

## Presenting the GDRI\_asof012020

### Handout complementing presentation (reading version)

#### Slide 1

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to introduce to you the Göttingen Diversity Research Institute. My name is Andrea Dorothea Bührmann and I am the founder and director of the Institute.

#### Slide 2

I will first mention the goals and mission of the Institute before telling you about their concrete realization in research, teaching and advisory work.

Last but not least I will introduce you to the team that makes all this possible.

#### Slide 3

Our goals and mission are:

- research on diversity and processes of diversification
- Research-oriented teaching
- And providing research-based advice to the University

#### Slide 4

Reflexive diversity research aims to inquire how differences are made, whether and how these differences form diversity, how this diversity is treated and which consequences arise from all this.

Reflexive diversity research is defined by the following characteristics:

#### **First, a post-foundationalist and reconstructive research perspective.**

Reflexive diversity research takes a decidedly post-foundationalist position.

That is, it opposes such positions that hypothesize *fundamental, that is non-revisable, principles, laws or objective realities that cannot be accessed or changed socially or politically.* (Here I paraphrase Oliver Marchart 2010, p.15)

Post-foundationalist thought radically and fundamentally questions (metaphysical) arguments based on the (monistic) idea of an ultimate premise.

In contrast to anti-foundationalist positions, *the necessity of (partial) premises is not fundamentally challenged. Rather, post-foundationalist thought hypothesizes the absence of an ultimate ground/foundation, not the absence of all grounding* (This again was paraphrasing Marchart 2010, p. 16).

So this doesn't mean that „anything goes“. It does, however, mean, that all foundations and groundings must be understood as provisional and contingent.

Post-foundationalism means to take into account the increasing uncoupling of (party) politics and the political in social structures. This consciousness strengthens the relation of empirical social research to real experiences of and in societies, as do reconstructive methods, which relate social theory to observations and experiences.

**A second defining characteristic** is to analyse processes of diversification intersectionally and reflexively, using multiple methods and multiple perspectives.

This means that interrelations between dimensions of diversity, quantitative and qualitative methods as well as approaches and perspectives of different academic disciplines and professions outside academia are taken into account. And it means to take account of the complexity of social diversity and inequality by continuously referring to their respective contextuality.

Additionally, research itself becomes the object of research.

This sounds pretty abstract to begin with.

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To become a bit more concrete, I would like to introduce three projects as examples of how we apply these principles.

**The project „Schlözer Programm Lehrerbildung“ (Schlözer Teacher Training Programme)** aims to further develop the existing teacher training at the University of Göttingen. The action area „Diversität gerecht werden“ (Doing diversity justice), which the Diversity Research Institute is part of, aims to prepare students training to be secondary school teachers to deal with heterogeneous pupils in a diversity-sensitive way. A reflexive concept of diversity forms the common ground on which three projects cooperate. They all develop teaching modules for integrating diversity and inclusion in teacher training. This is connected to elements of organisational development. For example, a network on diversity in teacher training was initiated, professional development programmes for lecturers were offered and a student research project analysed barriers to participation in studies and university using the example of the Institute for teacher training in Göttingen. The project ran from 2016 – 2019 and has been extended for a second three-year period in which school books and teaching situations will be analysed.

In a transdisciplinary collaboration with the regional youth council of Lower Saxony (Landesjugendring Niedersachsen e.V.), the **„Queer Youth Study“**, we analysed potentials and challenges of youth work for LGBTQI youth. In this multi-method project, we led 18 biographical interviews with young persons identifying as LGBTQI\* and two focus groups with professional and voluntary youth workers. One of the results is the challenge to youth work organisations to even consider their youth groups might contain queer persons – to be conscious of this possibility, to promote such consciousness and thus to create queer-sensitive spaces.

**The project „Diversity Turn in Land Use Science“** researches the interdependencies of social and biological diversity in the context of land use based on a reflexive diversity perspective. The project aims to achieve and implement a „diversity turn“ in land use science. By systematically integrating social dimensions of difference and a social science perspective which takes power relations and social inequalities into account, ten work packages research the ecological, social and economical effects of vanilla cultivation in Madagascar from the perspective of different academic disciplines.

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I am particularly proud to report that we launched the first German-speaking **MA programme on Diversity Studies** in the Social Sciences in October 2016. Our MA programme combines different specialisations in diversity studies with a strong methodological training.

We pride ourselves in our innovative teaching and learning formats, including community-based research and service learning, practical modules such as the „train the trainer“ Module and integrating strong international voices via blended learning, providing „internationalisation at home“. The programme is research-oriented and provides students with opportunities to make and reflect practical experiences, thus training them in reflexive diversity research.

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As we strive for **transdisciplinarity** in all areas, I will devote a few words to this principle.

We define transdisciplinarity as the mutual exchange between academia and other stakeholders. We see this exchange as elementary in as many phases of the research process as possible. We do this in our research, teaching and consultancy, for, with and in practice. Knowledge production is understood as a collaborative act between institute employees, students and stakeholders.

One area we currently move in is urban or municipal diversity management. Cities as employers and laboratories of diversity are at the centre of our current project on „Diversity, participation and cohesion in the city“. Diverse areas of interest are discussed with diverse practice expert, from municipal administration to streetworkers.

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**Consultancy** – or as I have said before, providing research-based advice on our area of expertise – is in some ways the logical consequence of our transdisciplinary research programme.

In our consulting work, we follow an inclusive, transformative and reflexive approach. All instances that are affected by the consulting process are not only taken into account, but bring their competencies and needs to the table through active participation in the consulting process. We work together towards positive change. If we identify needs for action, we combine them with concrete suggestions and strategies, all the while reflecting on our own position.

In this way we have achieved success in many contexts with different partners.

My colleagues and I have visibly strengthened the importance of diversity at the University of Göttingen in different ways and at different levels:

- We supported the University of Göttingen in developing a research-based and research-oriented diversity strategy. This was achieved in different ways, for example my tenure as Vice-President, Institute members' dedicated participation in university self-administration committees and our contribution to the preparation and coordination of the University's participation in an auditing process.
- Of course we do not limit our consultancy to the University. I advise the Austrian Ministry for Education, Science and Culture and contributed to the German Federal Government's Equal Opportunities Report.
- In the context of community-based research, we collaborate with the city of Göttingen and our students to develop a map of diversity-related data and activities.

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I am the director of the Diversity research Institute. Since 2015 I am also Vice-President of the University of Göttingen, first for teaching and studies and since my re-election in 2017 as Vice-president for studies, teaching and equal opportunities.

Nevertheless I continue to conduct my own research and teaching. First and foremost, the sociology of diversity. In the area of sociology of work and economic sociology, the transformations of work and its organisational structures and entrepreneurship research are my particular areas of interest.

I approach these issues with mainly qualitative methods of empirical social research, especially practice research and research on social practices, and I have also published on methodology.

Last but not least, I am interested in the sociology of knowledge, especially the transformation of knowledge production and forms of knowledge and research on consulting.

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During my tenure as vice-president, the chair for sociology of diversity is filled by an acting professor. This is currently **Dr. Astrid Biele Mefebue**. Her research and teaching focus on sociology of work and organisational sociology, specifically diversity and social inequality, diversity in organisations and life concepts. She also focuses on internationalisation of the curricula and has led the summer school on globalization and diversity in the past three years. Among other activities, she is and was involved in leading both the Schlözer Programm Lehrerbildung and a project on LGBTIQ youth in Lower Saxony as well as the 10th European Feminist Research Conference which took place in Göttingen in 2018.

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The Diversity Research Institute has three areas of work, each coordinated by a research associate.

**Elena Buck** coordinates the area of administration and strategic development. Together with her colleagues, she provides support for committees and boards and handles personnel issues, including internal diversity management. Strategy development and administration are also part of this working area. Elena is a political scientist with an interest in intersectional politics of belonging. She currently also works in a knowledge transfer project on diversity in the community.

**Dr. Doreen Müller** coordinates the area of applied research and advisory work. The main responsibilities of this area are developing research proposals to acquire third party funding and providing research-based advice for diversity-oriented organisational development. Additionally, Doreen teaches the module „Train the Diversity Trainer“ and currently co-leads a project on diversity in the community.

**Ulrike Thiele-Manjali** coordinates the area of teaching and fundamental research. She coordinates our MA programme „Diversity Studies in the Social Sciences“. Ulrike leads the community-based research project together with the city of Göttingen. Together with her colleagues, she promotes the internationalisation of our study programme. Ulrike is working on a doctoral thesis in couples sociology and is currently on parental leave.

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Thank you for your interest and time! I am happy to take questions and would like to stay in touch.