Is Diversity a Useful Theoretical Concept?

Reflections about a Contested *Zeitgeist* Term

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According to Thomas Eriksen, a discourse became dominant in Scandinavia in the 2000s that distinguishes a notion of "good diversity" and juxtaposes it to "bad difference". He argues that this change of the discursive landscape is part and parcel of an ideological shift from a group-based corporatism to individualistic neo-liberalism:

> In sum, diversity is economically profitable and morally harmless (...), while difference threatens the individualism underpinning and justifying neo-liberalism. In this perspective, it is no wonder that immigrants were praised in the 1970s, when the collectivist ideology of social democracy still held sway in Scandinavia, for their strong family solidarity; while in the new century, they are criticized for it since it impedes personal freedom (Eriksen, 2006: 23).

The ideological shift from a social-democratic corporatism (Brubaker, 2007) to neo-liberal individualism corresponds, in the case of migration and minority policies, to a backlash against multiculturalism (Vertovec and Wessendorf, 2010). As a *Zeitgeist* term, diversity offered an alternative to frame heterogeneity that appeared to managers, politicians and policymakers to be more positive and optimistic. However, the "diversity turn" (Vertovec, 2012: 287) did not remain uncontested. Critics accused advocates of diversity of glossing over social inequality (Faist, 2009), shifting the attention away from power structures and racism (Sealy, 2018) and reinforcing the culturalisation and hierarchisation of minority groups (Anthias, 2013) rather than empowering resistance and solidarity against oppression and exploitation. The controversy evolving around diversity was depicted by the critics as an antagonism between good social movement claims and bad management ideology. Nevertheless, we could witness an increasing interest in the concept of diversity in the fields of migration and urban studies.

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Despite the fact that critics have argued that the diversity concept would be too ideological and too ill-defined to be of academic use, at least two research agendas turned out to be particularly productive in the last decade or two. Firstly, a sociology of knowledge perspective that makes the discourse of diversity, its (ideological) implications and its impact on social life an object of empirical investigation. Secondly, diversity is also used as an analytical concept to enclose and theorise a field of study that is engaged with the question of how persons or groups deal with demographic heterogeneity.

In favour of the sociology of knowledge research agenda, it can be argued that if diversity discourses and management practices have a social impact, it is legitimate to study them independent of whether individual researchers believe diversity itself is a beneficial concept. In the case of the analytical concept, it can be claimed that bringing empirical phenomena together within a theoretical diversity frame allows one to observe, understand and debate aspects of contemporary social life that would otherwise be overlooked. In the following, I will spell out the reasoning behind both perspectives in greater detail and make some proposals about how these agendas could be theoretically advanced. As the reader will discover, I am not neutral but believe that both approaches can make (and have already made) a meaningful contribution to the larger landscape of social research and social theory.

1. The Sociology of Knowledge Perspective

The sociology of knowledge or reflexive perspective is concerned with what Vertovec (2012), following Charles Taylor, called the "social imaginary" of diversity. Taylor (2002: 106) uses the term social imaginary in order to emphasise that the way people "imagine their social surroundings" implies theoretical and normative assumptions about sociality which are often "not expressed in theoretical terms" but "carried in images, stories, and legends". As a philosopher, Taylor is particularly interested in the interaction between explicated philosophical ideas about sociality and social imaginaries. The imaginary of diversity most basically implies the idea that society is constituted by persons of different backgrounds and with different characteristics living and working together. Diversity more specifically often refers to migration-related characteristics and visible ethnicity. Nonetheless, depending on the context, it also can refer to other types of person-related differences, such as sexual orientation, bodily and mental fitness or gender. It has been noted (Glick Schiller and Çağlar, 2011b: 67; Johler, 2017: 14) that the imaginary of diversity implies the tendency to affirm the ethnic characteristic of a national or regional majority as the normative standard, while the characteristic of migrants and minorities are considered as constituents of diversity. A good example of how imaginaries of diversity reproduce imaginaries of

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'normality' are visual representations of *photogenic diversity*, with which private and public organisations particularly represent themselves as diverse.[1] Although photogenic diversity normally implies a mixture of (often smiling) middle-class people of both majority and minority backgrounds, different ages, genders and religions, it is, above all, visible ethnicity and symbols of minority religions, such as headscarves or turbans, which make the group identifiable as diverse.

However, the social imaginary of diversity is not only transported through photos but also through management, policy and governance discourses. In this context, diversity can be considered a hypergood. For Charles Taylor, hyper-goods are "frameworks of strong evaluation" (Calhoun, 1991: 234). They provide a "standpoint from which (..) [goods] must be weighed, judged, decided about" (Taylor, 1989: 63). Hypergoods allow for constructing congruencies between aspects of different situations and for hierarchising different goods within the same situation. A wide range of competing hypergoods coexist with each other particularly in fields of policy and politics (such as justice, security, integration and freedom) that can legitimise different forms of decisions, evaluations, moral judgements of persons and self-representation of organisations.

As members of our research group in Tübingen have elaborated elsewhere (Alp-Marent et al., forthcoming; Dieterich, 2019; Nieswand, 2020), after the so-called refugee crisis in Germany, integration particularly functioned as a *moral hypergood* to which a large range of actors, such as policymakers, politicians, volunteers and neighbours of refugee accommodations, could refer to. In this context, it also became clear that incongruent and sometimes contradictory measures and opinions could be reasoned within an integrationist framework. However, although references to the hypergood integration were frequent, it was rarely explained or defined what was understood as integration concretely. It could also be shown in other contexts that hypergoods often remain "broad and ill-defined" (Noon, 2007: 780) in usage and allow the placement of divergent agendas within their frame. Moreover, hypergoods which gain political and organisational relevance often rely on larger orders of justification (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2007) which spelled out within academic or other rationalising discourses, such as political theory, management theory, advice literature or, in the case of integration, in the sociology of migration literature (Alp-Marent et al., forthcoming). It appears important for the legitimacy of a hypergood that, at least in some settings and by some actors, justifications are manufactured and made available. The division of legitimation work allows other actors, such as politicians, representatives of civil society or public managers, to refer to these *hypergoods* without being forced to explain why it should be considered good

1 Reflections about the visual representation of diversity within the University of Tübingen were done within a student research project that was conducted at the Ludwig-Uhland-Institut für Empirische Kulturwissenschaft and supervised by Reinhard Johler (Johler et al., 2017).

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and important (e.g. explaining, for instance, why societies should be just, prosperous, secure, etc.).

Diversity has become a hypergood in the policy world within the two last decades. The hypergood diversity binds together two (or even three) justification orders within its frame of reference. Consequently, Squires (2005: 4) called diversity a bridging frame.

Firstly, diversity can refer to the frame of anti-discrimination and equality policies (Lynch, 2001). Such policies are supposed to reduce inequality between different classes of persons, some of whom are considered more disadvantaged than others. Since notions of discrimination and inequality have, over time, been extended to an increasing number of groups (Honneth, 2001) and classical affirmative action policies that targeted women and people with Afro-American family backgrounds appeared too narrow, new concepts arose that allowed for the embracing of a larger scope of person-related differences. In this context, Eriksen's diagnosis that the rise of diversity was connected to the decline of corporatism and the rise of an individualistic neo-liberalism may be accurate.

The second justification order is implied in the discourses of diversity management. They were introduced to management theory in response to a number of challenges, such as the transnationalisation of labour markets, the heterogenisation of national populations and the differentiation of consumer demands (Gilbert et al., 1999; Ivancevich and Gilbert, 2000; Vedder, 2009). As mentioned above, diversity management was also propagated by human resource managers as a means of distancing their corporate policies from legally binding affirmative action measures (Squires, 2005: 7–8). What was new about diversity was that it promised companies and public organisations that they could profit from the heterogeneity of their staff through greater work team creativity, improved access to new markets and an increased attractiveness to global talents. Placed within the justification orders of profit maximisation and rationalisation of labour organisations, the discourse was, in one sense, innovative. It did not interpret heterogeneity as a problem of social cohesion but as an economic, social and cultural resource (Wrench, 2007: 2).

Thirdly, and closely related to the second point, diversity became prominent as a means in the reframing of cities in the context of urban policies and marketing (Arnaud, 2016; Bullen, 2016; Martínez-Ariño et al., 2018). Here, Richard Florida's (2002) book on creative cities was very influential. He argued that those cities prevail in the global competition for talents and capital that attract high-tech industry and what he calls the "creative class", a group of highly educated people of different ethnic backgrounds and sexual orientations. The "generalized acceptance of diversity among the local population" (Florida, 2002: 129) is an important factor to make the city appealing to this group of people. As a consequence of this discourse, cities all over the world started to represent themselves as tolerant and diverse in order to attract business capital, global

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talents and visitors, even if they have neither a significant high-tech sector, a particular heterogeneous population nor many tourist attractions (Glick Schiller and Çağlar, 2011a).

According to Squires (2005), the prominence of diversity as a *hypergood* is particularly due to its function as a bridging frame between anti-discrimination policies and business interests. Pessimistic interpretations suggest that diversity would contribute to subjecting legitimate social movement's claim under a neo-liberal agenda of profit maximisation. At the same time, optimistic outlooks draw on the potentials of the diversity frame to increase the general acceptance of heterogeneity within fields and groups that in the past, had sealed themselves off from affirmative action and multiculturalist discourses. Which of these two scenarios is more realistic, appears to be primarily an empirical question. Sociology of knowledge questions have stimulated several studies in the last ten years. Researchers asked for empirical manifestations, relevance and impact of diversity policies in different organisational fields, such as human resource management (Dobusch, 2015; Herring, 2017), social services (Boccagni, 2015), in UNESCO (Saouma and Isar, 2015), urban policies (Schiller, 2016), at universities (Iverson, 2007; Johler, 2017), ethnographic museums (Johler, 2015) and national identity politics (Yücel, 2016). These studies show the empirical heterogeneity of understandings and divergent impacts of diversity policies.

2. Analytical Perspective

Analytical approaches are frequently used in the field of diversity research. While the focus within the sociology of knowledge perspective is on the reconstruction of what others – chiefly organisations and persons – understand as diversity, analytical approaches apply a theoretical understanding and examine phenomena *as* diversity independent of being framed as such within the respective social fields. In a simple way, diversity is understood as ethnic heterogeneity and it is asked how far it affects local communities (Putnam, 2007) or generalised expectations, such as trust or sympathy, towards others (Schmid and Hewstone, 2019).

A more complex research agenda was introduced in the early 2000s. Against the background of the criticism of the ethic lens within migration studies (Glick Schiller et al., 2006), Steven Vertovec (2007) in particular used the diversity concept to outline a research perspective that allowed him to capture a broader range of person- and group-related differences. In his analysis of London, Vertovec (2007) argued that due to the increasing complexity of migration patterns, the population of London had differentiated along multiple dimensions (e.g. legal status, gender, education, language) and would undergo a "transformative diversification of diversity" (Vertovec, 2007: 1025) which he called super-diversity. Vertovec's perspective stimulated a significant amount of research in migration

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and urban studies in the following years (Alba and Duyvendak, 2019; Connor, 2014; Crul, 2016; Foner et al., 2019; Padilla et al., 2014; Vertovec, 2015; Wessendorf, 2013). The debates about super-diversity increased the sensitivity of the complexity of patterns of differentiation. Since some of them cross-cut the divide between migratory and sedentary parts of a population, the super-diversity debate facilitated perceiving 'majority' populations not as the opposite of diversity but as part of a larger configuration of urban heterogeneity (see also Johler, 2017).[2]

While diversity more recently became the key term to theorise and study the complexities of urban demography in ethnic and migration studies, the concept of intersectionality was introduced much earlier in gender studies to address similar issues (Crenshaw, 1991; Davis, 2008). Comparable to a more advanced understanding of diversity, intersectionality was meant to theorise particularly the interplay of multiple dimensions of person-related difference, especially race, class and gender. However, different from diversity, intersectionality was framed within 'anti-racist feminism' (Anthias, 2013: 335) and particularly aimed at conceptualising inequalities between different types of women (McCall, 2005). Thereby, the metaphor of intersection (Crenshaw, 1991) suggests a bird's eye perspective from which society can be imagined as a large-scale structure of cross-cutting dimensions of inequality. The concept of diversity, which I will spell out below, employs a more fragmented and situationalist imaginary of society and expands its scope of observation beyond questions of social inequality. This neither denies the relevance of intersections of larger dimensions of inequality nor of anti-racist feminism but aims at outlining a sufficiently distinct intellectual problem which has not yet been captured by any existing concepts within social theory landscape, including intersectionality.

2.1 Refining the Analytical Understanding of Diversity

As mentioned above, simple concepts of diversity refer to the ethnic heterogeneity of a population or group that lives or works together. By contrast, social constructivist scholars, such as Andreas Wimmer (2008: 1003), suggested that ethnic or other kinds of heterogeneity are not "an independent variable that influences explananda such as economic growth or the propensity of civil wars" but that heterogeneity and difference itself is "an outcome to be explained". Accordingly, Reinhard Johler et al. (2007: 16) argue that cultural and ethnic otherness is not fact but an artefact embedded in societal power structures. They

2 Some others argue that the approach of super-diversity applies particularly to urban contexts in which diversification has led to a situation in which a clear majority can no longer be identified (Alba and Duyvendak, 2019).

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suggest that ethnic and other person-related differences should not be taken for granted, but are themselves outcomes of historically and situationally contingent social processes (Alba and Nee, 2003: 59–64, 96). In the social constructivist tradition, therefore, differences are understood as basic means of social organisation (Gildemeister and Hericks, 2012: 7) that articulate the interactional sphere of everyday life with formal organisations and larger social structures. Because of huge historical, cultural and situational variations of social organisation, social scientists cannot just presume but rather have to study and theorise why and how certain categories of difference become relevant under specific circumstances.

In order to align the concept of diversity with a constructivist basic understanding of difference, it has to be distinguished between categories or schemes of differentiation through which diversity of a population comes into being as the entity that is considered diverse. Diversity has to be redefined, since the categories of difference within the constructivist perspective are considered prior to the resultant heterogeneity of the population. It should be better understood as (a) the aggregate of (b) the outcomes of historically and situationally contingent ascriptions of (c) person-related differences (d) on and by a population. Instead of asking for the effects of diversity, a constructivist understanding of diversity suggests an alternative set of questions: Which differences matter to distinguish persons and characteristics? Under which circumstances do they matter? How do relevant differences relate and constitute the diversity of a population?

Asking for the context specificity of differentiation practices suggests a situationalist imaginary of society. Different from the intersectionality approach, society within a situationalist imaginary is not considered a holistic entity but an aggregate of often loosely connected situations and fields with interacting but divergent structures of relevance (e.g. hospitals, public squares, football fields or laboratories). If society is conceived as a complex fragment constituted by semi-independent situations and social fields, a disturbing quantity of person-related categories comes into the focus which can become relevant under certain circumstances. Moreover, it is apparent that the multitude of person-related categories which can constitute differences between persons do not merge into a permanent, static and holistic personality or identity that functions as a container for these differences. Additionally, it becomes clear that identifying and differentiating people and putting relevant and possible differences in a relationship to each other is a constantly ongoing effort. Departing from a situational imaginary of society, the study of 'diversity' becomes a research programme that focuses on how a multiplicity of person-related differences becomes ascribed and configured within social situations.

Erving Goffman (1967, 1986 [1963]) emphasised the dual character of persons as physiological living beings that are materially situated in time and space and as symbolic and moral entities. As such persons are both pieces of "inner-

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vated flesh" (Massumi, 2015: 90) and subjects with an identity, dignity and a moral status which requires recognition in daily interaction rituals and through small gestures of veneration. In this context, Charles Taylor (1989) highlighted the co-constitution of the symbolic form of the person and morality: "Taylor's claim is not that the self – the person, identity – is prior to morality, but rather that it is constituted in and through the taking of moral stance" (Calhoun, 1991: 233). Therefore, it appears principally the moral character of the idea of personhood and the moral prerogatives that regulate behaviour towards people, which distinguish them as social entities from other participants in society (e.g. objects, plants, animals).

Niklas Luhmann (1991: 170) defined the person abstractly as a social device that accounts for the "individually attributed limitation of possibilities of behaviour".[3] The possibilities of behaviour which refer to divergent interests, roles or positionalities ascribed to individuals according to varying situational relevancies. Acting as a specific person limits the possibilities of individual behaviour, since it is expected of persons to have a certain degree of over-situational coherence and persistence. Personhood offers – a Foucauldian might say imposes – a framework in which the uniqueness, and biographic and symbolic unity and the moral status are ascribed to individuals, negotiated and represented. Understood as a flexible *and* stable social form, the imaginary of personhood both expresses and bridges the tensions between the situational fragmentation and normative claims of personal identity. It is particularly in the context of face-to-face interactions that the tensions between the situational fragmentation of relevancies and a morally constituted unity of the person are managed and moderated. Ulrich Beck (1992: 131) has emphasised that it is the ongoing processes of societal differentiation which constitute and intensify the tensions inherent in the form of the person. Differentiation increases the number of possible criteria under which individuals can become relevant and augments the demands put on the shoulders of individuals to reconstruct themselves as sufficiently consistent and identifiable entities.

The proliferation of categories of difference between persons creates a structural problem. Social workers in the youth welfare office among whom I did fieldwork some years ago (cf. Nieswand, 2014, 2017), for instance, had to decide which differences of their clients made a difference in terms of youth welfare procedure: autism spectrum disorders, body mass index, school performance, migration background, traumata, religion, intelligence quotient, 'moral career', gender, etc. Whether these or other categories mattered was dependent on the concrete case configuration. The relationship between different person-related categories and their relevance for a case often only became clear in the course of a complex procedure in which sometimes various actors (e.g. teachers, doc-

3 Translated from German to English by the author.

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tors, social workers, children, parents) were involved. Asking how ethnic differences came into the picture of larger configurations of difference, I could observe the practice of keeping interaction-related categories of differentiation (gender, ethnicity, moral status) implicit and silent, while categories more probably explicated were often legitimated by the formal procedures, such as medical diagnoses or court decisions. Therefore, it often remained for me as an observer and for the participants unclear how far ethnic ascriptions mattered and, even more fundamentally, whether some changes in the course of interaction could be understood at all as ethnic differentiation (or were related to language, race, religion, interaction skills, class, assessments of intelligence or a combination of these). "Unavoidable, irremediable vagueness" (Garfinkel and Harvey, [1963] 1986: 197) is, as the ethnomethodologists have highlighted, a general quality of daily interactions that becomes reinforced among social workers through their concerns to avoid categories that could entail accusations of discrimination or racism (Nieswand, 2017: 1721). Intrinsic vagueness and strategic silencing draw the attention to a key theoretical and methodological problem of diversity studies. The notion of difference implicates the idea that differentiations would be clearly distinguishable empirical phenomena and it could be authoritatively determined what counts as a difference of a certain type in a given situation. However, in many instances, this is obviously not the case – not least the fierce and irresolvable debates about how racist or patriarchal contemporary society exhibits the problems of profound indeterminacies.

Confronting the issue of (in)determinacy within a diversity frame, it could be helpful to distinguish between more or less clear-cut categorical differences, in which actors unambiguously classify a person according to category of person-related difference and proto-differences, which are vague portions of meaning, such as intuitive assessments of sameness or difference or insufficiently reasoned and explained moves in the course of interaction that have an impact but have not assumed the form of a categorical difference. Proto-differences can become meaningful material out of which clear-cut and definite categorical distinctions can be made but are not (yet) in a categorical state.

2.2 Governmentality and Diversity

Formal organisations, such as schools, courts, hospitals or social welfare offices, are often confronted by categorical differences which are produced and processed by other organisations but have to be incorporated in their practice according to their own organisational relevancies. When, for instance, the category 'unaccompanied minor refugee' became strengthened within a global and European human rights framework, German youth welfare offices, foreigner departments, the police, children's homes, etc., had to adapt their procedures and

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practices accordingly (Nieswand, forthcoming). Bringing the attention to the role organisations and their interrelations play for the proliferation of categories of person-related difference, connects diversity studies to Foucauldian (Foucault, 1991: 100) notions of governmentality and population management, as practices of regulation and measures of disciplining through which a population comes into being as "purpose" of government.[4] State organisations embrace the population (Torpey, 2000) and inscribe person-related differences (e.g. between citizens and non-citizens). Thereby, state organisations contribute to the emergence and stabilisation of certain patterns of differentiation that become constitutive parts of the diversity of a population.

At the same time, in the case of street-level bureaucracies but also in the large variety of situations of daily encounter proto-differences continue to play an important role for the mutual assessment and evaluation of people. A theoretically advanced notion of diversity should, therefore, be able to comprise the construction, diffusion and modulation of categorical differences within the organisational and governmental environment and the relationship between proto-differences and categorical differences and how they are transformed into each other.[5]

As has already become indirectly clear, the approach to diversity which is developed here builds partly on an ethnomethodologically informed perspective that West and Fenstermaker (1995) described as "doing difference" and which looks at "social life as the business that people conduct with each other, displayed in their everyday practice" (Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998: 1). West and Fenstermaker (1995: 8) have argued that person-related differences can neither be reduced to the properties of individuals nor simply deduced from larger societal structures but should be understood as an "ongoing interactional accomplishment" and "an emergent property of social situations". From this viewpoint, it becomes central how actors, including state actors, make use of person-related categories, how they construct, select, enact, confirm, modulate or challenge them. More recently, Hirschauer (2014, 2018) developed this approach further into a theoretical framework for studying different modes and grades of belonging. Drawing on Bateson, he stressed that a difference can only be considered relevant in a sociological sense if it *makes* a difference in a practical sense (Hirschauer 2014: 181). In accordance with what was argued before, he sees the major theoretical contribution of his approach is to provide an analytical frame-

4 The shift from state organisations to private enterprises, such as Google or Facebook, as the main categorisers of person and collectors of person-related data has still not yet been reflected in the social science literature on the nexus of governmentally, subjectification and diversity.

5 A recent challenge is to integrate the data sorting algorithms and the computer-induced person-related categories of internet-based consumer industries within a diversity framework.

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work within which it can be studied whether and how certain person-related categories[6] matter.

2.3 Contours of a Theoretical Understanding of Diversity

Summarising and synthesising what was written above, I want to highlight four pillars of the proposed analytical concept of diversity:

1. *Configurations of difference*. Diversity, as understood here, does not presume pre-existing qualities of persons or populations but rather understands diversity as the emergent social configuration that is created by ascribing and ordering person-related differences and proto-difference. This conceptualisation emphasises (a) the constructedness and historical contingency of person-related categories, (b) the situation as a strategic site for the configuration of person-related differences, (c) the distinctions and transformations between vague proto-differences and categorical differences, and (d) the resultant tensions between unity and fragmentation of personhood. The proposed understanding highlights that the scope between explaining and silencing, selecting and passing over, configurating, merging and separating, constructing and deconstructing and hierarchising and de-hierarchising person-related differences are, first and foremost, practical concerns for which actors, including social scientists, have to find context-specific solutions.

2. *Relational qualities*. The relationships between person-related differences can assume manifold qualities. Not only do they intersect, as the image of intersectionality suggests, but, especially if we take proto-differences into account, they can also pervade, affect, reinforce, neutralise or irritate each other. Drawing on complexity theoretical thinking, it can be argued that the qualities of relationships are of similar importance as the qualities of the single parts (Anderson, 1972; Page, 2015). Therefore, complex systems develop characteristics on higher levels of aggregation which the single parts of the system do not have (Mitchell, 2008). This process is called *emergence*. Accordingly, the diversity concept allows for an inquiry into situational qualities that emerge from the interaction of person-related differences. It is because of emergent effects that diversity can be considered a field of study in its own right which is different from the study of singular differences as was

6 Coming from science and technology perspective, Hirschauer uses the more technical term *Humandifferenzierung (*differentiation of human beings). Because of its moral and symbolical implications, which I explained above, I prefer referring to the person and talk about person-related differences.

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carried out in classical research fields, such as gender studies, ethnic and race studies and disability studies. Although the need for the configuration of person-related difference and its emergent effects on a population is not specific for a particular period in time, the process of proliferation of person-related differences has changed its conditions.

3. *Categories of different quality, scale and scope*. Another insight from complexity theory is that not only 'big forces' have 'big effects' but that smaller forces can also have larger effects and large forces can have small effects (Mitchell, 2008). Applied to the question of person-related differences, one can argue that not only big structural categories of encompassing relevance, such as gender, race and class, matter but that also categories with small and medium societal scope can have an important impact on social reality. The interaction between more general categories alluding to the unity of a person and more specific categories that refer to its fragmentation within situational contexts is particularly important for understanding the academic challenges implied in contemporary diversification processes. Moreover, as Stefan Hirschauer (2018) and Rogers Brubaker (2016) have recently particularly highlighted, students of diversity should not only be concerned about the quantity of difference but also take the divergent qualities and internal logics of different categorisation (e.g. gender vs. race) more closely into account.

4. *Fragmentation and coherence*. Many person-related categories, such as genetic dispositions, syndromes, legal statuses, credit-worthiness or tax classes, do not closely relate to personal identities but are, nevertheless, significant for the classification of people. By opening the focus to a wider range of categories, diversity offers a perspective that goes beyond identity or, to put it more precisely, the notion of person-related differences allows one to look at the tensions and convergences that emerge between the huge variety of person-related categories that are applied to individuals and at efforts to restore a fragile and incomplete sense of coherence, belonging and continuity.

3. Conclusion

Starting with the criticism that diversity would be an ideological and ill-defined *Zeitgeist* term, the goal of this article was to develop two complementary perspectives that, in my opinion, can sustainably guide research and theory building.

In a first step, I argued that some researchers approach diversity from a sociology of knowledge perspective and study how different actors, particularly

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persons and organisations, use the concept of diversity and what the effect of its implementation is. In this framework, I added that diversity can be understood as a moral hypergood within the policy world to which different types of actors can refer in order to legitimise a heterogeneous set of practices. The success of diversity as a hypergood was related to its potential to bridge the divide between equality policies and human resource management.

In a second step I developed an analytical notion of diversity. I argued that the concept of diversity can contribute to social theory and basic social science research if it shifts the attention more strongly to the processes and relations rather than taking the diversity of a population for granted. Theoretically, the analytical understanding of diversity proposed delineates a field of study which includes a) the historical processes of construction and proliferation of person-related categories, b) the situational practice of configurating them and c) the nexus between everyday encounters and organisations. In this understanding, diversity is a preliminary outcome of the open process of configuration of person-related difference. Theoretically, the approach proposed was particularly influenced by a situationalist imaginary of society and complexity theoretical thinking. It put a special accent on the relationships between categorical difference and proto-difference, governmentality and face-face interactions, and fragmentation and unification of the social form of the person.

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