YASEMIN KARAKAŞOĞLU

INTERCULTURALITY AND DIVERSITY
MANAGEMENT AT UNIVERSITIES:
THEORETICAL CLAIMS AND PRACTICAL CHALLENGES

Humboldt Ferngespräche – Discussion Paper No. 3 – August 2014
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Summary
The topic Interculturality and Diversity Management at universities represents clearly an area of conflict between theory and practice. Using the example of the University of Bremen, Prof. Karakaşoğlu elucidates which challenges the University, as a place of intellectual contention and acquisition of intercultural competences, has to take on. Which instruments and actions can help the individual to build up a critical understanding of Diversity and Differences, by reflecting the own cultural self-conception in a pluralist society? How can Interculturality and Diversity Management be implemented as an essential part of the institutional self-understanding in a participatory process, reaching all levels, in order to face discrimination, guarantee equal opportunities and recognize diversity.

The present text is based on the keynote speech on Humboldt Ferngespräche, held at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin on 29 April 2014.
DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT AS A DRIVER OF INTERCULTURAL OPENING

Diversity management, a concept with roots in the American civil rights movement, was initially seen as a strategy to counter discrimination against black Americans, and later became an approach to establishing equal opportunities and equal rights for all citizens (equity approach).

Due to the specific focus here on interculturality and internationality within the context of diversity management, not all of the dimensions that could have been looked at within this approach, for example (dis-)ability, gender, social class, age or sexual orientation, are given equal consideration. The author is aware that this somewhat narrows the perspective on diversity management, nevertheless she sees herself as a representative of an “intercultural perspective” that does not define culture as merely ethnic, national or religious, but rather views those “cultures” as intersectionally interwoven with other dimensions of diversity. It should be made clear that these dimensions do not exist per se, but that relationships of social power and domination are also reflected in them (with regard, for example, to the traditional triad of gender, ethnicity and social class).

In Germany, diversity management is today associated – not least because of the connotations of the word “management” – with control processes in the field of economics, which has adapted this principle for optimising corporate leadership for its own purposes to serve as a key to commercial success. To date, this approach has rarely been seen as a suitable principle in the educational context\(^3\). A strategy that focuses on optimising economic output by means of improved personnel management (business approach), is clearly not compatible with the educational ethos of creating equal opportunities through education or the transmission of knowledge, including knowledge for its own sake rather than for utilitarian ends.

However, if the demand related to the equal opportunities and equal rights approach is brought to the forefront – to optimise the general institutional conditions that allow individuals to develop the potential arising from their “differentness” – the connection to educational institutions becomes clear. These institutions are currently changing their pedagogical approach to difference, from compensating for supposed deficits in individuals using measures aimed at specific groups to strengthening their resources and potentials as a part of operations as usual, which must come to treat the diversity of the institution’s members as the norm. This is a key characteristic of intercultural opening\(^4\).

If diversity management at universities is to be more than a superficial and promotional event that serves as a “simplistic glorification of diversity”, it must work towards ensuring that diverse diversity or “super diversity”\(^5\) is perceived and accepted as the norm by everyone.

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in the institution\textsuperscript{6}. This involves a shift in perspective from a target-group-oriented (often with a connotation of deficiency) minority perspective to a diversity approach that is resource-oriented and spans all target groups\textsuperscript{7}. Diversity management thereby becomes a deliberately planned (strategic) approach to dealing with diversity through the interaction of top-down and bottom-up measures that are jointly developed and supported in participatory processes by the members of the institution\textsuperscript{8}.

In terms of a broader understanding of “interculturality”, it is about using diversity management to make institutions interculturally open to the potentials of their diverse members, or in other words: “intercultural opening becomes the goal and diversity management the vehicle with which to achieve it”\textsuperscript{9}.

\textbf{CURRENT REQUIREMENTS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INTERCULTURAL OPENING THROUGH DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT AT UNIVERSITIES}

Diversity management at universities is not a case of pure altruism on the part of the institutions. There are two, only seemingly contradictory, driving forces behind the adoption of the approach: in the context of demographic change, excellence and international competition, economic/utilitarian interests dominate. In the context of educational equality and anti-discrimination it is about supporting individuals and allowing them to develop their full potential. But economic/utilitarian interests combine with educational/ethical ones in talk about

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\item\textsuperscript{6} Allemann-Ghionda, Cristina: Orte und Worte der Diversität – gestern und heute, in: Allemann-Ghionda, Cristina; Bukow, Wolf-Dietrich (ed.): Orte der Diversität. Formate, Arrangements und Inszenierungen, VS Verlag, Wiesbaden 2011, p. 31
\item\textsuperscript{7} Allemann-Ghionda, Cristina: Orte und Worte der Diversität – gestern und heute, in: Allemann-Ghionda, Cristina; Bukow, Wolf-Dietrich (ed.): Orte der Diversität. Formate, Arrangements und Inszenierungen, VS Verlag, Wiesbaden 2011, p. 29
\item\textsuperscript{8} See Wiltzius (2011), p. 33
\item\textsuperscript{9} ibid., p. 22
\end{thebibliography}
discovering the institution’s “blind spots”\textsuperscript{10} with regard to the potential of their members, for example the “hidden” resources represented by those who may until now, have been regarded as “headaches” – individuals from immigrant families, or who have no Abitur (high-school graduation certificate), or who have some form of impairment.

Diversity management is also linked to the topic of internationality and the international mobility of students. While this connection seems to be taken for granted in the Anglo-Saxon world (cf. UK Council for International Students Affairs 2014), German universities only become aware of it when they witness academics who were educated here emigrating or remigrating abroad, and when they recognise that it is essential to train students and young researchers in “intercultural competence” as a key qualification on the global job market\textsuperscript{11}.

The Excellence Initiative of the German federal and state governments, which calls to universities to define their institutional strategy for the future of the university as a whole and incorporate new governance structures, also represents an opportunity for transferring the “diversity” management concept to the university sector\textsuperscript{12}. Diversity management, with a decidedly anti-discriminatory approach, can thus become a distinguishing feature that is visible on the international

\textsuperscript{10} The author is aware that this wording, in the context of sensitivity towards diversity, also has the potential to be stigmatising, because “blind spots” is a synonym for the refusal to see something, and a conscious and thereby ignorant refusal to acknowledge facts, whilst at the same time constituting a dimension of (dis-)ability.

\textsuperscript{11} For a critical assessment of “intercultural competence” see Castro Varela, Maria Do Mar: Interkulturelles Training? Eine Problematisierung, in: Darowska, Lucyna; Lüttenberg, Thomas; Machold, Claudia (ed.): Hochschule als transkultureller Raum? Kultur, Bildung und Differenz in der Universität, transcript-Verlag, Bielefeld 2010

The conflicting demands of educational equality, anti-discrimination and the selection of the best

Currently, universities in Germany accept about 50% of high school graduates each year. Universities have thus long since left the niche of “elite education” for top positions in research, administration, education and culture, industry and business, and have become a primary societal locus of education and training. In this role as one of a society’s important loci of education and training, and in light of the decreasing birth rate, universities have a greater social mandate than ever before to help as many young people as possible complete their studies successfully by developing their specific personal potential. At the same time, universities face the task of bringing their commitment to the Humboldtian tradition of providing academic knowledge for its own sake rather than for utilitarian ends into balance with market interests (employability being the key word here) in training specialised workers for industry and trade; such interests are also articulated by the students themselves (in particular in the pre-professional fields of business, law, and teacher education).

Then there is the potential conflict between those aims and the principle of the selection of the best, which is likewise anchored in

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16 Mecheril; Klingler (2010), p. 85
17 See Mecheril; Klingler (2010)
the university’s understanding of itself as an institution and that is most clearly expressed in the cultural emphasis on differentiation and hierarchical evaluation that is integral to the institution. This supplements and strengthens the school-based selection mechanisms that already exist upstream from universities. While schools already to a great extent follow the principle of selection by socioeconomic class rather than the meritocratic principle of selection based on “performance”, university as institution is only beginning to do so, for example by seeking to compensate for disadvantages and thereby establish equal opportunities. Relevant comparative studies of performance indicate that in Germany in particular, compared with other OECD countries, social capital or a lack (for example due to immigration status) of the cultural capital required to meet the demands the monocultural and monolingual institution that is school are implicitly included in the evaluation whenever student performance and potential are assessed. The credo of wanting to open universities to capable candidates who have not taken the conventional path to university (as in the “open university” concept) notwithstanding, so far only 2% of students enter university by routes other than the Abitur (high-school graduation certificate), and most university students are not the first generation in their families to attend college. There is, then, a gulf between the claim and the reality. Studies following Tinto (1993) show that compatibility between one’s own lifestyle and the way of life required in the academic milieu is constitutive for both access to studies and academic success. The fact that twice as many international students as “native” students abandon their studies is another indication that the claim of international and intercultural opening, the “worldwide competition for the best minds”, and the reality of the attention given to the general

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19 Kreft; Leichsenring (2012), pp. 146f
conditions necessary for this at universities diverge markedly from one another.

As a consequence of the obligation to be vigilant for all forms of discrimination, universities are charged with taking a proactive approach to discrimination. Ongoing self-reflection by the institution about its own inherent mechanisms of power and exclusion is closely related to that duty. In this regard, the diversity approach would also be an “analytic-empirical statement about the effects exerted by differences, identities and affiliations, and diversity is at the same time a normative-regulative approach that investigates and seeks opportunities to recognise differences, identities and affiliations (in economic contexts as a means for maximising benefit, but in educational contexts more as a means unto itself)”\textsuperscript{20}.

With an eye to conveying the advantages of diversity management to both institution and individuals, diversity management can also be seen as a way to convince sceptics that it “links the normative orientation toward educational equality with the generation of advantages for the entire organisation”\textsuperscript{21, 22}.

\textbf{INTERCULTURAL OPENING AS AN OBJECTIVE}

If diversity management is a way to achieve intercultural opening, then we need to clarify just what that means. Current approaches to intercultural education address the structural and institutional conditions under which education occurs and point to the need to change general institutional conditions in such a way that people of different (social, family, linguistic, cultural, intellectual) learning-related backgrounds receive the same educational opportunities within the

\textsuperscript{20} Mecheril; Klingler (2010), p. 105.
\textsuperscript{21} ibid.
\textsuperscript{22} See also Leicht-Scholten (2012), pp. 8-9
system. In order to “enable academic educational processes”, in this context target-group-specific measures should also be viewed as useful and as a way to supplement the intercultural approach. This applies as well for approaches in which scholarships are set up for specific target groups, such as socioeconomically disadvantaged young people, or in which extra support is provided for developing academic language skills in German or English to students whose parents received little formal education. However, such measures have no sustained effect on normal institutional processes or on the pattern of instructor or administra-
tor attitudes. This must be changed by means of intercultural opening processes at universities, for example by requiring “intercultural competence” on the part of university employees (as described in Fischer 2006). If the approach used is to be grounded in a theory of recognition and reflective of social changes resulting from migration, intercultural opening must also be expressed in active efforts by the university to increase the percentage of personnel at all ranks that has a background involving migration and/or has intercultural competence.

Intercultural opening also refers to a strategic orientation on the part of the institution that is expressed in its general mission, and that “is specified in the respective goals and bindingly obligates the organisation to intercultural opening as an across-the-board task”. This alludes to a consciously designed process “that enables (self-)reflec-
tive learning and transformational processes by and between different individuals, lifestyles and types of organisations, by means of which barriers to access and exclusionary mechanisms in the organisations

23 Ingrid Gogolin, Marianne Krüger-Potratz and Mark Terkessidis deal with this topic. Terkessidis speaks of “radical intercultural opening” of the institution requiring an entirely new type of orient-
tation. Terkessidis says that the core of the institutions must be examined to determine whether their spaces, central ideas, rules, routines, leadership styles and distribution of resources, as well as their communication with the outside world and the attitudes of their key players, are fair and effective with regard to diversity.
to be opened are dismantled and recognition is made possible”

The goal is for the university as an institution to adapt its structures, methods, teaching and learning content and modes of interaction to its members, which are heterogeneous in many regards. This leads to the reorganisation, improvement, development and evaluation of decision-making processes in all areas of policy-making and operations at universities. Here as well, intercultural opening can be seen to be an across-the-board task for university policy-making.

Mecheril and Klingler consider a key task to be the development of “difference-sensitive approaches to action” that demonstrate awareness of the tension between emphasising difference, determining its relevance for the university as an educational locus, the associated risk of entrenching these differences by focusing on them, and the need to see differences in order to uncover and combat disadvantaging processes. They recommend a “reflective approach to dealing with differences and social identities” that is not limited to the consideration of individual categories of difference with regard to conditions of access, types of teaching and learning, and advising and guidance services, but also reflects continuously on the new lines of difference that new offerings for specific target groups generate. From this perspective, an overarching goal with regard to students is a structural and content-related focus on “carrying along” as many of them as possible, increasing their satisfaction with their studies, and enabling them to successfully pursue and complete their study programmes in light of their different starting conditions and requirements vis-à-vis the institution.

26 ibid., p. 83
28 Schröer (2007). p. 82.
EXAMPLE OF A FRAMEWORK FOR UNIVERSITY POLICY AND PRACTICE WITH REGARD TO INTERCULTURALITY AND DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT: THE EXPERIENCE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF BREMEN

In the past, intercultural opening has for universities been primarily a set of requirements related to their work with “international” or “foreign” students as guests of the German university system. Thus the “National Code of Conduct on Foreign Students at German Universities” that a number of German universities signed in 2009 provides specific instructions for university offices that deal primarily with foreign students. Subsequently, many universities have addressed, in a more nuanced fashion, the requirement that they engage in increased intercultural competences. Additional policy measures in the area of immigration, like the Immigration Act of 2005, which provides the option for foreign graduates of German universities to remain for up to a maximum period of one year after completion of their studies in order to look for work, extended in 2012 to 18 months\(^{30}\), as well as the waiver of the individual priority review requirement (2007), have contributed to a shift in the way international students are viewed. In the past, they were seen as temporary guests of the university system and future ambassadors for Germany in their countries of origin, whereas now international students have become a desirable target group of potential immigrants.

Universities are thus becoming new players in immigration policy as magnets for migration and drivers of integration for the qualified professionals that are in so much demand on the German employment market\(^{31}\). Universities thus face the challenge of improving the way they plan, guide and provide services for transnational academic migration without thereby losing sight of the fact that historical

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\(^{31}\) Ibid., p. 52
immigration patterns have already created an interculturally diverse population of native students.

Motivated by cross-university programmes of the DAAD such as PROFIN and PROFIS, the foundation is being laid for a closer connection between increasing internationality and an intercultural orientation on the part of universities. Thus the international offices of many universities have provided very significant encouragement for intercultural opening. This is true at the University of Bremen as well, where examples of this work include projects and measures carried out within the scope and context of the International Office such as peer mentoring and peer coaching programmes (e.g., Compass International), offerings to increase student intercultural competence (Certificate in Intercultural Competence), projects to orient newcomers and build a welcoming culture (newcomer internet portal, freshers’ breakfast as a welcoming and informational event at the start of the semester), projects to manage the transition from school to university and from university to employment (student advising, career centre, round table on employment market access for international students), language support programmes for international students (German as a foreign language, writing workshops, English) as well as projects to create opportunities in which international students, students from immigrant families and German students can come together (e.g., studentservice@school).

From the perspective of the University of Bremen, the task of giving more space to the university’s linguistic-cultural diversity as a central academic resource and as a defined realm of activity in which diversity, interculturality and internationality become unified, and of enabling everyone to experience that diversity as a fundamental feature of the institution, is especially essential to the goal of comprehensive intercultural opening. The cultural and social capital within the university milieu must be recognised, and individuals must be given the opportunity to further develop that capital and make productive use of it both at university and with regard to expanded
professional prospects. At the University of Bremen, this objective is being pursued primarily by means of the “Academic Multilingualism” pilot project. This project was established at the Foreign Language Centre in winter semester 2011-2012 and recognised as exemplary by the DAAD, which awarded it the “European Language Seal” in 2014. Here, students who enter university with relevant (native) language skills have an opportunity to expand their academic language skills in their fields not only in English or German but also in Turkish, Russian and Polish, the three immigrant languages that are most strongly represented among students in Bremen. Attendance of the courses is free and, because it is part of General Studies, also academically relevant. The provision of this increasingly popular programme is not a generous gesture; instead, it is in the interest of the university itself, which wants to maintain or further develop its members’ linguistic potential in order to continue building up international relationships.

**INTERCULTURAL OPENING AS A POLICY OF RECOGNITION AND A SIGN OF QUALITY**

The University of Bremen views the conflation of internationalisation and intercultural opening as a firm component of its diversity management strategy and therefore as a way to further defining its profile. The practical measures involved in the implementation of the strategy also have a symbolic political value, as well as communicating a meaningful statement. This is evident in the example of the project enter science – for students from immigrant families set up at the University of Bremen, which aims to “... glean more knowledge about the target group, to expand their academic opportunities, and to encourage them to explore the issues regarding academic vocations and

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their own personal and professional perspectives. Furthermore, the diversity of the student body should be made visible, while the university environment should be made sensitive to the target group’s specific needs, questions and potentials”\(^{33}\).

The general strategy emphasises the anti-discriminatory, democratic/humanistic aspects of diversity sensitisation. The approach can be principally characterised as intersectional, since many of the measures link different diversity dimensions (enter science, for example, links “immigrant family” with “gender”). After a pilot phase, the projects that have initially been implemented as target group measures should be successively transferred into the general regulatory structures of the university. Guiding the diversity concept of the University of Bremen are the principles laid down in the Diversity Strategy adopted in 2012: anti-discrimination, equal opportunities, support, and communication that utilises empowerment and networking options\(^{34}\).

The responsibility for this issue at management level is connected to the objective that: a) in combination with the already existing guiding principle of “internationality”, it will be easier for interculturality and diversity management to take on more concrete form and become more widely accepted at the university; b) it will be possible to secure the acceptance and sustainability of successful projects by consolidating and integrating them into an all-encompassing university diversity strategy (i.e. from the project to the concept level); and c) that this will facilitate the creation of university management mechanisms and new communication structures between the relevant central and decentralised groups and actors via agreements on binding responsibilities.

At the University of Bremen, the relatively strong top-down


\(^{34}\) http://www.uni-bremen.de/fileadmin/user_upload/chancengleichheit/Uploads_Diversity/Grundlagenpapier_DiversityStrategie_UniBremen_Juni12.pdf
signal of appointing a specific vice rector for this area is joined by a participatory bottom-up approach. An initiative called “Diversity” is collaborating on the further development of strategic considerations and concrete measures, as well as developing relevant steps for implementation. The initiative is made up of members from: all staff levels in different departments – which should represent the breadth of study courses on offer at the university (biology/chemistry, law, educational sciences); representatives from key areas of administration; internal interest groups and self-help groups at the university (such as IG-Handicap); advisory groups; and the rectorate, represented by the vice rector and the rector. In the spirit of an authentic, interculturally open, diversity-sensitive climate at the University of Bremen, the initiative examines existing institutional structures and target-group-specific (support-) opportunities, while the departments develop new resource-oriented approaches to supporting diversity and equal opportunities. These approaches are then tested to see if they are suitable for transferral to other departments, taking the individual departmental cultures into account. In this way, the three departments involved have developed their own diversity profiles. The approaches in the biology/chemistry and law departments clearly reflect the goal of internationalisation. In both cases, this concerns furthering the academic success of international students through tandem learning, monitoring the tandems via surveys, and expanding dual degree programmes with international partners. The educational sciences department has turned its research profile on diversity issues into a kind of unique selling point, and it has identified improvements that need to be made to teaching staff’s practical awareness of diversity issues. Accompanying these efforts are the established university forums that encourage discussion of diversity issues throughout the university. Some such examples are the annual “Tag der Lehre“ (Day of Teaching), for the collective reflection on teaching organisation and planning, and the Semester Summit, an open forum held once each semester to allow exchange between students and the rectorate.

Alongside the measures and projects that symbolically and
practically reflect the representation of ethnic, national and cultural diversity, forums have been established to allow an internal, institution-critical debate on racism and experiences of racism. One such forum is the yearly Festival contre le Racisme organised by the AStA (General Students’ Committee) in cooperation with the vice rector. What is important here, also on the symbolic level, is that although this is a student event, the responsibility and organisation for the event is also quite visibly carried by the rectorate, a fact that in itself makes a statement of solidarity against racism. Another such forum is the Netzwerk Antidiskriminierung (Anti-discrimination network), self-organised by central advisory institutions and target group representatives. This gives those most actively involved against racism and discrimination at the University of Bremen the chance to come together to develop and decide upon on new measures and to reflect on their own work. In another example, a series of events held over four semesters with the title Diversity@uni-bremen. Exzellent und Chancengerecht?! (Diversity at the University of Bremen – excellent and offering equal opportunities?!), critically examines the university’s expressed intention to attract the best students by means of the federal government’s Excellence Initiative, to contribute to equal opportunities in education by compensating for disadvantages and offering target-group-specific support, and to develop a coherent diversity strategy. The Diversity@uni-bremen series of event includes workshops on both individual and institutional approaches to racism. The university carries out regular surveys of students, graduates and university staff with the purpose of monitoring diversity measures.

INTERCULTURALITY AND DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT: A CELEBRATION OF DIFFERENCES?
In 2013, the University of Bremen’s Kompass International programme, which aims to strengthen the self-organisation of international student groups and which regards itself as an integral element of the university’s integration concept, was awarded the title “Die internationale
Hochschule 2012” (International university 2012) by Stifterverband and the DAAD. The central focus of this programme and its main actors are the international student communities themselves, who come together under self-defined commonalities in groups that are then recognised as official bodies. Their unifying goal is both to assist newcomers at the university who feel a sense of belonging to these groups – owing to similarities of origin or other identifying factors – to find their feet within the new system and to empower them to engage in active participation. A further goal is to extend the visibility of these groups within the university and to facilitate the communication of information about their group to the university public.

The Kompass International programme was initiated at the University of Bremen just a few years ago. In addition to many other activities, the programme is instrumental in the organisation of International Day, which, now in its third year, has been established as one of the university’s major events. Here, international student communities who have come together under the umbrella of shared religious (e.g. the Islamic University Association, the Yezidi Students Association), national (e.g. the Pakistani or Indian communities), or regional (e.g. the Latin-American community) adherence, present themselves to the wider university public. Kompass International functions in alignment with the university’s overall diversity management principles of participation, networking, and activating and strengthening self-responsibility. The programme breaks with the traditional paternalistic approach of “caring” for what are seen as “needy” international and immigrant students, and instead strives to support and empower these students.

From the perspective of the current discourse on intercultural education (and following theoretical concepts of cultural studies), which offers up a self-critical view of the societal effects of “culturalisation” and “othering” through the identification of certain individuals as representatives of particular cultures, the idea of international students (or students from immigrant families) organising into “communities” could be criticised as a case of “essentialising”. Have Mecheril
and Klinger not pointed out that diversity management at universities should follow a culturally reflective approach that is characterised by “refraining from ‘celebrating difference(s)’”³⁵? When the university’s international “communities” organise the much-loved International Day, is that not a shining example of “celebrating difference(s)”? Is it true that international students’ identities are here reduced to merely illustrative examples and artefacts of their “culture of origin”? And given the fact that the majority of those attending International Day have “international origins”, are the topics of internationality and interculturality addressed on International Day seen as primarily being the concern of people with “migrant backgrounds”? In what sense does this kind of occasion support the idea of establishing interculturality as a unique selling point for the university and thus as an element that cuts across all levels and is a key dimension in the university’s role as a global player³⁶? How do efforts to promote “internationality” and events that celebrate ethnic, national and cultural diversity such as International Day weigh up against the actual instances of racism experienced by these students, both in society as well as at the university³⁷, who on this single day join in the staging of “cultural diversity” in such a carefree manner?

International Day is part of a series of self-organised, public events on the university’s annual calendar that the organising communities use to pursue their goal of getting acknowledged both as individuals and as members of specific cultural groups. In their work, these groups receive the financial and organisational support of the International Office. Each month, the different communities hold publically advertised Culture Nights. They also organise events to communicate information about their countries of origin, or about the cultural and religious elements that they feel are relevant to their identities. The

³⁵ Mecheril; Klingler (2010), p. 109
³⁶ See Karakaşoğlu (2012)
³⁷ Antidiskriminierungsstelle des Bundes (ADS) (ed.): Endbericht zum Projekt Diskriminierungsfreie Hochschule. Mit Vielfalt Wissen schaffen, Berlin 2012, p. 25
students either give talks themselves or invite external speakers. The concept is geared towards the need of international students to come together in national, ethnic or cultural communities as we-groups\(^{38}\) within a new environment. This kind of support appears to be an important part of equipping new students to meet the challenges of finding their feet at the university and meeting academic demands. Not least, joining other students in a similar situation allows these students to fortify themselves against instances of discrimination and racism that they may experience both in society and at the university. The fact that new communities of this nature are continuously being founded shows that the concept fulfils very real and existing needs.

Nobel laureate and diversity activist Amartya Sen offers a way out of the dilemma posed by the stance taken by intercultural education experts that we should refrain from “the celebration of cultural differences” and the fact that communities broadly agree that this is exactly what they want to do. He defends the basic right and the need of people to position themselves culturally and to celebrate cultural traditions\(^{39}\), but he states that all individuals should be free to choose whether or not to do so and should be given space for reflection in order to make such choices: “Cultural freedom, which I believe is essential to human dignity, should not be confused with the mere advocacy of cultural diversity. Nor does cultural freedom come from the celebration of cultural traditions to which every individual must allegedly adhere. Cultural freedom in a multicultural society means that one must first resist the knee-jerk defence of cultural heritage. Of course, it is imperative that this includes the possibility of affirming these traditions after prudent deliberation\(^{40}\).”

A university should see itself as a place that enables its staff to

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\(^{38}\) See Elwert, Georg: Nationalismus und Ethnizität. Über die Bildung von Wir- Gruppen, Berlin 1989

\(^{39}\) Allemann-Ghionda (2011), pp. 31-32

acquire the intellectual fundaments for making these deliberations, for example by gaining an intercultural qualification that does not profess to qualify one to “communicate properly with people from other cultures” but rather requires staff members to critically examine their own cultural stereotypes and to challenge the validity of these within a pluralistic society.

To aid internationality and interculturality, a university also has the task of questioning such stereotypes and assumptions in its role as a place of enlightenment, as a place that creates space for free-thinking, and as a place for the production and reproduction of collective meaning and practices. When approaching the issue of interculturality and transculturality in the framework of a university education within a pluralistic society, we should be able to expect that the education offered includes “an understanding of the contingency and relativity of cultural expectations and knows how to classify cultural certainties and cultural knowledge and to examine the historical and semantic boundaries of these. Cultural education in a pluralistic society is one that, in this sense, questions transcultural and cultural belonging.”

**CAN EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IN EDUCATION BE ACHIEVED THROUGH TARGET-GROUP SUPPORT OR MAINSTREAMING?**

It is necessary to identify particular student groups’ specific needs for funding, support or simply empowerment in order to implement measures that enable their success. These student groups may include those from educationally disadvantaged families, those for whom German is a foreign or second language, students with transnational migration experiences, students with mental or physical impairments, students whose family members need care, or students in financial

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41 See Mecheril; Klingler (2010)
42 Mecheril; Klingler (2010), p. 91
difficulty. Ideally, these measures serve the purpose of securing equal opportunities for all students despite their differing circumstances. This is an important instrument for diversity sensitisation and intercultural opening as it increases the numbers of students coming from different circumstances and living conditions. In response to the need for support articulated by the students themselves, particular courses can be offered, for example in academic writing for student teachers with German as a second language.

Funding measures that are designed to foster equal opportunities in the long term contribute to the empowerment of the target group and thus foster participation. But they do not necessarily have a lasting effect on standard procedures within the university, conditions outside the university, or the behaviour of university staff. They do not change the institution, but rather improve the “fit” of the people in question (who in some way do not match the institution’s expectations of individuals) with the mainstream. This deviates from the goal of educational equality and orientation according to individual potential.

This dilemma has a further dimension: when courses are announced for specific target groups within the university, the target groups become visible as having some kind of deficit, which implies to the teaching staff that the individuals within a group generally have some kind of educational “special needs”. This can lead to stigmatisation and “essentialising”. Therefore, the medium-term goal has to be one that relies on this insight and offers training to those responsible for setting up regular courses so that they are sufficiently sensitised to the needs of the target group. This way, the design and content of the courses appropriately reflect the needs of these various target groups. As long as this is not ensured, I believe that it is still useful to continue with the special target-group options.

The issue here is trying to avoid cementing presumed collective attributes through unilateral assistance of the target group. Instead,
it is important to develop “practices of questioning”\textsuperscript{43} these kinds of presumptions; to create spaces for discussion; to generate reflective knowledge of the “interwoven nature of difference and power relationships”\textsuperscript{44} and to draw consequences from all of the above. With this in mind, it is clearly necessary, as part of university staff development measures, to provide training in intercultural issues to members of staff involved in devising and running regular support courses, in order to enable them to critically examine their own advisory practices from a perspective that takes differences into account; to consider whether their own handling of actual advisory meetings with students reveal a sensitivity for differences; and to critically reflect on whether their own behaviour and attitudes may sometimes betray racial prejudice. Legal guidelines such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (adopted by the University of Bremen in an action plan for inclusive education in December 2013), the General Anti-Discrimination Act (AGG) and the commitment to its implementation are important drivers for the adoption of relevant measures. They are also important in that they allow the measures to be convincingly communicated to members of the institution, ensuring that they are regarded as legitimate.

When implementing barrier-free access in any shape or form, one is advised to refer to Metz-Göckel, who underlines that “the key challenge for the self-development of the university is the further development of its culture of communication”\textsuperscript{45}. The (further) development of this is a priority task of the rectorate, which must create reliable horizontal and vertical communication structures and provide spaces for intercultural encounters and discourse. Similarly, the rectorate must ensure that the recognition of diversity is bound to an explicitly

\textsuperscript{43} Mecheril; Klingler (2010), p. 85
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., p. 107
\textsuperscript{45} Metz-Göckel, Sigrid: Theoretische Skizzen zur Hochschule in der Wissensgesellschaft, in: Klein, Uta; Heitzmann, Daniela (ed.): Hochschule und Diversity. Theoretische Zugänge und empirische Bestandsaufnahmen, Beltz-Juventa, Weinheim und Basel 2012, p. 52
anti-racist stance that is accepted as standard throughout the university. In its role as a body with the democratically legitimate power to act and the duty to propose and implement strategy, the rectorate has the great responsibility to continuously communicate and question the university’s general attitude and practical approach to diversity and difference. The rectorate thus has the tasks of maintaining open channels for recognising real needs, strengthening useful grassroots initiatives that encourage active codetermination and participation, and appropriately anchoring such initiatives within the university’s structures.