

Conference “Critical Gender and Diversity Knowledge. Challenges and Prospects”
University of Applied Science Northwestern Switzerland
Olten, 20th/21st of November 2020

Call for Panels

(Addressed to the Think Tank Gender & Diversity members and their universities as well as their network partners from non-academic fields)

The conference “**Critical Gender and Diversity Knowledge. Challenges and Prospects**” aims at bridging current academic and societal debates on gender and diversity. With a focus on exchanging knowledge, the conference fosters a dialogue between various understandings of difference, inequality, discrimination and inclusion regarding gender and diversity. The event is designed as a forum of exchange between representatives of universities and non-academic fields, such as politics, business, education, media, arts etc. Inviting members of the Think Tank Gender & Diversity will set up this dialogue by forming workshops with external discussants from various practical fields.

The conference contributes to debates of knowledge building in critical gender & diversity research, equality politics, and diversity management and aims at initiating discussions on current debates and problems in various specific contexts where gender and diversity are at stake. These debates and concurrent knowledge building started a long time ago in different places, at many institutions, in specific contexts, with numerous methods and involving various people. The conference builds on this knowledge, reflects its critical potential and addresses pressing questions. The critical dialogue and joint learning will focus on thematic fields that highlight the issues of language, leadership and meritocracy, institutionalized inequality as well as methods of knowledge sharing.

Content orientation of the thematic fields:

1. Gender, diversity and language

Language is not a simple tool to describe the world; rather, language shapes our perception of the world and thus our understanding of gender and diversity. Representations of difference are expressed through language, images and other signs. Furthermore, the monolingualism of most educational and professional settings marks legitimate languages and devalues others. On the panels that refer to this thematic field, we will focus on the ways in which gender, race, class, age and dis/ability are represented in language. On this panel, we will discuss changing gender- and diversity-understandings, which need to be taken up by language. We will exchange possible means (guidelines, workshops, trainings, etc.) of enhancing a respectful and inclusive use of language in higher education and in public spaces such as media and politics.

2. Women in leadership positions

In organizations, gender diversity contributes greatly to creativity and innovation. In recent years, an increasing number of women has reached high hierarchical positions in various areas. The thematic field “Women in leadership positions” aims at bringing together women in leading positions in higher education as well as various further fields and researchers to discuss women’s journeys to leadership in organizations. This panel asks: How do other categories of difference influence the organizational success and career paths? What challenges do these women face? What organizational measures facilitate their advancement? What is the role of norms like heteronormativity in this respect? How important are other women in the organization?

3. Meritocracy, excellence and inequality

The images of genius artists, excellent scientists, influential managers and politicians have begun to become more diverse over the last decades. Diverse teams are regarded as more successful (‘added

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value’) and the formula “gender equality/diversity = quality” has become the new guiding principle in many areas of society. Simultaneously, the supposedly neutral merit criteria used to measure performance, excellence and success continue to reproduce norms of masculinity, whiteness heterosexuality and ableism. Thus, in many places, meritocracy still fosters inequality. Moreover, excellence requirements seem to actually counteract the idea of gender equality or diversity. How can we deal with this tension between excellence and gender equality/diversity, which increasingly permeates neoliberal institutions in contradictory ways?

4. Institutionalized inequality and discrimination

Gender, race/ethnicity, class and other differences intersect in organizations as they also do in society. The aim of this thematic field is to tackle these intersecting processes and to analyze the efforts to build work organizations as well as political and educational organizations that are more egalitarian and resist discrimination. With a focus on organizational inequalities, we will pay special attention to power dynamics in hierarchical settings, where e.g. employees with a migrant background are often overqualified and do not manage to advance according to their actual know-how. For example, we are interested in discussions on how organizations and hierarchies work, how human resource processes influence promotions, and how organizations might challenge inequalities and create more inclusive work environments.

5. Methods of knowledge sharing

The thematic field “methods of knowledge sharing” looks at the methodological side of the knowledge exchange in the realm of gender and diversity. This thematic field reflects the conceptualization of gender and diversity knowledge and includes aspects of sensitization and awareness as well as approaches to planned processes. It also includes the question of participation, e.g. how various types of knowledge are articulated and what type of knowledge makes itself heard. Challenges such as the sustainable establishment as well as the development of knowledge in different contexts are possible topics. Experiences and approaches like curricula, trainings, immersion, presentations, debates, focus groups and activists’ engagement are discussed. This includes institutions of learning (universities, schools etc.) and education politics as well as institutions in the field of culture, business, and politics that build up gender & diversity knowledge.

6. Further thematic fields

If you have a project that is not thematically related to any of the panels described above, it is possible to submit additional thematic variants or further thematic fields.

Conference format

Essentially, the conference will provide an opportunity to exchange knowledge and experiences on gender and diversity issues. The formats of the panels may have various designs. For instance, there can be workshops in which one or two short inputs lead to a discussion among the participants. Roundtables can be held and may include experts from different institutions. World Cafés can be organized that offer a structured conversational process for knowledge sharing in which groups of people discuss a topic at several tables, with individuals switching tables periodically and getting introduced to the previous discussion at their new table by a “table host”. Other didactic ideas are welcome.

As the panels focus on knowledge transfer from the inside to the outside of academia and vice versa, each panel has to consist of representatives from both groups: members of the Think Tank as well as

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of non-academic stakeholders. We encourage workshop applicants from the Think Tank to invite colleagues, practitioners from the fields of politics, business, education, media, arts, sports, law etc. to participate in their workshops. The Think Tank members set the agenda for a critical dialogue on gender and diversity with regard to the chosen panel topic.

Venue and timetable

University of Applied Science Northwestern Switzerland, Olten

Friday 20.11.2020 (from 10.00 to 18.00 plus evening event)

Saturday 21.11.2020 (from 9.45 to 13.15)

Keynote/roundtable

Keynote:

Prof. Dr. Andrea Maihofer (University of Basel)

Roundtable:

Prof. Dr. Helma Lutz (Goethe-University, Frankfurt a. M.)

Prof. Dr. Gabriele Griffin (Uppsala University)

Prof. Dr. Hoda Elsadda (Cairo University, invited)

Chair: PD Dr. Christa Binswanger

Panel submission

Members and/or working groups of the Think Tank Gender & Diversity are invited to submit panels that focus on one of the six thematic fields.

The panels should offer time for an intensive exchange, enable discussions and can be designed in different formats (see: Conference format).

A panel takes 90 minutes.

Please submit a panel description (1-2 pages) by 8th of May 2020 using the enclosed form.

Selection process:

The Conference Committee will select the contributions via a joint decision. In case of overlapping proposals, the committee will encourage cooperation.

Contact

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Conference Committee

Nathalie Amstutz, Susanne Burren, Christa Binswanger, Klea Faniko, Sarah-Mee Filep, Elke Gramespacher, Sabine Kradolfer, Andrea Maihofer, Fleur Weibel