of the target group (in this case, Disabled staff (using the definition from Accessible Academia)). They also want the advisory board of external candidates, which places the concept of working collaboratively into a Liberal organisational structure.

After reviewing the data for the different types of documents a common trait among the three universities has emerged: namely, a mixed approach across all document types and universities. There is ambiguity in the types of policies and actions to be taken which could be a consequence of this lack of coherence. They combine Liberal and Decolonial approaches that are incompatible with each other. A mixed bag approach of grabbing whatever concepts are easily available may be the underlying problem in implementation of procedurally consistent diversity practices at the universities. Workshops are commonly offered as an option for a Liberal conceptualisation of diversity, but further investigation reveals that Liberals do not find workshops to be effective at addressing diversity-related issues, namely discrimination and openness to different perspectives. Decolonial approaches to diversity emphasise listening to affected groups to make changes, and universities show an interest in doing so. However, if the policies are left ambiguous, it is far easier to ignore advice given by target groups than to work collaboratively with them. Furthermore, the idea of how to handle

diversity in the Liberal camp is through diversity management, which is a top-down approach (from which ideas such as workshops emerge).

The rationale behind listening to employees, students, and external groups is that they will be able to work collaboratively on policies which impact them. This involves a relationship which is more egalitarian than top-down. There is no structure in place to show the university how to apply the idea of listening to students and staff and how to use the feedback. Their policies are currently open-ended; the people implementing policies at universities are free to adapt policies, but lack a procedure they can follow or criteria to evaluate their implementations. An example of this is the impetus of all three universities to do something to listen to students: the policies declare intent, but how universities can, should, or will implement or utilise this feedback is absent in the policies.

Beyond the policies involving listening to students and staff, the mixing of Liberal and Decolonial theories of diversity may be interfering with consistent and effective policies overall. Utrecht and Amsterdam demonstrated more of an alignment with Cultural Competences in their policy documents, while their activities favoured Othering and Third Spaces. Some of the activities documents reviewed were from grassroots organisations, which cited decolonial sources in their theoretical frameworks. Groningen showed a strong bias toward Cultural Competences with their reliance on workshops. Groningen had less diversity-related infrastructure at the time of the study, which may explain this. Documents produced directly by the universities at times mention intersectionality, but the concept was never clearly defined nor demonstrably implemented in policy decisions. Conversely, grassroots organisations cite Crenshaw's conceptualisation of intersectionality in their activities-related documents - Toolbox Diversity in Education, Accessible Academia, and the Academic Diversity Programme. Without a theoretical understanding of intersectionality, universities may be misrepresenting to others and even themselves the extent to which their policies address people with multiple marginalised identities.

By not committing to focussing on one idea or camp of diversity, the universities are unable to delve deep enough into the concepts, values, and discourse as they develop policies. This results in ambiguity in policy construction which will inhibit implementation, and a lack of cohesiveness in the diversity programme overall.

### *Limitations*

At the time of the publication of the research, with few exceptions the documents collected were produced within the last two years. It is not possible to assess the implementation of much of the policies and activities because they have not been put into effect yet. This will likely not be possible for another couple of years, especially since policies can change between their conceptualisation and their implementation. The research was, however, able to focus on the theoretical underpinnings that went into the policies that have been created, which was the goal of the research. More research, likely years later, will be needed to be able to assess both how theoretical underpinnings have affected diversity practices and the extent to which activities and public communication kept in line with policies made within the scope of this research. Currently, the magnitude of the changes universities are considering are on a large enough scale to suggest that the state of university practices are in flux. As such, this research offers a snapshot of universities in this state at a particular point in time.

### *Advice to Universities*

All three of the universities focussed on more than just intake and making minor changes, both of which are backed by literature (C.F. Dobbin & Kalev, 2016; Gebrial, 2018; Holmwood, 2018). Improving the experiences of the people within the organisation is more important, and if possible, removing the barriers of entry for students. This can involve working with external organisations: Utrecht started Accessible Academia, Amsterdam collaborated with Amsterdam United and the Diversity Committee, and Groningen intends to create a board of trustees with external candidates, which contribute to more effective diversity initiatives (Andrews, 2018; Richardson, 2018). All universities state they would like to make use of input from their students and staff, as well.

What typically seems to limit the success, or at least the concrete nature of many promising policies, seems to be a lack of a theoretical framework for diversity. Reading about diversity with a deep analysis of the origins of inequity and ways in which they can create blind spots without consideration for the relationship between multiple identities (Crenshaw, 2015) can help universities both develop a more in-depth plan for policies involving working with and integrating feedback from other groups, as well as adding more layers to

their policies, such as for the Gender Equality Plan, to help their policies reach the least represented minorities within target groups.

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