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Table of contents

Accounting for equity – what is at stake? Local public managers' accounts of equity in organizing local education systems.

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Introduction, research question and conceptual framework

The expansion of education systems and the corresponding institutionalization of the values of equal educational opportunities in the post-war era reflected a general convergence in the development of welfare systems across the Western world (Meyer and Ramirez, 2000; Ramirez et al., 2016; Ramirez and Boli, 1987). Internationally equity and inclusion in education is increasingly becoming a high stakes policy area, as inequalities are on the rise (OECD 2025). This global adherence to equity in education represents though as much a story of conceptual shifts and contestation (Levinson et al, 2022). Meyer (2001) argues, there is a taken-for-granted-ness in how equity in education is constructed as a research object and policy goal, concealing its inherently contested nature when operationalized into policy and practice. Educational research shows how local contexts are vital to understanding the realization of inclusion- and equity policies (Ainscow, 2020). The so-called 'Nordic in education' is characterized by strong egalitarian values and equity (Aasen, 2007). But, the Nordic model is also under pressure, and ongoing policy efforts address equity issues under pressure of demographic changes and economic austerity. In our paper we address the question of how equity is constructed as a policy goal at the local level of municipalities in three Nordic municipalities. Our research question is: How do local public mangers account for their work to enhance educational equity, and what do they consider it at stakes in their efforts?

The analyses are informed by research on the impact of organization for inequalities (see e.g. Haveman, 2025; Amis et al, 2020; Tomaskowic-Devey et at, 2019), and research on policy makers' framing of social inequalities (See eg Offe, 2018). With our paper we aim to inquire how local meaning-making processes related to policies of educational equity reflect differences in the construction of equity in education as an object for local policy making and organizing in the context of local authorities. Our Nordic comparative cases serve to compare and contrast organizational attempts to work with educational inequalities, and the story is thus illustrative of perceptions of mechanisms that make inequality durable (Tilly, 1998). We address particularly three dimensions in the organizational efforts to enhance equity: Degree of decentralization in the local management of schools, degree of (de-) politization of equity measures in the local political context; and institutionalized categorizations and perceptions of socially disadvantaged social groups, in particular immigrant groups in relation to social class.

Methods and data

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The paper present analyses of qualitative interview data from a Nordic comparative study of the organization of childhood and education in three Nordic municipalities, located in Finland, Norway, and Sweden respectively. The analyses are based on interviews with local public managers, situated in different leadership positions across the local bureaucracy, thus representing local decision-makers with influence over the policy agenda, problem definitions and viable measures. In the interviews, the managers reflect upon what they consider to be the main challenges in the education system concerning the equity in education, and what they consider to be main local organisational efforts and barriers in the work to enhance inclusion and equity.

Reflections and preliminary findings

Preliminary analyses of the interviews display both similarities and differences in how the local public managers perceive of and address equity questions. Our main argument is that *how* equity is operationalized and addressed in national governance systems has implications for how the equity problematic is conceived of and handled the local policy contexts, thus displaying the need for contextual, organizational perspectives to understand enduring mechanisms of educational inequalities. Despite similarities across the Nordic cases, regarding the overall perception of equity in education as a policy goal, aligned with the international institutionalization of the field, institutional characteristics are vital to understand how local managers perceive of and address the question of equity in the local arena. We interpret these along three aspects in the work for equity: Firstly, local contextual factors play a part in how the local managers address and make sense of the work for equity in education, particularly related to the perception of socially disadvantaged groups, the socio-economic distribution between school districts, and the local distribution of resources. Secondly, a central aspect of local mangers accounts of equity between local contexts are the interplay between decentralized autonomy given to the school level, and centralized control through national governance structures. Thirdly we argue that the degree of politization of the organizational effort to combat inequalities vary across cases and over time, which makes equity efforts sensitive to local political priorities and struggles.

Acting on the margins – conceptualising practices of the Other with vulnerability

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In her canonical essay "Can the subaltern speak?", Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) comes to the provocative conclusion that they cannot. She states that marginalized actors don't have the ability to speak (or act) in a sphere where speaking conditions are defined by the dominant, and marginalized positions tend to remain the silenced, invisible Other. However, building on this insight, critical scholars have rightfully argued that we tend to overlook that marginalized positions can, in fact, speak and act, and have raised attention to difficulties in hearing and perceiving the other's voices and actions (de Jong and Mascat, 2016; Tyler and Cohen, 2010; Zembylas, 2018). That is, organisations – even with the best intentions to include marginalised actors – are always at risk of operating with particular normative ideas of the Other (Rogers 2017; Priola et al. 2018), and might explicitly or implicitly demand representative tasks of them that lead to what Tyler and Vachhani (2021) call 'overinclusion'. Hence, as differences are an inherent part of all organisations (Muhr 2008; Pullen and Rhodes 2010), inclusion attempts that ignore the different conditions of doings and sayings are at risk of rendering the practices of marginalised, so-called vulnerable actors they aspire to include even more invisible.
Although studies acknowledge that practices are continuously produced and reproduced through enactment (Nicolini, 2012), practices have often been studied as rather isolated and stable occurrences, making it difficult to understand the inequality and exclusion embedded in and performed through them. While practices are linked to situations, they also translate and interfere previous and future enactments through the rhythm they place on social life (Blue 2019; Southerton 2006), and their "trans-situational" (Nicolini, Mørk, Masovic, & Hanseth, 2017) character, thus practices always travel different contexts. Hence, more recent studies acknowledge that practices are embedded in complex socio-spatial arrangements (Gherardi 2017), which is crucial for understanding their exclusionary effects. One branch of literature foregrounded their relational character, urging the avoidance of 'micro-isolationism' (Seidl and Whittington 2014:1408) and instead engaging with how individual practices are always interrelated with larger social dynamics. A second branch of studies highlighted the different qualities of practices, and showed how practices can be (un)learned (Gherardi and Nicolini 2002; Shove, Pantzar, and Watson 2012), are embedded in power dynamics (Watson 2016), entail non-human actors (Everts 2015), and sediment themselves in bodies and objects (Butler 2016). However, while such studies provide a more nuanced perspective of relationality, change, and differences in and of practices, they still tend to prioritize manifest, routinized, and directly observable practices, such as cooking, hiking, heating, eating, accounting, etc., and have paid less attention to more implicit or invisible dynamics of practices. Notably, as inclusion scholars made us aware, practices of and to the Other are always at risk of remaining invisible or overlooked, even with the best intentions. Hence, to organise for more just societies and organisations within and through organisations,

*Speaker

we need to understand how the practices of marginalised actors operate and contribute to these complex dynamics.

Building on the relationality these approaches foreground, this conceptual paper introduces the concept of vulnerability (Butler 2022; Diprose 2002; Mackenzie 2014) as a means to study practices of the marginalised Other. Vulnerability is more than a characteristic of so-called vulnerable actors. It can be understood as the very condition of opening up to others. Thus, it offers an analytical tool for zooming in and out of organisations' inclusion efforts. Vulnerability highlights the affective (Reckwitz 2012) and embodied (Butler 2022; 2016) dimensions of practices. Drawing on the illustrative case of participative art, an art form that aims at giving voice to marginalised actors-such as homeless, adolescent, or elderly-by involving them in a shared art practice, I demonstrate with two exemplary practices how vulnerability can help us better understand practices of the Other: (1) First, turning to care practices, I show how vulnerability-sensitive lens on practices sheds light on practices that might gain little attention as part of organising, because they tend to become side-lined. Some of these practices are carried out by marginalised actors, and considering them might raise awareness of their contributions. (2) Second, I will explore practices of listening, and with this study, often invisible effects of hurt, e.g., exclusion experiences that follow even unintentional misgendering. Through a vulnerability-sensitive lens, I will show that hurtful doings gain attention as a practice of exclusion, thereby shedding light on the normative dimensions of these practices. In sum, a vulnerability-sensitive perspective to practices can help us to further investigate other, more "silent" practices, such as hiding, silencing, listening, resistance, and non-action. Moreover, I will argue that vulnerability offers a perspective on practices as less consistent, yet open to alternatives (Kremser and Sydow 2022), which might enable us to remain attentive to differences and practices of the Other that we might not yet have considered.

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Agricultural dis/connections – Farmer subjectivities and green transitions

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Introduction

This paper theorizes and explores the dis/connections that constitute Danish conventional farmers' subjectivities, shaping their present and future orientations in times of profound changes and transitions to their profession, industry, and to their land, livelihood, and lives. The dis/connections that keep them rooted amid change and through which they navigate work lives between tradition and (green) transition. The paper is based on an extensive empirical study spanning three years and comprising a document study of the Danish agro-industry's central interest organization, as well as 25 in-depth interviews with conventional, livestock farmers (pig and cattle) across Denmark.

Organization studies have long argued that ongoing environmental crises are a consequence of a human disconnection, caused by the ways in which individuals and organizations have engaged with nature as an external object to be managed, controlled, and exploited (Banerjee, 2003; Ergene, Banerjee, & Hoffman, 2021; Muñoz & Branzei, 2021). As a response to the disconnection, organization studies have increasingly turned to relational approaches that emphasize and affirm entanglements with nature and the nonhuman (Ergene & Calás, 2023; Good & Thorpe, 2020). In particular, scholars highlight the ethical potential of affect and embodiment for cultivating 'deeper' human-nature relations (Aguiar & Cunliffe, 2025; Ferns, 2024), arguing that 'felt affectivity and embodied connectivity' (Huopalainen, Satama, & Tallberg, 2025, p. 7) can foster a sense of care and responsibility essential to 'move beyond' the anthropocentric disconnection and address its impacts on the natural world (Sayers, Martin, & Bell, 2022; Phillips, 2014, 2019; Singh, 2017). While considerable hope and optimism currently surround the promise of affective human-nature relations, the notion of disconnection-what it means to be disconnected, who or what constitutes the disconnected entity, and from what are they disconnected-has been curiously neglected or taken for granted as a given condition of the modern human or organization, inflected by anthropocentric and capitalist logics.

In this paper, we dwell with 'the problem' and stay with disconnection. We argue that before rushing to affirm the promise of affective relations, we might pause to ask how the problem manifests as already demanding of a particular (affective) response and solution. Our aim is not to rehearse a theoretical argument, nor to understate the urgency of concrete solutions. Instead, we suggest that sitting with disconnection opens a line of inquiry that allows us to interrogate, as Esther Turnhout, writes 'not only what the problem is, including what items the problem consists of and how they are related, but also what solutions are possible and rational' (Turn-

*Speaker

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hout, 2024, p. 2; see also Knudsen, 2011). In this sense, staying with disconnection becomes a way to explore the conditions under which solutions can appear and be recognized as such. The decision to stay with disconnection is not a disavowal of responsibility, but a deliberate effort to unsettle slightly the established notions of what currently constitutes the 'proper' response and solution. In doing so, the paper seeks to expand political possibilities for connections, engagements, and responses in the face of environmental crises.

Conventional agriculture presents a particularly compelling case for exploring and complicating the notion of disconnection in the context of environmental crises. In public and political discourse, conventional farmers are frequently portrayed as the disconnected *par excellence*-perceived as viewing nature merely as a resource, exploiting land, polluting ecosystems, and treating nonhuman animals as commodities. Yet, these same farmers are also among those most 'embedded' in natural environments. Their work is deeply dependent on elemental conditions and biological processes, and it requires a form of proximity to nature that seems to challenge a simplistic notion of the conventional farmer as wholly disconnected. Moreover, conventional agriculture plays a pivotal role in the green transition and it is one of the most contentious sectors due to the profound impact such transitions have on farmers' lives and livelihoods. At the same time, its contribution to accelerating climate change, biodiversity loss, water pollution, antibiotic resistance, and the emergence of new zoonotic diseases is substantial, underscoring the urgent need to reorganize agricultural production and land use (IPBES, 2019; IPCC, 2022; MacLeod, Eory, Gruère, & Lankoski, 2015). Despite its importance-and the complexity and controversy surrounding its green transition-conventional agriculture remains understudied in organization studies, where research has largely focused on alternative agricultural organizations, such as such as organic farms (Siltaoja et al., 2020), permacultures (Roux-Rosier, Azambuja, & Islam, 2018), conservation agriculture and small-scale farmers (Dyck & Silvestre, 2019), agricultural cooperatives (Ajates, 2020), community supported agriculture (Watson, 2020), and alternative food networks (Beacham, 2018; Pascual et al., 2021). While this is surely important, it once again suggests that scholarly attention appears to centre on the emerging 'solutions', while much less focus is given to understanding what becomes accepted as 'the problem'.

Theoretically, the paper engages Lauren Berlant's (2011) concept of 'attachment' in order to theorize and explore dis/connection. Two aspects of Berlant's concept make it particularly relevant to our case. First, their notion of attachment is situated within a post-structural tradition, which posits that every connection inherently involves disconnection, and vice versa. This theoretical insight challenges the binary opposition between connection and disconnection, allowing for a nuanced analysis of how disconnection emerges through multiple and overlapping connections – hence, the term dis/connection. Second, the concept of attachment is developed primarily in writings about the particular form of attachment that Berlant terms 'cruel optimism'. Cruel optimism describes a situation, wherein the very attachment is fraying or diminishes life in the present, yet its loss is still difficult to endure, 'because whatever the content of the attachment is, the continuity of its form provides something of the continuity of the subject's sense of what it means to keep on living on and to look forward to being in the world' (Berlant, 2011, p. 24). To us, this resonates with the current situation of conventional farmers. Their attachment to conventional farming is under threat from multiple directions-economic, environmental, regulatory-yet they remain tethered to it. The loss of this attachment would mean the loss of an identity, a world, a way of life, and a promised future. Thus, the questions and analytical inquiries that cruel optimism foregrounds are, as Berlant puts it: "what happens when the loss of what's not working is more unbearable than the having of it, and vice versa." (Berlant, 2011, p. 27)

In this paper, we trace farmers' attachments to what to them constitutes 'the good life' – attachments to a world that seems to be dying, but in which they nonetheless find their con-

ditions of possibility, their sense of continuity, and the promise of their desires. Indeed, how do farmers sustain attachments to conventional farming amidst green transitions? How do they struggle to change or maintain 'the terms of value in which their life-making activity has been cast'? And what are the multiple dis/connections that constitute those attachments?

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Algorithmic Investment. The Digitalization of Financial Organizations through Quant Hedge Funds

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Algorithmic Investment. The Digitalization of Financial Organizations through Quant Hedge Funds

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Financial organizations like investment banks, hedge funds and private equity companies are mayor drivers of the ongoing digitalization of society. As such, quantitative hedge funds, short Quants, are pushing forward to incorporate AI and Big Data technologies to optimize their market analysis and portfolio management. Quants "run Wall Street now" (Zuckerman/Hope 2017) and thus exemplary for a societal trend to give more decision-making authority to digital algorithms. At the same time, the algorithmizing in and of Quants shows that organizations are central drivers and enablers of the encompassing digitalization of modern society.

From a sociological perspective, the digitalization of financial organizations and markets is mostly researched with regards to High-Frequency-Trading (Lenglet 2011; Schwarting 2015; MacKenzie 2018; 2021) as acceleration of trading practices, while the use of novel digital technologies for market analysis and observations remains opaque. Against this background, I will ask how Quants integrate Big Data and AI technology in their internal processes and structures and how digital technologies change organizational decision making (cf. Büchner 2018) and the enactment (cf. Weick 1988) of environments. As such, the use of Big Data analytics and AI leads to more complex and observations of plural (market) environments. While the classic approach is limited to the analysis of standardized company and market data, algorithmic analysis techniques expand the data sources and process data that have traditionally played no role in market analysis and do not have to be genuinely economic data. For example, the German fund boutique Acatis uses an AI algorithm for the "Acatis AI Buzz Equities" fund, which is intended to evaluate investor sentiment in online media (Bülow 2018, 1) and analyzes comments in social media platforms, blogs and discussion forums for this purpose. The algorithm checks 20 million posts per month and analyzes how users communicate about these assets over a period of one year for 350 securities. The observation of plural environments and the processing of heterogeneous data, so the rationale, should allow for more comprehensive and profitable investments strategies.

Algorithmic investment technologies are shaped by organizational structures as they also change the internal decision order of organizations. Algorithms are programmed by organizational struc-

*Speaker

tures as those structures alter those very structures vice versa. Again, Acatis uses Deep Learning techniques to compilate promising investment portfolios of assets. First, the database of fundamental business data from Acatis is fed into the algorithm which the organization has been building up for years. On this basis, the algorithm uses 55 key figures, i.e. data from business reports and balance sheets, to analyze from a population of 2500 securities those that promise positive performance above the average price increases of the central global stock indices in the short, medium and long term. Subsequently, the results of the algorithm are qualitatively evaluated by fonds managers: at this point, the fund management manually analyzes them according to qualitative criteria and reduces them to 50 stocks that appear to be the most promising in terms of their future performance. Acatis emphasizes that the organization "specifies the route, while artificial intelligence (...) takes a seat in the passenger seat"(Acatis 2022); i.e. the fund management is not strictly bound to the forecast of the algorithm, and a relationship of loose coupling is established between those two decision-making bodies (Weick 1976).

Thus, I will explain the relationship between algorithm and organization as a form of "directive correlation" (Herbst 1976, 32 ff.); cf. Luhmann 2000, 207), in which both decision making bodies condition each other in a loosely coupled relation. "The contribution of member A (algorithm; MJ) may be recognized as an innovative step by member B (fonds management; MJ), who may be able to take this further in his own work. This again may help A to see further implications" (Herbst 1976a, 70), i.e. algorithm and fonds management "conduct" (Luhmann 2000, 207) each other's decision making recursively but are not strictly bound formally at each other's results. Plural technical and social decision-making instances are combined loosely to realize more sophisticated business and investment strategies.

At last, the consequences of the algorithmization of investment practices in and by Quants for the enacted environments are discussed. The ongoing digitalization makes systemic risks (cf. Jöstingmeier 2019) more probable. Using the case of the "Quant Meltdown" of August 2007 (Kirilenko/Lo 2013) and the "Hack Crash" (Karppi/Crawford 2016) of April 2013, I will discuss how algorithmized uncertainty absorption creates new systemic risks which can destabilize modern highly interconnected and often tightly coupled (cf. Perrow 1984) financial markets. Both crisis events demonstrate how algorithmic information processing can lead to instabilities which threaten the entire financial system. "Although technology provides for a fixed coupling of causal factors, the system becomes non-transparent for itself (...). Highest precision in detail does not prevent, but promotes unpredictability" (Luhmann 2017, 101; own translation). As such, the ongoing digitalization in and by financial organizations like Quants opened new possibilities to make profit as well as it recursively produces new crisis dynamics.

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Behind the Black Box in Organizations: Unsustainable Practices of Collegiality, Gossip, and Discrimination

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Agenda-setting around diversity management has become an increasingly central challenge for contemporary organizations. Compared to the private sector, public administration in Germany still fails to reflect the social plurality of society. Individuals with migration backgrounds remain underrepresented, particularly in municipal offices and federal agencies (Ette et al.; 2025). To address this imbalance, many public organizations have formally committed to promoting diversity and strengthening anti-discrimination structures. They have introduced requirements and compulsory tasks such as diversity training, inclusive recruitment procedures and designated in-house contact persons for diversity and anti-discrimination. However, as recent research indicates (Kalev & Dobbin 2022; Lang 2020), the implementation of such initiatives does not automatically lead to institutional transformation.
One reason for these ambivalent effects lies in the gap between formal commitments and everyday organizational practice. While diversity promotion presupposes an open and reflective organizational culture, the simultaneous expansion of complaint mechanisms and sanctions for discriminatory behavior may produce tensions. To what extent can a culture of openness coexist with one of increased control and sanctioning? Will employees feel empowered to speak up against discrimination when they are risking informal consequences from their colleagues? As Luhmann pointed out (1964), breaches of collegial conduct are sanctioned not only by means of formal organizational requirements, but also and foremost through the more subtle social means of informal disapproval, silent indignation, ridicule, or the loss of respect of colleagues (ibid.,p.316). Although *Collegiality* has long been recognized as a central organizational principle (ibid.), yet its functional role in shaping or reinforcing *racialization and discrimination* within organizations has rarely been examined.

This paper explores these organizational ambivalences by examining the everyday interactions among colleagues in a municipal public order office. Drawing on ethnographic data, it opens up the "*black box*" of institutional interaction to analyze how racism and exclusion are produced and contested in workplace relationships. The ethnomethodological interactional analysis reveals that informal organizational communication, particularly *gossip*, serves as a key arena of collegial sense-making. Empirical data illustrate what Luhmann (1964) theorized, namely that personal enmities and sympathies, profession-related misconduct, conflicts in everyday control work and broader societal issues are interactively negotiated through *gossip*. Within these communicative processes, gossip does not only concern well-known absent third parties but often also unknown individuals or entire social groups, who are talked about *in derogatory and racializing*

*Speaker

ways under the veil of discretion. In the social microcosms of collegial cliques, such *racializations* can be intensified and *institutionalized* in work related interactions.

However, an outspoken and open accordance with racist rumors can become a risky practice. When other colleagues become aware of such racist communication, they may deliberately intervene to uncover the underlying violations of moral and professional norms, thus engaging in a form of anti-racist critique. By exposing *racist gossip*, colleagues can also seek formal redress through available complaint mechanisms to challenge discriminatory behavior. These dynamics show that *collegiality* is not merely based on discreet loyalty but is continuously enacted, negotiated, and reshaped through everyday moral and communicative labor.

In this sense, the paper argues that the visibility or disappearance of "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion" (DEI) topics in organizational life is not primarily determined by policy change but by the ongoing enactment in everyday practice. In plural societies, actors constantly have to face and engage with issues of (anti-)discrimination and diversity. Within organizations, *collegiality* can thus be understood as a practical mode through which social order is produced and maintained. As Bergmann (2006, p.641) suggests, social order emerges not only from explicit rules or sanctions but also as a shared accomplishment, continually produced through concrete interactions. Therefore, the conditions under which diversity, equity, and inclusion take shape are co-constituted both by formal organizational structures and by the communicative practices of employees.

In that sense, *collegiality* can be understood as an implicit normative practice within organizations, one that is not formally codified but guides action and continuously updates and reproduces organizational norms such as *(anti-)discrimination* through members' everyday conduct.

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Bridging Strategies and Legitimation of New Collective Identities within Traditionalist Markets

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Introduction

Research on markets has often privileged narratives of technological progress and creative destruction, in which modern production displaces traditional craft (Schumpeter, 1934; Weber, 1946). Yet, many traditionalist markets persist, upheld by long-standing cultural repertoires, embodied skills, and authenticity norms (Negro et al., 2011; Suddaby et al., 2017). Within such markets, producer identities and production practices are tightly regulated, limiting how newcomers can reinterpret craft traditions (Koçak et al., 2014; McKendrick & Hannan, 2014). However, emerging evidence suggests that new craft-based producer groups do enter and transform traditionalist market spaces-not by rejecting inherited conventions, but by selectively adapting them (Reckwitz, 2020; Kroezen et al., 2021).

This study addresses how such new producer collectives establish legitimacy within traditionalist markets by examining the case of independent cymbal smiths: former drummers who craft cymbals individually, outside of long-established producers. While traditional Turkish cymbal producers emphasize lineage, secrecy, and craft purity, independent smiths foreground personal sonic expression, open knowledge exchange, and creative reinterpretation. Yet, despite their departure from orthodox craft methods, they have become a recognized producer collective with strong symbolic legitimacy among professional drummers.

Theoretical Background

Markets provide shared identity categories that shape how producers define "who we are" and "what we do" (Glynn & Navis, 2013; Lamont & Molnar, 2002). For new collectives, legitimacy depends on aligning identity claims with market audiences' expectations while differentiating from existing categories (Navis & Glynn, 2011; Wry et al., 2011).

In traditionalist markets, legitimacy is especially constrained by:

Prototypicality pressure, which restricts variation (McKendrick & Hannan, 2014)

Strong authenticity norms, which penalize deviation from inherited practices (Negro et al., 2011)

*Speaker

Restricted knowledge transmission, often via master–apprentice lineages (Cattani et al., 2013)

Despite this, new producer collectives can reinterpret traditions from within (Durand & Khaire, 2017), especially when they draw on embodied user expertise and community-based exchange networks (Shah & Tripsas, 2007; Browder et al., 2019).

This study theorizes identity legitimation under traditionalist constraints, showing how newcomers embed innovation within culturally resonant narratives rather than oppositional ones.

Methods

Data consists of 40 long-form interviews with independent cymbal smiths (2020–2024), drawn from YouTube podcasts and industry media, totaling 799 pages of transcript. These interviews, often conducted by smiths themselves, allow access to insider meaning structures and collective discourse.

Additional contextual sources included industry journalism, exhibition interviews (e.g., Chicago Drum Show), and drumming community forums.

Analysis followed grounded theory procedures (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Gioia et al., 2012), moving from open and focused coding to the identification of second-order themes and broader legitimation strategies.

Findings

1. Identity Bridging: "We are player-smiths."

Smiths legitimate their identity by connecting craft practice to drumming experience. They characterize cymbal making as an extension of musical self-expression-cymbals become *sound embodiments of artistic voice*. This connection reframes their lack of inherited craft lineage not as a deficit but as a creative advantage, positioning smiths as uniquely attuned to the experiential needs of drummers.

Three linked identity claims reinforce this strategy:

Distinctive personality in sound ("cymbals reflect the maker's voice")

Complementarity rather than competition (each smith adds a "color" to shared sonic palettes)

Generosity and community exchange based on jazz and drumming culture norms

This ultimately supports a cooperative market logic, where distinctiveness strengthens rather than fragments the collective identity.

2. Practice Bridging: "We build by ear, touch, and embodied knowing."

Smiths justify their production practices through analogies to musical improvisation and embodied listening. Instead of presenting craft as precise replication, they emphasize iterative

experimentation and evaluation through playing.

Three practices underpin this narrative:

Continuous learning and humility (craft mastery is "never finished")

Balancing structure and improvisation in shaping and hammering

Intentional imperfection, where variability and unpredictability are framed as markers of artistry, not flaws

This positions embodied user-expertise as a source of craft authority, enabling legitimacy without traditional apprenticeship.

Contribution

This study contributes to three streams of research:

Collective identity legitimation

1. New producer groups can gain legitimacy via reinterpretation, not radical differentiation (Wry et al., 2011).

2. Distinctiveness framed as complementary "color palette", balancing coherence & diversity (Navis & Glynn, 2010; Hiatt & Carlos, 2016).

3. Cooperation sustained beyond threats, reinforcing collective legitimacy (Sonenshein et al., 2017; Mathias et al., 2018)

Legitimation within traditionalist markets

1. Boundaries not fixed - softened through identity & practice negotiation.

2. Use of modern tools reframed as craft-enablers, authenticity reinterpreted (Negro et al. 2011).

Reinterpreting craft & singular production

1. Coexistence of "pure craft" & "creative craft" in the same market (Kroezen et al., 2021).

2. Product variability reframed as intentional imperfection, singularity reinterpreted & valorized (Karpik, 2010; Reckwitz, 2020).

3. Open knowledge-sharing contrasts secrecy of incumbents → expands legitimacy (Shah & Tripsas, 2007; Croidieu & Kim, 2018).

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Bureaucracy, Holocracy, Adhocracy – das (that) crazy. The Handling of Social Inequality in German Childcare Organizations

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Internationally, organisational sociology has been rather silent concerning current dynamics in the child care industry – although many European societies have seen a remarkable expansion of the latter over the last decades. In Germany, the remit of that societal sector has evolved with regulatory frameworks intended to contain certain forms of social inequality among children, particularly those related to language proficiency and acknowledged disabilities. More generally, throughout the institutional environment of the sector, the latter's operations are seen as a key lever for combating poverty and risks of becoming entangled in a precarious life course.

Our paper dissects the processes by which childcare organizations respond to these institutional expectations and argues that the 'handling' of social inequalities related to the above predicaments is imbued with governance mechanisms that eventually disempower those expected to meet the above mission. In theoretical terms, we draw on three concepts which, as we put forward, are all relevant to the governance of current childcare organizations. First, this governance looks bureaucratic to some extent, given that these organizations are highly institutionalised and embedded in public administration contexts. This adds to the fact that, like other modern organizations, childcare agencies are partially shaped by hierarchical rule, formal procedures, and norms of administrative accountability. Importantly, concerning the handling of social inequality, bureaucratic dynamics also matter because external actors structure activities run within these agencies in formalistic ways and in the context of special public programmes. Secondly, however, childcare organizations govern themselves by decentralised routine, collegial deliberation, and dynamics of 'managing up'. These processes of collective self-steering make them resemble governance models which have come to be seen as an expression of 'holocracy'. Institutional norms from outside corroborate these processes insofar as professional ideologies want these organizations to conceive of themselves as creative and proactive places for agreed organizational development – which impacts upon the sense-making of relevant organizational actors. Thirdly, however, German childcare organizations struggle with a multitude of missions that are imposed on them in our days. With a widespread lack of staff and time, as well as the experience of various tasks being incompatible among each other, street level practice is fraught with permanent pressures to strike balances in a sporadic and spontaneous manner, based on quick individual decisions. Hence the day-today is often structured by dynamics of adhocracy.

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While such agency helps keep the 'business' going on despite various constraints, it clashes with both expectations to handle social inequalities in a systematic manner and according to formal prescriptions and norms of collegial deliberation among professionals. Given the distinctive governance mix within child care agencies, external interventions by programme-running public bodies or special professions are a source of disorganization which increases further the need for adhocratic decision making although this is often viewed as being 'unprofessional'. From the perspective of organizational actors, this involves 'crazy' situations in which actors appear stunned as required operations appear senseless or prove mutually exclusive. All this results in role confusion and the experience of systematic disempowerment, prone to undermine the organizations' capacity to effectively 'handle' the above mission of combating social inequalities.

Our contribution makes use of findings of a qualitative research project, jointly conducted by teams located at two academic institutions (one at the University of Kassel and one at the HWR in Berlin, coordinated by Sigrid Betzelt). It draws on evidence collated via four in-depth case studies, based on semi-structural interviews with members of staff, participant observation; documentary analysis; and focus group interviews with parents. Using sensitizing concepts inferred from the literature dealing with the contemporary childcare sector and exploiting our data by an inductive, category-led approach, we find overarching mechanisms through which bureaucracy, holocracy and adhocracy, while becoming intertwined in various, often provisional manners, put organizations in this sector under permanent strain.

The paper adds to different literatures: It enriches reflections on how contemporary human service organizations cope with growing institutional complexity. Secondly, it shows that regulatory frameworks matter when it comes to influence organizational capacity for meeting complex missions. Finally, it provides new insights to scholars studying childcare settings from the perspective of organizational sociology and, more generally, with tensions related to the current assemblage of Western 'societies of organizations'.

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Collective Relations in Governing the Welfare State – The Operational Turn and the (im)possibility of Collective Conflict?

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This paper explores the collective bargaining system as an immune system for public administration in times of rapid change. I examine the bargaining system and its self-regulation as the immunological mechanism that has historically enabled public employees to say no and engage in conflict with the public administration. Historically, the development of Danish welfare state is closely linked to the plurality of collective relations and the integrations of collective interest in developing welfare policies. This includes the gradual recognition and formation of a collective bargaining system for public employees (Pedersen, 2022). Through labor law regulation and an institutional separation from legislative power, the principle of self-regulation was alleviated, making the collective bargaining system a crucial part of the public administration's immune system in a pluralistic liberal democracy. I draw on Niklas Luhmann's theory of social immune mechanisms and his observation of the law as society's immune system (Niklas Luhmann,2004; Andersen & Stenner 2020, 2023; Wolfe 2017). According to Luhmann, the possibility of saying 'no' is the core of social immunity and conflict is the most important immune mechanism, observing the legal system as an immune system that thrives on conflict. Luhmann argues that the more complex a society is, the more conflict it needs in order not to become rigid and imploding. In that respect, the self-regulation of the collective bargaining system enables the administration to recruit, listen to, and manage collective conflicts through negotiations and agreements.
My claim is that the historical recognition of collective interests and conflicts in the public labor market has been significantly weakened in relation to current radical reforms of public administration. These reforms view not only organizational structures but also law as potential threats to agile and efficient welfare processes, designating them as 'bureaucratic 'in favor of 'an operational turn' in the semantics of public governing fostering anti-structural processes and technologies in public administration (Andersen, 2020; Andersen, Pedersen & Porner Nielsen, 2026). Instead of inviting private and collective interest the administration attempts to protect itself from all forms of structures, speaking of 'de-bureaucratization', 'agility,' co-creation' and 'core task'. This paper focuses on the effects of this operational turn on the immune function of the collective bargaining system. I argue that the operational turn challenges both law and conflict resolution by promoting open-ended and fluid processes. Collective interest and conflicts are no longer considered valuable for the system to evolve. Instead, collective relations have become embedded within reform complexes, tripartite negotiations, dialogue forums, and managerial and operational initiatives. This entanglement has made it increasingly difficult to mobilize collective interests and initiate conflict. Although conflicts persist, they have become

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more diffuse and complex, rendering them less amenable to resolution through traditional bargaining mechanisms and labor law institutions. Consequently, the bargaining system has been stretched out between two poles-on one hand, traditional collective representation of interests, and on the other, a potentializing involvement in reform processes. Employee organizations are increasingly invited to act as co-creators of welfare operations and potentialities, rather than as adversaries in collective negotiations. This dual role has generated systemic tensions that challenge the self-regulatory capacity of the bargaining system-and its function as an immune mechanism-has been substantially weakened.

As the empirical underpinning, the paper traces this development through key moments in contemporary collective bargaining, from the first massively politicized negotiations in 2008 to a recent convergence of tripartite agreements and collective bargaining processes in 2023–2024. The analytical focus is on the interaction between collective bargaining and the political system. While a comprehensive account of this interaction is beyond the scope of this paper, attention is given to recurrent instances where political intervention has directly undermined the bargaining system's autonomy-such as government-imposed legislative overrides of mediation proposals, ignorance or even avoidance of bargaining procedures and the proliferation of tripartite collaborations addressing employment, welfare, and crisis management.

The analysis proceeds in two parts. First, it examines how interest-based conflicts have been reframed as cognitive system conflicts (instead of collective interests), with the bargaining system repurposed to support New Public Management reforms. Second, it explores how the system has adapted to the operational turn and a networked form of governance, allowing attacks on bargaining rights and efforts to transform negotiations into potentializing technologies addressing operative challenges-such as agile leadership, recruitment, and co-created welfare on an operational level of administration. The paper concludes by reflecting on the immunological implications for the collective bargaining system and its auto-immune effects on public governance. It is discussed how these developments constrain and demotivate collective conflict in a pluralistic democracy.

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Competitive Shocks and Educational Inequality: The Case of Swedish Schools

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Organizations are central to the challenges of diversity, equality and inclusion of modern society. Much of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusiveness literature is focused on what takes place within the organization; as Amis et al. (2020) point out, many of the observed DEI challenges originate in, and are perpetuated by, organizational practices such as hiring, promotion and remuneration. What is still discussed is the degree to which organizations are responsibility for the inequalities they cause, or if their practices simply reflect larger societal norms and standards. Where authors such as Acker (2006) or Barley (1996) argue that inequitable practices are an organizational choice, others such as DiMaggio and Powell (1983) or Tilly (1998) forward more of a view of organizations as a mirror of society. Seeking to bridge these two lines of argument, the work of Amis et al. (2017); Amis et al. (2018) position organizations as conduits between the institutional field and the individual.
The focus of this literature has been on the effect of organizations and organizational practices on the members of the organization. Who is hired, who is promoted, who is included and who is listened to inside the organization. In this paper we widen the perspective and suggest that the organizations and their practices can affect social inequality also outside its boundaries.

Our empirical focus is Swedish education, a field where the relation between schools in municipalities has been organized as competitive since 1992 (Björklund, 2005). Earlier work by economists have shown that the introduction of competition has – in the long run – rendered the school system less equitable and less inclusive, as segregation on socio-economic status and ethnicity across schools has increased (Holmlund et al., 2019; Söderström & Uusitalo, 2010). Economists, by and large, explain this outcome solely as the result of individual choice behavior (Epple et al., 2017; Kapor et al., 2020); the schools as organizations and the organization of their relationships is conspicuously absent from their analysis.

We re-introduce the schools as organizations that mediate between the competitive market and the educational achievements of individual students. Our approach is that we study the effect of competitive shocks on the educational achievement of pupils in the schools affected by the shock. The intuition is that when a school rapidly loses (or gains) students due to new entry (or exit) from a local school market, it wreaks havoc with the operational budget of the school – which calls for rapid budgetary adjustments by school leadership, the consequences of which are mediated by student socio-economic status. What typically happens when a principal needs to shrink the budget from spring to fall is that the 'non-essential' staff and activities – teacher aides and extra classes – are dropped. This is the extra support on which pupils from lower SES

*Speaker

depend relatively more on.

We test this intuition through an econometric analysis of the effects of enrollment shocks on students' educational achievement. Using register data covering nearly 80 percent of all students in Sweden who completed grade nine between 2013 and 2021 (approximately 697,000 students), we estimate how annual changes in school enrollment affect grade point average (GPA). The effects are modeled non-linearly to capture both gains and losses in student numbers at the school level. The model is estimated at the individual level using a fixed-effects specification with municipality-by-year fixed effects and a comprehensive set of school- and individual-level controls. Preliminary results suggest that 1) there are significant reduction in student GPA in schools exposed to enrolment shocks; 2) learning effects are mediated by student SES; 3) students in privately run schools are relatively more adversely affected than students in publicly run schools.

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Constructing Disability in Higher Education: A European Comparative Discourse Analysis on Students with Disabilities

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Disability is no longer confined to a single national context, but is increasingly shaped by transnational discourse (see Goodley, 2011). Consequently, inclusive practices in higher education are becoming more deeply rooted in global interpretive frameworks (Allemann-Ghionda, 2021). Although the subject of disability in higher education has gained political traction through the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), academic engagement with this area of study began comparatively recently. Two important aspects are significant when addressing disability in the context of higher education: 1) There is still a lack of conceptual clarity regarding how disability is constructed linguistically and culturally across diverse European contexts. 2) Universities are not merely sites of learning but organisations that allocate status, opportunity, and recognition. Initiatives such as the Bologna Process (Crosier & Parveva, 2013) and the European Disability Strategy (Aust, 2016) highlight the importance of conducting comparative research into the experiences of disabled students. Nevertheless, comprehensive cross-national analyses remain scarce (Allemann-Ghionda, 2021; Powell & Solga, 2010).

Adopting a European comparative perspective, this paper is grounded in Disability Studies (Waldschmidt, 2018, 2020), a field that conceives of disability as a socially and culturally produced phenomenon rather than an objective condition, and organizational sociology. It examines how disability is problematised, managed, and normalised in higher education and how this organisational work translates broader social inequalities into positional inequalities among students and staff. It traces how international scripts (UN-CRPD) and European policy regimes (e.g., Bologna) are translated into institutional policies, routines, and technologies of classification. The empirical basis of the study consists of guideline-based interviews conducted with staff members at five European universities. The aim is to reconstruct the discourses surrounding students with disabilities and to examine the normative orders and power relations at work within these discourses. The analysis is drawing on these two approaches from disability and organisational studies: With first a discourse-theoretical approach, particularly Michel Foucault's reflections on power, knowledge, and subjectivation (e.g. Foucault, 1989, 2017), as well as Judith Butler's concepts of performativity and iterability (Butler, 2016a, 2016b), the analysis explores the interplay between power and knowledge in the production of disability. It secondly connect these to classic organisational mechanisms - myth/ceremony, isomorphism, and boundary objects - as they materialise in admissions, assessment, and student services (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

*Speaker

The findings (Aust, 2025) reveal that discussions surrounding students with disabilities fluctuate between normative regulatory frameworks and individual recognition. Despite political efforts, the concept of the 'normal' student remains closely associated with non-disabled standards. Disability continues to be viewed as a deviation from an ideal norm - a perception deeply rooted in medical and psychological paradigms. I term the resulting pattern performative inclusion: visible commitment with limited redistribution of epistemic, temporal, and material resources, foregrounding the distributional, procedural, and epistemic dimensions of inclusion (Fricker, 2007; Hamraie, 2017; Shakespeare, 2013).

Under such conditions, legal provisions alone are insufficient to realise inclusion. A fundamental shift in perspective is needed, one that recognises disability as an integral part of academic practice. The contribution addresses the call to disentangle social vs. positional inequality, explain organisational (resistance to) change with theory and critically appraise pro-diversity measures and indicators.

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Coordinating inclusion: How public administrations navigate between diversity, stability and organisational change

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In times of intensified challenges posed by an increasingly complex and diverse society, the topics of diversity, equity and inclusion are becoming increasingly relevant to governments and public administrations. Guidelines have been established at national and regional levels, and programmes have been launched at a local level. How are public administrations responding to the demand for diversity and inclusion in our society? How are these concepts and principles incorporated into their organisational processes?
A variety of implementations could be found in internal and public participation, or organisational change in the public administration. There are various ways to interpret the relevance of diversity and inclusion for one's own areas of responsibility and integrate them into one's daily work procedures. Diversity programmes launched within public administrations are received differently by each department, which may has its own unique approach. Even within participation processes, the concept of inclusion can be interpreted in various ways. It can either be seen as a means to an end, resulting in a fairer distribution of the common good, or as an end in itself, leading to recognition and empowerment (Van De Wetering and Groenleer, 2023; Fraser and Honneth, 2003).

The organisational forms and structures of formal bureaucracy are often perceived as a major obstacle to participatory and innovative processes in public administrations. Despite New Public Management reforms in the late 1990s and subsequent waves of reform, formal bureaucracy remains a crucial and necessary part of public administration, coexisting with other emerging organisational models. The concept of 'neo-Weberian state' describes the combination of formal bureaucracy with the customer and performance orientation which is characteristic for public administrations in Germany (Kuhlmann and Bogumil, 2019). Even the radically flexible approach of "potentiality administration" in the Danish public administration system is the result of the cumulative development of co-existing organisational forms, ranging from formal bureaucracy to sector administration and the supervision administration (Anderson and Pors, 2016). Therefore, rather than asking how to diminish bureaucracy, the more realistic question is how this internal variety of logics and approaches which reflects the diversity of society, can be differentiated and coordinated within organisations.

This raises crucial questions for public administration organisations: How can conflicts between

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goals, priorities and expectations be managed to ensure inclusive decision-making that considers the diverse needs and interests of society? How do public administrations respond to growing organisational and societal complexity, maintain stability, and cope with reform and change?

These questions have been addressed by existing organisational sociology literature in various ways. In response to the multiple and often controversial societal expectations they face, organisations become 'multi-referential' (Wehrsig and Tacke, 1992) and adopt strategies to decouple, translate and recombine these expectations, relying on their own available structures (Besio and Meyer, 2018). Bureaucratic organisations in particular prefer to add flexible elements to their existing structures rather than change them (Besio and Tacke, 2023). For public administrations, the priorities in decision-making programmes become mixed and shiftable, while the organisational routines such as hierarchisation, professionalisation and parallelisation are developed to deal with the complexity of multi-referentiality (Bora, 2001). Moreover, creating new work groups, interfaces or boundary positions for internal and external coordination seems to be a common approach to tackling cross-cutting tasks and addressing new challenges and emerging societal issues. Under what conditions can these coordination structures fulfil their role of bringing together the diverse perspectives and practices from different departments and units based on their functional differentiation? Where are their limits? How do they influence the balance between flexibility and stability, and affect the way the administrative organisation functions as a whole?

Empirical results from our ongoing case study of the local administration in Berlin, conducted within the framework of the BMBF-funded research project EmpHyReS (2023-2026), suggest that both openness and resistance to change exist simultaneously and are intertwined in the handling of participation in decision-making processes. Although the challenge of increasing complexity is perceived everywhere, not all departments and units within an organisation possess the same level of flexibility and openness to make change possible. While some departments are trying to keep diversity and inclusion issues separate from their own work, others have seized the opportunity to launch an internal transformation process and encourage most of their staff to participate. This diversity of responses highlights the importance of coordinating activities across departments via various interfaces and channels. These can reduce friction by expanding the scope for manoeuvre and facilitating exchange and negotiation between conflicting goals. However, coordination structures within public administration can themselves become an additional source of complexity, especially if they become excessively diversified and overlapping. The question is: what organisational mechanisms and dynamics come into play to manage this paradox? How can 'loose coupling' (Weick, 1976) help organisations to balance the tension between stability and change?

Our research aims to answer the following key question: what structural conditions make organisational change possible? The ongoing analysis is based on empirical data gathered through expert interviews, as well as administrative and political documents. In our presentation, we will share our findings and discuss their theoretical relevance from an organisational sociological perspective.

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Coupling dynamics in policy implementation: Understanding organizational change and resistance in plurilingual education reform in Luxembourg's ECEC sector.

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This paper introduces a typology for educational policy analysis designed to deepen our understanding of how organizational dynamics shape the implementation and outcomes of education policies. Drawing on Orton and Weick's (1990) multidimensional concept of coupling, the paper conceptualizes policy implementation as a process of organizational change that unfolds through varying degrees of alignment between policy goals and policy measures, across both policy design and practice levels. This theoretical framing allows for a systematic analysis of how organizations may respond to expectations of change – whether through tight coupling (alignment and compliance) or loose coupling (partial adaptation, or forms of resistance and reinterpretation) that reshape the original policy intent.
The typology examines the relationship between policy goals and policy measures, focusing on the degree to which they are tightly or loosely linked within and across these dimensions. The central argument is that the degree of coupling established at the policy level significantly shapes implementation dynamics. Depending on how closely goals and measures are aligned, implementation can generate both intended and unintended effects in practice (Spillane, Reiser & Gomez, 2002). This analytical perspective is especially relevant in complex education systems, where diverse organizational actors and hybrid governance structures complicate coherent policy enactment (Simoes & Hadjar, 2024).

Empirical evidence is drawn from a recent mixed-method study on the implementation of Luxembourg's plurilingual education policy in the early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector (Simoes Loureiro, 2024). This reform, situated within the broader agenda of reducing language-related educational inequalities and fostering inclusion in a multilingual and multicultural context, provides a rich case for examining how organizations within a mixed economy of ECEC – comprising public, private, and non-profit providers – navigate complex and sometimes contradictory policy expectations. The study focuses on expert interviews to explore how organizational actors interpret, translate, and enact plurilingual education guidelines in practice.

The developed typology is based on the analysis of both loose and tight coupling between policy goals and measures, as well as within them, all at the policy level. For each configuration, the

*Speaker

typology identifies corresponding intended and unintended effects at the practice level, illustrating how organizations respond differently to policy expectations depending on their structures, capacities, and interpretive frameworks.

The results highlight several key patterns:

- Tight coupling between policy goals and measures may foster clarity and vertical coherence, supporting goal-oriented strategies in practice, but it may also constrain adaptation to diverse local conditions.
- Tight coupling within policy measures may ensure strong connections between design and implementation, yet it may also produce challenges when organizational realities require more differentiated or context-sensitive approaches.
- Loose coupling between policy measures may allow for greater flexibility and contextual interpretation, but it may also lead to inconsistent or fragmented implementation due to varied understandings across organizations.
- Loose coupling within policy goals may generate ambiguity in execution, which may encourage organizations either to rely more heavily on their own interpretations or to adhere closely to concrete measures for guidance.
- Tight coupling within policy goals may foster a goal-oriented implementation strategy at the practice level, ensuring alignment with overarching objectives, whereas loose coupling within policy goals may lead to challenges in implementation when clear or consistent measures are lacking to support execution.
- Loose coupling between policy goals and measures may reflect a lack of specificity or coherence between the two elements, which may, in turn, encourage innovative adaptations but also produce unintended rigidity, as organizations seek stability while navigating uncertainty.

These patterns reveal how coupling configurations influence the ways in which educational organizations balance coherence with autonomy, structure with flexibility, and reform compliance with contextual responsiveness.
The proposed typology thus provides both a conceptual framework and a practical tool for researchers and policymakers to analyze how policy goals and measures on.a policy level shape implementation processes within an field of organizational diversity. It contributes to broader educational research by offering a lens to assess how education policies are translated into everyday organizational practices, revealing both challenges and opportunities in navigating systemic complexity. On this basis, this contribution calls for a more nuanced understanding of organizational diversity, not only in terms of sectoral or structural variation but also regarding how organizations interpret and enact reform pressures in ways that may reproduce or challenge social and educational inequalities.

Datafication and Inter-Organizational Coupling: A Systems-Theoretical Perspective on Mutually Enforcing Dynamics

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The 21st century is widely described both as an era of ever-advancing digitalization and as a period in which multi-organizational constellations are gaining more and more importance. These two developments are often discussed separately: on the one hand, research examines how digital technologies and organizations shape one another and how *intra*-organizational decision-making, communication, and working routines change in the context of digitalization (e.g. Büchner 2018; Kellogg et al. 2020; Onnen et al. 2022). On the other hand, scholarship on organizational fields, networks, and meta-organizations highlights that organizations are more densely interlinked than ever before, with digitalization receiving little attention in this research context (e.g. Ahrne and Brunsson 2008; Raab and Kenis 2009; Grothe-Hammer and Rachlitz 2025). In this presentation, I explore how these two dynamics are not merely parallel but deeply intertwined. I argue that there is a mutually reinforcing dynamic between datafication and inter-organizational structural coupling.
The central argument is this: As decision-making within organizations increasingly relies on data (= datafication), irritations originating from other organizations gain greater relevance for ongoing organizational operations (= structural coupling) – and vice versa: Inter-organizational couplings catalyze datafication. Investigating this mutually amplifying dynamic is not only theoretically but also 'practically' relevant, as it challenges the widespread hope that digitalization might lead to a reduction of bureaucracy.

This perspective builds on and extends a systems-theoretical understanding of organizations. In Niklas Luhmann's theory, organizations reproduce themselves through decisions (Luhmann 2018 (2000)). Organizations are operationally closed but open to observations of the environment as they themselves construct it. As autopoietic systems, they can connect to other systems through structural couplings, understood as stable patterns of reciprocal irritation that allow them to observe and respond to each other's operations without dissolving their autonomy (Luhmann 1998). Traditionally, systems theory has applied the concept of structural coupling primarily to the relationship between organizations and function systems (e.g., organizations and law, or organizations and science) (Knudsen 2007; Luhmann 2019). However, I argue that this concept is equally useful for analyzing inter-organizational relations – which becomes increasingly important as multi-organizational configurations are on the rise.

*Speaker

The dissertation project on which this presentation is based examines these dynamics empirically through a qualitative study of the dairy sector. In contemporary dairy farming, organizational decisions are increasingly oriented towards data. Milking robots and sensor systems continuously collect information about animals' health status, fertility cycles, movement patterns, and milk quality. Importantly, it is not only farms that make use of these data. Numerous other organizations – e.g. governmental bodies, retail corporations, veterinary offices, and technology companies – seek access to this data and reference it in their own decision-making.

In my analysis of datafication and inter-organizational coupling in the dairy sector, I identify three forms of inter-organizational structural coupling in which this mutually reinforcing dynamic of datafication can be observed:

- Benchmarking as coupling through shared sense-making frameworks: Benchmarking practices represent inter-organizationally shared standards of evaluation. When farms compare their performance metrics to those of others, they irritate one another. Datafication amplifies this by widening the range, granularity, and temporal frequency of what can be benchmarked. As data collection expands, new arenas for benchmarking can be established. Conversely, the aim of participating in benchmarking motivates dairy farms to collect and share data.
- Inter-organizational expectations as coupling through differentiated functional logics: Organizations address expectations to one another that are formulated in relation to different functional logics. In the dairy sector, for example, there are laws (guided by the binary code of the legal system) as well as food certification schemes and subsidy programs (guided by the binary code of the economic system). Those inter-organizational expectations are observed as bureaucracy. The need to monitor compliance with such expectations acts as a driver for the development and diffusion of datafication technologies. Conversely, datafication renders inter-organizational expectations more precisely articulable and more tightly observable and controllable, deviations become harder to conceal.
- Meta-Organizations as coupling through formalized decision premises: The complexity of inter-organizational coordination requirements in the context of datafication motivates the formation of meta-organizations. But meta-organizations not only respond to datafication but actively drive it: Meta-organizations organize data exchange by, for example, establishing standards. They make data collection and transparency a condition of membership and institutionalize datafication as a precondition for participation.

The focus of my presentation will be on illustrating the mutually reinforcing relationship between inter-organizational couplings and datafication, as manifested in benchmarking, inter-organizational expectations, and meta-organizations. I will begin my presentation by briefly explaining how I approached the dairy sector case study from a systems-theoretical perspective and will conclude by contextualizing the findings within the broader organizational sociology literature on digitalization and multi-organizational arrangements.

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Deprofessionalisation and Loss of Control – The Adaptation of Schools to AI

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The sociological basis: school as a type of organisation

As a starting point, this article conceptualises schools as a type of organisation (Drepper & Tacke 2023; Pohlmann 2024). In our classification, schools are profession-based administrative organisations. In Germany, their goals, budgets and curricula are specified by the respective federal state and coordinated nationwide, while being standardised to the greatest possible extent. One of their special features is that their clientele is not usually free to choose whether to attend and that it consists of adolescents whose 'maturity' is still in the process of being developed. Their functions are therefore not only the transmission of knowledge, but also socialisation. Against this background, a profession has developed in the form of teaching staff? who are granted limited autonomy within the framework of the curricula inside their classrooms. Another special feature of schools is that they take on 'sovereign' tasks for the state in order to ensure that adolescents made socially compatible with the institutional order of society and to ensure their potential usefulness as future personnel.

The problem: the dynamics of structural change and the lifeworlds of pupils

In the second part, the article highlights the problems and dilemmas schools face in digital capitalism. Their challenges in digital capitalism include the fact that the platform economy, with its democratisation of cultural participation, has a significant impact on the socialisation and everyday lives of Their clientele from a certain age onwards – especially as (uncontrolled) media consumption and online platform presence increase. At the same time, school classes are often equipped with tablets or laptops (DigitalPakt!), and pupils are expected to work through content with the help of standardised educational apps. Nevertheless, this form of analogue, mediasupported knowledge transfer competes with the digital, AI-supported lifeworld of adolescents, which is largely dominated and controlled by corporations of the new platform economy. The conflict of interests and the digital gap between the often outdated, enforced traditional teaching methods offered by schools and the private teaching methods offered by AI and the corporations behind it, continues to grow. Although this situation is being recognised by state-level policymakers and schools are being prescribed a Digital Pact!, at the same time pupils are being prohibited from using mobile phones in schools.

The dilemmas faced by schools

The fact that schools as a type of organisation are lagging behind in the digitalisation of our daily lives is not only due to resistance to and the privileging of analoguebased teaching, but also to three dilemmas of this particular organisational form that AI-based digitalisation encounters:

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First: Due to its 'sovereign' state functions, schools are obliged to maintain political neutrality and scientific validity in the transfer of knowledge. The much-discussed AI bias and the hallucinatory capabilities of AI (LLM) undermine both of these principles. AI applications fundamentally challenge both the protection of political neutrality and 'scientific accuracy in' because they often generate results through socalled 'black box processes' whose modes of operation are opaque and difficult for teachers to understand. This undermines the assurance of neutrality and accuracy as well as the promotion of the liberal-democratic resilience of their clientele.

Second: At the same time, the attribution of individual performance is declining. AI-generated homework or exams can no longer be clearly attributed to individual performance. This jeopardises the functional and purpose-based ability of schools to monitor and evaluate performance. If the significance and function of grades and traditional performance assessments decline because performance can no longer be attributed to the individual, central functional principles of schools and their legitimacy in the educational system of society will be undermined. Defending and maintaining the logic of control is therefore a struggle for schools and an increasing challenge to their institutional survival.

Third: School systems are often highly hierarchical and federally organised (especially in Germany), which makes reforms lengthy, complicated and difficult to integrate and implement. Every change has to pass through many administrative levels (federal, state, school authorities), which makes the system slow, inflexible and highly resistant to change. Chronic teacher shortage and a lack of financial resources are scientifically proven barriers. Teachers often feel overburdened by their day-to-day work, so that new reforms or didactic and methodological concepts of digital or AI-based teaching are perceived as an additional strain rather than a relief. There is a lack of time and incentive structures for necessary professional development and AI-related training. At the same time, teachers work relatively autonomously behind closed doors and under institutional protection. Central reforms for 'sustainable education and future-ready schools' often do not penetrate everyday teaching practice or are only implemented superficially.

Schools are therefore faced with extremely diverse and often contradictory expectations: imparting knowledge, teaching values, integration, inclusion, digitalisation and preparing their clientele for the labour market. Every new social challenge leads to a new reform that 'competes' with other goals and makes implementation difficult with an increasingly heterogeneous student population. The high frequency of changing and often poorly coordinated reforms leads to considerable change fatigue among teachers and school administrators. They often simply wait for the next reform because experience shows that the current one may soon be replaced.

However, in light of the rapid development of digitalisation and artificial intelligence, schools and, in particular, their teachers are subject to a dual pressure of adaptation: on the one hand, they are expected to continue to fulfil fundamental educational tasks such as knowledge transfer, personal development and social integration; on the other hand, they are increasingly being measured by whether they prepare pupils for an increasingly digitalised and AI-shaped world of everyday life and work, which labour market opportunities and career trajectories are increasingly influenced by AI-based systems.

The study

In the third part, the article presents the results of a sociological analysis of teachers' collective interpretative patterns (collective mindsets). In addition, it presents the results of a survey on the 'AI adaptation' of schools and teachers in Germany, which, drawing on new institutional

theory, analyses both the diffusion dynamics of AI use and the cognitive and normative institutions that shape its application and implementation.

The results

A survey of 136 teachers from Baden-Württemberg confirms the structural hurdles. Although teachers have a solid basic knowledge of AI and show a fundamental interest in it, there is considerable reluctance to use it. Their concerns are less about job losses or AI bias and more about losing control over the educational process and assessment authority. Accordingly, fears of deprofessionalisation and loss of control currently play the biggest role in their collective mindsets when it comes to the hesitant application of AI. There is no fundamental rejection of AI and the digital teaching and learning tools based on it. So, while schools are formally adapting, behind the scenes it is the 'mandate for autonomous problem solving' and control over individual performance that currently still stand in the way of AI-supported teaching.

Conclusions

In the final part, conclusions are presented based on the key findings and results. The profession-based administrative organisation of schools tends to respond formally and (within the scope of its possibilities) technologically to the new demands of society and state policy – but in an extremely heterogeneous manner. At the informal level, however, dominant collective mindsets within the teaching profession tend to interpret AI use as a source of deprofessionalisation and loss of control, thereby constraining the potential for the development of AI-supported pedagogy and sustainable knowledge transfer.

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Disruptive partnerships? When corporate foundations provide answers to the desires of public education - and a little more...

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Organizations are confronted with a plurality of rapidly changing challenges to which they respond in various ways. Within education one of these challenges is the future. The future is important in education, because we educate for the future. Currently the future is described as looming with crises and characterized by rapid change and emerging challenges. This radically uncertain and unknown future confronts education with the question of how to take responsibility for shaping children and young people for a society, labor market, and jobs that do not (yet) exist and of which we only know that we do not know (Andersen, Knudsen, Sandager 2024; Pors and Kishik 2023).
The question of how to educate for the unknown future is answered with a call for radical transformation. A call that place major pressure on the conventional boundaries of democratic control, delegations of responsibility, and legitimacy. Discussions about pedagogy, purpose, curriculum are being overtaken by a want for and promises of radical change.

In this landscape of reform and atmosphere of insecurity, private corporate foundations enter the stage with resources, big ideas and promises of positive change. Denmark is an extreme case when it comes to this new tendency of private actors engaging with public education. This is due to two characteristics: 1. the Danish society is traditionally a small welfare society which used to have a fully tax financed public education system. 2. Some of the world's biggest private corporate foundations like Novo Nordisk, AP Møller Mærsk and LEGO are located in Denmark. Over the past 8-10 years, these private corporate foundations have donated to and partnered with Danish educational institutions in a variety of ways (Knudsen and Cone 2025). Denmark is an extreme case but private corporate foundations are playing an increasingly influential role in shaping educational aims, practices, and institutions around the world (Srivastava & Oh, 2010; Ball, 2020; Rowe et al. 2023; Parreira de Amaral et al. 2019).

The paper focus on one Danish case and explores how policy is formulated, how accountability is observed and what counts as knowledge in "Playful learning" which is a partnership between LEGO Foundation and the six Danish University Colleges. The paper unravels the unsettling feeling that "Playful Learning" fulfills the desire for radical change from below. Through an analysis of materials published by the LEGO Foundation before and through the Playful Learning partnership, the paper illustrates how positive arrangements of excitement, emergence, and riskiness establishes the program beyond conventional frameworks of policy negotiation, accountability, and knowledge politics. This negation not only provides a pathway for building

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philanthropic influence from below but blurs any structural differences between teaching as a contextual practice and global flows of commercial excitement.

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Does Artificial Intelligence Constitute a New Phase of Alienation in the Managerial University?

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This paper investigates how the integration of generative artificial intelligence (Gen-AI) technologies reshapes the university as an organization of knowledge production and redefines academic labor through new regimes of alienation. Situated within organizational sociology and the sociology of work, the analysis treats the university as an organization in which digital infrastructures restructure coordination, control, and the meaning of intellectual work. Alienation is conceptualized both as an organizational condition and an experience, a systemic form of dispossession and of loss of meaning resulting from the standardization, formalization and commodification of cognitive labor (Fuchs 2019; Zuboff 2019; Couldry and Mejias 2019).
The digital transformation of higher education unfolds within broader processes of neoliberal managerialization that have transformed universities worldwide. Within the university, this separation occurs through organizational rationalization-a process Weber (1978) described as the expansion of bureaucratic control through formalized procedures. Under neoliberal governance, managerial reforms have intensified this rationalization through total-quality systems, performance indicators, and quantification models that translate scholarly activity into measurable outputs (Hall 2018). Total-quality management models, performance indicators, and quantification systems translate scholarly activity into measurable outputs, recoding intellectual labor as data. The institutionalization of AI extends this managerial logic by embedding algorithmic decision-making within academic structures (Pasquinelli 2023; Kallinikos 2006). While public discourse presents AI as efficient and neutral, this promise functions ideologically-as a rhetorical mechanism legitimizing intensified forms of managerial oversight and surveillance (Zuboff 2019; Beer 2019; Crawford 2021). The university thus evolves into a data-driven organization governed by algorithmic rationality and digital capitalism.

AI integration into the processes of intellectual work reorganizes the conditions of alienation within academic labour, which emerges from new forms and experiences of alienation. Classical Marxian thought defines alienation as the separation of the worker from the product, process, and self (Marx 1844). Twentieth-century organizational sociology and work sociology extended this concept to the bureaucratic and technical division of labor (Braverman 1974; Blauner 1964, Friedmann, 1964). In the early 2000s, French sociologists of work and social philosophers argued that the new management strategies and corporate culture emerging after the 1980s-while claiming to overcome bureaucratic rationality-actually produced new forms of alienation (subjective

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alienation) (Dejours 2000; Linhart 2015; Honneth 2014) by mobilizing workers' subjectivity. Academic labor epitomizes this subjectivized regime: scholars internalize institutional goals, perform autonomy as a managerial ideal, and continuously display reflexivity and innovation.

However, the integration of AI marks a historical turning point. It relocates the locus of creativity and judgment from human subjects to algorithmic systems, transforming subjectivity from an epistemic foundation into an operationalized interface-a monitored and datafied element of organizational feedback (Knox 2022; Bender et al. 2021). The rise of Gen-AI extends this logic into the cognitive domain. AI systems coordinate and evaluate research, teaching, and publication by transforming interpretation and judgment into algorithmically processed data (Pasquinelli 2023; Beer 2019). Academic autonomy is thus redefined as compliance with automated systems of evaluation, making alienation not only a labor condition but an organizational ontology of the digital university.

The defining feature of this new phase of alienation is the epistemic shift it produces. Knowledge, once grounded in reflexivity, deliberation, and interpretive reasoning, is re-coded as predictive processing. Large language models and generative systems simulate understanding through statistical association, producing what Bender et al. (2021) call "fluent but contextless" text. This reconfigures the epistemic foundations of scholarship from critical engagement to computational output. Meaning is replaced by correlation, and reasoning is offloaded onto algorithmic systems designed for efficiency rather than truth (Pasquinelli 2023; Crawford 2021). This automation of abstraction marks a profound departure from the Enlightenment ideal of autonomous thought: the capacity to interpret and critique is externalized, quantified, and integrated into machine systems. In this sense, the epistemic shift is also a new phase of alienation-the estrangement of knowledge itself from its human authors.

Accompanying this epistemic transformation is a process of cognitive offloading. AI systems relieve academics of repetitive and interpretive tasks-grading, editing, summarizing, and even argumentation-but in doing so, they absorb the scholar's cognitive functions into organizational platforms (Knox 2022; Kallinikos 2006). What appears as assistance is simultaneously dispossession. Intellectual labor is captured as data and repurposed for the institution's productivity metrics. The academic subject, thus, becomes an objectified cognitive worker-both producer and input within the university's data economy. Marx's notion of the worker becoming an appendage of the machine finds renewed expression here: the academic becomes an appendage of the algorithm. Reflexivity, creativity, and affect are reconstituted as resources to be extracted and optimized, while interpretive judgment-once the hallmark of intellectual autonomy-is operationalized as a managerial function (Fuchs 2019; Zuboff 2019). The result is objective alienation: the externalization of agency and meaning into digital infrastructures that mediate every stage of knowledge production. This reorganization of alienation also transforms the subjectivity of academic labor. Since the 1980s, the managerial strategy is founded on subjective overinvestment, which transforms into alienation. Nevertheless, subjectivity today is algorithmically governed.

By re-centering alienation as the primary analytic lens, this paper shows that the integration of Gen-AI is not simply a technological or managerial phenomenon but a restructuring of human consciousness under algorithmic rationality. Organizational rationalization, while still significant, functions as the mediating mechanism through which alienation expands: from the economic to the cognitive, from the subjective to the objective, and from the material to the epistemic. The university thus emerges as a paradigmatic site of twenty-first-century alienation-where the production of knowledge and the production of the self are both automated, quantified, and rendered organizational property. To understand the future of academic labor, one must therefore return to alienation, not as a relic of industrial capitalism but as the organizing condition of intellectual work in the age of artificial intelligence.

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EU relationships in conflict early warning and response: Cooperation, autonomy, and hierarchies

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Why does the European Union (EU) financially support the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and the Standby Team of Senior Mediation Advisers of the United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (UN DPPA)? Why its new European Peace Facility is less beneficial for Africa? Or why wouldn't the EU officials always share the information with their counterparts on the ground? These and many other questions arise regularly when looking into the EU activities in the field of early warning and response to violent conflicts (EWR). The activities, which are inevitably connected with the EU cooperation with other international organizations on the issues of peace and security.
The nature of violent conflicts has changed significantly in the post-Cold War era, with a variety of state and non-state actors being involved as both parties of the conflicts and 'third parties' working on conflict prevention and resolution. Based on the assumption that Europeans are affected by widespread crisis and challenges, in the past decades the EU has become increasingly active as a global security actor. This includes both being involved into conflict early warning and response (EWR), as well as building relations with other actors in this field, including IOs. Accordingly, the main research questions of the paper are: *What is the EU role as a global security actor? And how is it constructed in the context of EWR and with the view of the EU relations with other heavyweights in the field?*

Starting from pinpointing conflict prevention on the EU agenda since 1990s, as well as the construction and organization of early warning and response by the EU, I further look at its partnerships and the relevant roles played by the organizations in this regard. My particular focus is on the heavyweights in the field, namely the United Nations (UN), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the African Union (AU). These organizations have been chosen due to their continuous involvement in conflict prevention regionally or worldwide, as well as their well-developed EWR mechanisms. While most of the papers on inter-organizational cooperation (including my own monograph on inter-organizational cooperation in conflict early warning and response) discuss specific factors and reasons influencing decision-making in cooperation, here I strive to go a little further, linking these reasons to the EU dynamic relations in and to the dominant security order. I argue that undertaking the role as a global actor in the face of today's threats and challenges and mainstreaming up-to-date approaches to cooperation in global governance, including on peace and security, the EU continues to carry forward the constitutive elements of the order, including the existing social hierarchies.

*Speaker

The EU position as a global security actor continues to evolve around both the principle of strategic autonomy and the norm of cooperation. Cooperation among actors is certainly a big part of the dominant order visions. However, the recent tumultuous transitions strip inter-organizational relationships of their rhetorical formalities – pointing to the prevalence of the so-called 'rational choices', as well as hierarchies that underlie these choices. Due to their material and social capital, Western international organizations, including the EU, are perceived and present themselves as the most rational and effective actors. Such positions often lead to dismissing the importance of other (regional) organizations in dealing with crises, diminishing them to the role of information-providers and support-receivers.

This work partakes in reimagining the studies of peace and security, as well as International Organizations, through the sociological and constructivist lens, including the recent accounts on hierarchies in world politics. It does so by focusing on the processes taking place in the sphere of the conflict early warning and response, while considering their relational and inter-subjective aspects. Identifying roles that the EU plays vis-à-vis its partners in the field of conflict early warning and response also helps better understand wider structures and processes in the global peace and security architecture. For this purpose, I analyze documents originating from the EU and other international organizations in the time period of 1992 to 2024, as well as semi-structured interviews conducted with practitioners and policy experts.

Emotional Labour in the Neoliberal University: Polycrisis and Intersectional Inequalities

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The concept of emotional labor, pioneered by Hochschild (1983), demonstrated that labor processes are not limited to physical or cognitive production; emotions are also regulated and controlled within capitalist relations of production. Emotional labor emerges as an invisible form of labor, particularly through qualities such as care, patience, and empathy, often attributed to women. Yet the management of emotions is not only an individual internal process but a social practice that takes place within the wider relations of power and inequality as well as social and institutional norms (Hochschild 1983; Rafaeli & Sutton 1989; Mirchandani 2005; Kelan 2008, 2009; Brook 2013). Considering the genderedness of work organisations (Acker 1990; Cockburn 1991), the social expectation of emotional labour takes a greater toll on women.
This study is based on the findings of our project on emotional labour and gender in Turkish academia. We conducted 112 interviews with academics and 8 focus groups with university students in Istanbul, Ankara, İzmir and Antalya. The contacts were reached through purposive and snowball sampling techniques and through email and social media invitations. The interviews covered education background, work life, emotional labor display rules, emotional labor in the workplace, gender and merit differences, consequences of emotional labor, general evaluation of academia, and policy recommendations. Our main objective is to understand the extent to which emotional labour is affected by gender and how this relationship is mediated by other factors such as merit, location and type of university (public or private) within the context of neoliberal academia.

As a consequence of the simultaneous existence and interactive nature of multiple crises today (Morin & Kern, 1999; Tooze, 2023), students are becoming increasingly heterogeneous. Yet, diversity and inclusion is not a well-established framework in Turkish academia which is characterised by a heavy control of universities by the centralist organisation Council of Higher Education, the neoliberal trend towards marketisation and anti-gender and anti-LGBT+ tendencies. Although Turkish university administrations pose a unified attitude at the upper level, some (especially private/foundation universities) may incorporate more progressive policies and discourses to attract secular/cosmopolitan students. Yet academics who support egalitarian policies and discourses do not find a strong legal and institutional framework for protection but rather act on an individual basis and rely on informal networks of solidarity.

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The findings reveal that emotional labour in academia has a tranformative and resistence potential while bringing extra workload on academics. Young, female and LGBT+ academics face greater expectations for emotional support in times of multiple crises such as the pandemic, economic hardship (for both precariously employed academics and students from working class background) and social polarisation. These expectations and the neoliberal performance criteria, the treatment of students as customers, and the marketisation of academic work, produce invisible yet systemic emotional labour load for academics. In this context, this study reconceptualizes the concept of emotional labor in light of feminist political economy, labor sociology, and higher education studies literature. It explores the strategies developed by academics, the tensions they experience, and the forms of resistance they encounter. Furthermore, it explores how emotional labor is not merely an external obligation but also how it is interpreted, narrated, and negotiated by academics within institutional and personal contexts. Thus, emotional labor is considered not only as a component of structural inequalities but also as a component of the academic subject's emotional experience. The performance-driven structure of the neoliberal university and the intersectional inequalities caused by Turkey's deepening multiple crises (economic, social, and cultural) reproduce emotional labor in academia in an invisible and exploitable manner. However, emotional labor also constitutes a subjective field of experience, which is interpreted and negotiated by academics and carries the potential for resistance.

Keywords: Emotional Labor, Neoliberal University, Intersectional Inequalities, Multiple Crises

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Expectations of Research Transfer and the Quantification of Plural Organizational Practices in Germany

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Scientific knowledge is widely seen as a crucial contribution to human progress, economic growth, and social welfare. More recently, the expectation to produce usable scientific knowledge has become explicitly institutionalized in research funding and legal frameworks of universities and other research institutions. The call for the production of useful scientific knowledge by funding programs is predicated on referring to grand challenges that require addressing. Furthermore, research that promises to have an "impact" on social problems is favoured. At the same time, this optimism in science policy is confronted with a considerable gap between research and practice and suggesting fundamental differences in institutional logics between science and other social spheres.
Approaches on how this gap could be narrowed are manyfold. Research policy tries to narrow this gap by measuring and monitoring research impact (Dotti and Walczyk, 2022; Dwivedi et al., 2024). This emphasis on indicators of knowledge transfer is part of a broader shift toward quantification brought about by notions of new public management in the public sector (Broucker and Wit, 2015; Huber and Hillebrandt, 2019; Münch, 2014). To address expectations of excellency and accountability, various performance metrics for research organizations and HEI have been developed, often presented in the form of rankings (Rust and Kim, 2015). In some countries, rankings have become such a central device in the comparison and evaluation of universities that they have been framed as "engines of anxiety" profoundly reshaping academic practice (Espeland and Sauder, 2016). Rankings function as devices of commensuration transforming complex institutional characteristics into seemingly objective, comparable metrics. These numerical representations influence not only public perceptions of universities but also shape their strategic orientations and their institutional positioning within national and global academic fields (Hammarfeldt et al., 2017).

Despitean increasing emphasis on the usefulness of academic knowledge in research and policy and the development of manifold indicators to measure academic knowledge transfer, this aspect has not featured prominently neither in university rankings (Demarinis Loiotile et al.,

*Speaker

2022) nor in social studies of rankings (Brankovic, 2025; Ringel et al., 2021). This raises fundamental questions about whether and how existing indicators of academic knowledge transfer actually affect practices at the organizational level. More specifically, we focus on the question of how members of research organizations and HEI perceive and use indicators of academic knowledge transfer in their organizational practices.

Theoretically, we build on the concept of reactivity, which states that numbers are not neutral tools but the result of historically situated quantification processes reshaping how institutions function and how individuals understand themselves and others (Espeland and Stevens, 2008: 401; Mennicken and Espeland, 2019: 223). Quantification is a generative force that reorganizes the social by making it legible, governable, and comparable. Quantitative forms of governance institutionalize particular notions of value and accountability, often at the expense of qualitative judgment (Miller and Power, 2013: 561–562). While different notions of reactivity suggest dynamics of measurement that are catalysed almost automatically with the creation of indicators (Marchionni et al., 2024), we caution against attributing too much power to these indicators by paying close attention to the micropolitics of measurement that clearly have an organizational dimension. This paper investigates the micropolitics of academic knowledge transfer measurement using organizational theory. This entails two assumptions: First, following micropolitical perspectives on organizations, we assume that indicators as governance instruments will not automatically transform organizational practices but might be challenged and contested by organizational members (Crozier and Friedberg, 1993). Second, following decision-based conceptions of organization, we assume that decision-premises (Luhmann, 2000), such as being a member of meta-organizations (Ahrne and Brunsson, 2008; Grothe-Hammer and Rachlitz, 2025) and programmatic differences in the missions of academic organizations might be relevant for use patterns of knowledge transfer indicators.

Empirically, this paper focuses on indicators of academic knowledge transfer in Germany. Overall, the field is characterized by a complex constellation of heterogeneous actors operating at different governance levels and various frameworks for measuring academic knowledge transfer. Reflecting the fact that national transfer policies are subject to transnational debates, in 2010, the European Union initiated U-Multirank, a ranking tool for universities of diverse activity profiles comparing them in several domains, one of which is knowledge transfer (van Vught, 2010, 2012). However, U-Multirank data has only sporadically been used for explicit analyses of knowledge transfer (Dip, 2021) and, therefore, its influence on organizational practices can be doubted. In late 2023, U-Multirank has become part of the European Higher Education Sector Observatory (EHESO). During the same period, the Joint Research Centre of the European Union published two studies on transfer measurement aiming at a harmonization of indicators across countries (Campbell et al., 2020; Campbell et al., 2022). In Germany, the national transfer policy for extramural research organizations it is co-determined by the Federal Government and the Heads of Government of the Länder in the Joint Science Conference (GWK). Since 2007, they have monitored the knowledge and technology transfer of extramural research institutions at the level of their meta-organizations in annual reports (e.g., GWK, 2025). Monitoring academic knowledge transfer in HEI policy is more heterogeneous because funding is the responsibility of the 16 *Länder*. Some have defined academic knowledge transfer indicators, others have not. At the level of individual organizations, the so-called Transfer Alliance Initiative is a meta-organization of German HEI, research institutions, companies and civil society organizations offering the Input–Output–Outcome–Impact taxonomy as a conceptual yardstick for capturing different dimensions of transfer performance and has published according indicators (Transfer-Allianz, 2021). The "Transferbarometer", developed by the Stifterverband (2022), distinguishes eight distinct transfer fields and proposes standardized yet flexible indicator sets, allowing for institutional self-assessment rather than inter-institutional ranking. Meanwhile, a research project funded by the German Ministry of Education and Science (Beckmann et al., 2021) has com-

piled an extensive catalogue of over 1,000 indicators, revealing considerable diversity in transfer measurement – particularly regarding longer-term, often intangible outcomes. Our study draws on these stakeholder initiatives as well as conceptual and methodological debates to investigate how formalized indicator systems intersect with the micropolitical negotiations in everyday organizational practices and organizational missions.

Through an in-depth analysis of documents and interviews, we trace the micro-level negotiations surrounding the production and use of academic knowledge transfer indicators. Analyses conducted in two research projects funded by the German Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space (BMFTR) reveal multifaceted tensions between the broader policy environment, institutional frameworks, transfer managers and researchers. While policy actors tend to prefer simple indicators that seemingly allow for comparisons across organizations, transfer managers are very sceptical toward such an approach and use indicators preferably for organizational development and strategic decision-making. Our results suggest that extramural research organizations act somewhat more strategically than HEI. While the former are more organized in terms of their overarching structure of meta-organizations, the latter are a very heterogeneous set of organizations, across which we are cautious not to overgeneralize. In general, faculty members and transfer managers struggle to gather data that capture the complexities and longer-term impact of diverse processes of knowledge transfer. Our empirical material shows that measurement is a micropolitical process: local stakeholders negotiate which activities should be tracked, how categories align with disciplinary norms, and who reaps the benefits of "countable" outputs.

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Fit or Friction? Organizational and Influencer Voices about the Bundeswehr on TikTok

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Organizations such as the German Federal Armed Forces (Bundeswehr) navigate digitalization under multiple, often conflicting societal expectations while seeking legitimacy (Brunsson, 1986; Parsons, 1956). In particular, the Bundeswehr is viewed critically by the public because it is a very large, state-funded organization with the unique mission of defending the country. To make matters more difficult, global security developments in recent years have also led to new requirements for the Bundeswehr, not least in terms of personnel policy and recruiting. The legitimacy of the Bundeswehr in the public eye plays a special role in this respect, because as a volunteer army, it must convince primarily young people of its merits and purposes. Whether the Bundeswehr appears legitimate in the eyes of the public depends largely on how it represents itself and how it is represented by third parties in public discourse through the media (Stengel, 2021). Today the "new war for talent" (McKinsey, 2015) is set in the digital sphere, specifically on social media platforms (Meister / Slunecko 2023). For this reason, we are examining the representation of the Bundeswehr in a partial public sphere (Taddicken / Schmidt, 2022) that is particularly relevant to younger generations: social media. The Bundeswehr does communicate on social media about itself for years (Stengel, 2021) to address the recruitment challenges (Auer / Rothenberger 2011) and reach younger audiences. Against this backdrop, the Bundeswehr has expanded its presence on TikTok, a platform defined by short-form, multimodal content and algorithmic curation. At TikTok we can not only identify official Bundeswehr accounts but also a number of accounts that regularly address Bundeswehr-matters and provide intra-organizational perspectives, e.g. by talking as soldiers to their audience. While not officially speaking for the organization, Bundeswehr influencers can complement the official accounts by engaging with topics differently on a more authentic, hands-on level (Borchers / Enke, 2021). However, the organization does have little to no control over which messages are being distributed by such influencers. To what extent can the tension between these two different organizational communication channels be characterized?

We analyse how effectively the German Armed Forces is shaping its public image by examining (1) the organization's strategies and goals for communication on social media, (2) the content and framing practices of the official accounts in contrast to the influencers associated with the Bundeswehr, and (3) audience reactions in comments and interaction patterns towards both account types. Methodologically, a mixed-methods design is used, that combines semi-structured interviews with the Bundeswehr's social media team and selected soldier influencers with a quantitative and qualitative analysis of TikTok posts and corresponding user reactions. To this

*Speaker

end, we identified approximately 250 German-language accounts that repeatedly communicate Bundeswehr-related content. From the last two years, video data from these accounts along with user comments and interaction metrics (e.g., likes, reposts) is collected. Using computer-assisted methods such as topic modeling and sentiment analysis (Wiedemann, 2016) on video transcripts, we analyze this data to examine the portrayal of the Bundeswehr itself in contrast to TikTok influencers and commenting users.

Theoretically, organizational communication and para-organizational communication on TikTok is conceptualized as complementary forms of legitimacy work under plural societal expectations. Therefore we propose a perspective in which platform-native practices (such as brevity, remix, trend alignment) and algorithmic visibility jointly shape the circulation and contestation of organizational portrayals. We aim for two main contributions: (a) a typology of TikTok communication strategies in a high-salience public organization, differentiating institutional, occupational, and lifestyle framings; (b) indicators that link representational choices to public resonance and communicative effectiveness (e.g. higher number of views and positive comments). Beyond the exemplary case, the study advances research on organizational communication by showing how organizations and insider-influencers co-produce legitimacy in digital environments, and how publics actively ratify or resist these efforts on social media.

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Fixing academia? The creation and diffusion of a certification for gender equality in science

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In recent years, certification schemes promoting gender equality in science have gained remarkable visibility and spread across the globe. These initiatives seek to advance women's participation and leadership in academic and scientific institutions, reflecting a growing awareness of persistent gender imbalances and the need for structural change. A wide range of programmes and policies have been launched by universities, research councils, professional associations, government agencies and non-governmental organisations to address these disparities. However, in most national contexts, these schemes are neither mandated by law nor directly required by funding bodies. This raises the question - how and why do such voluntary certification frameworks emerge, gain legitimacy and become institutionalised within the scientific ecosystem?
This research examines the Athena SWAN Charter - created in the United Kingdom in 2005 - and its subsequent adaptations in the United States and Canada, through an in-depth study. The Athena SWAN model recognises universities and research institutions that meet specific gender equality benchmarks at various stages of academic careers, including recruitment, retention, promotion, and leadership representation. The certification process involves self-assessment, data analysis and the creation of action plans, all of which aim to embed gender equality principles within the organisational culture of universities and departments. By linking symbolic recognition to practical organisational reforms, these schemes aim to operate as instruments of governance, markers of legitimacy and vehicles of cultural transformation.

Drawing on theoretical insights from institutional isomorphism, feminist institutionalism and the sociology of activism, this study examines how such initiatives spread, evolve and acquire meaning in different national and institutional contexts. From an institutionalist perspective, the diffusion of the Athena SWAN charter can be understood as part of a broader process through which universities respond to global pressures for accountability, transparency and diversity. Within the context of decades of gender mainstreaming, data production, and feminist advancements, the diffusion of Athena SWAN demonstrates how scientific policy and university bureaucracy can understand and implement specific concepts of 'equality' and 'gender'.

Methodologically, the research employs a comparative qualitative design, combining document analysis - including application forms, institutional gender equality plans, evaluation reports and academic CVs - with semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders involved in designing, implementing and disseminating the schemes. This multi-source approach allows the processes through which equality standards are negotiated, adapted and translated into local practices to

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be reconstructed in detail. By analysing the formal architecture alongside the lived experiences of those engaged with certification, the study uncovers the tensions between policy aspirations and organisational realities.

Preliminary findings suggest that, although the Athena SWAN framework provides a shared language and structure for addressing inequalities in academia, local adaptations reflect different conceptual and political perspectives. In the United Kingdom, the scheme focuses on gender equality, reflecting its original mandate to increase women's representation and advancement in scientific organisations. By contrast, the Canadian and US versions of the charter have broadened their scope through intersectional approaches, addressing not only gender, but also race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, disability and other social markers. These developments demonstrate that the transnational circulation of policy models is never a straightforward replication process: as the Athena SWAN framework spreads, it is reinterpreted in light of local histories, equality narratives, and institutional priorities.

Through an examination of the global circulation of governance instruments such as Athena SWAN, this study seeks to contribute to wider discussions concerning the translation of concepts such as gender equality, diversity, equity, and inclusion across borders and organisational sectors. Although these are now widely accepted as legitimate and desirable organisational goals, their implementation remains a subject of debate and political contention. Efforts to institutionalise equality are ongoing sites of negotiation between competing logics, such as academic meritocracy, managerialism, and feminist critique. Understanding the role of individuals who act strategically by mobilising data, uniting resources and negotiating political support to convince others of the importance of this agenda is crucial to explaining these dynamics.
Ultimately, the study aims to advance the theoretical and empirical understanding of how gender equality is promoted, adapted and resisted in academic settings. By examining the interplay between transnational policy diffusion and local institutional contexts, the research contributes to the sociology of organisations, feminist institutionalism and the study of policy mobility. More broadly, it sheds light on the processes of international diffusion and organisational change towards gender equality within the scientific ecosystem.

From Clean Streets to Sustainable Cities: Behavioural and Policy Pathways of Organizational Responsibility in Indore, India

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Cities all over the world are experiencing difficulties staying liveable because of heat, trash, and growing inequality. In a country like India, where the population is huge and people don't follow sustainable practices, Indore city is trash-free, and citizens of Indore have adopted sustainable practices. Indore, which has been India's cleanest city for eight consecutive years, is one great example of how local government, civic pride, and daily habits can progressively create a culture of accountability. This research examines how individuals, government, private and non-government organisations, media, and policies together can bring social transformation.

For this research I employed a mixed-methods research design comprising surveys and interviews with approximately 300 participants from various socioeconomic groups and residential and commercial localities. The narrative of Indore is less about strict enforcement and more about persuasion, habit, and shared purpose, as these voices demonstrate. Over time, doing things like separating trash, not using plastic, and reminding neighbouring people has established social norms. How citizens focus on sustainable practices among young children through socialisation is also commendable. Cleanliness slowly became a moral duty of stewardship.

In this study, three clear patterns emerge. First, behavioural adaptations such as public contests, school activities, and tiny rewards transformed what people thought was "normal". Second, organisational accountability: the Indore Municipal Corporation has acquired the ability to listen. It now acts like a learning organisation-tracking data, responding to comments, and letting citizens monitor progress through tools such as the Indore 311 app. Third, social inclusion: informal rubbish pickers and women's self-help groups make up the invisible infrastructure that keeps the system operating, but their work is only slowly being appreciated.

Though Indore is often considered a success story-and many visitors feel they are walking through a developed city-certain social hierarchies still need to be challenged. Citizens' attitudes are changing, and both government and non-government organisations are working together to make Indore a world-class city. However, a segment of workers from the lowest strata of society, who are the very people keeping the city clean, continue to feel insecure and stigmatised. This research provides clarity about their experiences and the social inequalities that persist beneath Indore's visible success. Another thing is higher-income wards have better equipment and access to the internet, whereas lower-income regions depend on people to do things. Many safaimitras

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(sanitation workers) still don't have safety gear or the chance to move up in the world. These imbalances warn us that sustainability, if not linked to justice, could end up making the same unfair situations worse.

The research indicates that environmental change is never solely technical. It has to do with feelings, culture, and morals. People who lived there often said that their actions were based on pride, embarrassment, or duty instead of rules. Durkheim's concept of communal conscience elucidates this moral alignment, whereas Foucault's theory of discipline elucidates how visibility-being observed by others-promotes conformity. They all show that Indore's change is based on both personal belief and modest social pressure.

From the viewpoint of organisational sociology, the city functions as a network of interconnected organisations-public, private, and informal-that collaboratively foster sustainability. This study shows that boundaries become ambiguous; accountability is in constant motion. Due to this complex structure, the system can change, but it is not always equitable. In this case, organisational responsibility is more about connections than hierarchies. This includes the relationship between authorities and residents, technology and trust, and cleanliness and dignity.

Indore's journey indicates that sustainability transitions work best when institutions see inhabitants as partners. There has been some progress, but the feeling of shared ownership is clear. Rules are important, but the feeling that "this is our city" lasts. I contend that this attitude constitutes the true foundation of resilience.

In conclusion, sustainability in Indore appears to be both an environmental and a social success. It has grown from the collective willingness to recognise, act, and include others in the city's progress. Indore's experience offers a grounded example of how diverse stakeholders-citizens, government bodies, and non-governmental organisations-can work together toward sustainability transitions. Despite being a developing nation with a large population, India demonstrates through Indore that coordinated effort and civic participation can create outcomes comparable to those seen in more developed contexts. The paper demonstrates that cities that are cleaner and fairer would rely less on technology and more on organisations that show empathy, recognition, and a willingness to learn. Indore shows us that the way to live in cities that care about the environment isn't through big steps, but through small, everyday actions by people who, by taking care of their streets, start to take care of the earth.

From Compliance to Practice: DEI in Swedish Firms under CSRD-Driven Institutional Pressures

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Organizations are not only economic entities but also social systems that distribute status, opportunities, and income. They play a central role in producing and reproducing social inequalities (Acker, 2006; Amis et al., 2020; Avent-Holt & Tomaskovic-Devey, 2019). Despite Sweden's strong discourse on equality, disparities persist in organizational practices, manifesting in wage gaps, unequal career opportunities, and occupational segregation for underrepresented groups (Aradhya et al., 2023; Bursell & Bygren, 2025). With the EU Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) coming into effect in 2024, firms are required to disclose social indicators, including Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) measures. Yet, how these indicators are operationalized and whether reporting translates into substantive change remains largely unexplored.
This study examines how Swedish organizations interpret, implement, and communicate DEI strategies through sustainability reporting, and how these processes may both challenge and reproduce existing inequalities. It considers the first wave of large firms subject to CSRD, analyzing how DEI indicators under European Sustainability Reporting Standards S1 (own workforce) and Global Reporting Initiative are reported and implemented in practice.

Using a mixed-methods approach, the project combines: (1) quantitative content analysis of sustainability reports from a preliminary sample of 30 large Swedish firms, (2) panel regression models to test relationships between firm characteristics and DEI transparency and outcomes, and (3) qualitative interviews and roundtable observations with HR professionals to uncover organizational mechanisms driving DEI implementation.

The study applies New Sociological Institutionalism to explain variation in DEI practices, drawing on theories of coercive, mimetic, and normative pressures (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977), and extending them with insights on agency and field heterogeneity (Beckert, 2010).

While existing literature synthesizes known issues around labor exploitation and sustainability reporting, it often lacks empirical grounding in high-income contexts like Sweden. Moreover, current studies rarely integrate management and sociological lenses in a way that reveals how organizations respond to regulatory pressures. This project addresses that gap by offering a theoretically informed, empirically grounded, and policy-relevant analysis of DEI under CSRD.

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Building on Oelrich et al. (2024), which identifies four types of organizational responses to mandatory diversity disclosure (dismissal, concealment, imitation, and transcendence), we expect differentiated pathways among Swedish firms under CSRD pressures. Some organizations are likely to translate disclosure requirements into substantive DEI improvements, actively embedding diversity into HR practices. Others may respond symbolically or selectively, emphasizing diversity rhetorically while omitting concrete indicators such as employee distribution by gender, age, disability status, ethnic background, employment type, and pay gaps.

Preliminary results are expected to show that overall DEI transparency has increased over time due to the shift from voluntary to mandatory disclosure, yet this increase may largely reflect symbolic compliance. Sectoral variation is also anticipated: knowledge-intensive or publicly visible service sectors are expected to exhibit higher transparency and better DEI outcomes, whereas traditional manufacturing or logistics firms may report formally but implement few substantive internal changes.

Internal mechanisms are likely to moderate these outcomes. Firms with diverse leadership are expected to achieve tangible DEI improvements, such as reduced turnover and higher engagement scores. Firms with higher revenue may also achieve better outcomes due to greater capacity to operationalize policies.

Thus, this study anticipates a duality: organizations maintain legitimacy through DEI narratives while structural inequalities persist beneath the surface. By revealing the limits of symbolic reporting, it underscores the role of internal mechanisms, such as leadership diversity and data transparency, in translating formal compliance into institutionalized practice. Guided by New Sociological Institutionalism, the project reveals how external regulation interacts with internal agency and contextual factors to shape DEI outcomes, providing implications for both EU policymakers and firms seeking to embed DEI as a substantive and sustainable dimension of organizational practice.

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From Law to Affect: The Disassembly of Administrative Immunity in the Welfare State

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Keywords: administrative law, public administration, pluratilty of expectations, affect, immunity, Luhmann, welfare state, conflict, inclusion/exclusion, rule of law, affective citizenship, co-creation.

Abstract

This paper explores how the transformation of public administration from a rule-of-law model to an "agile," dialogue-oriented model has fundamentally altered the state's immune system-its capacity to process and learn from conflict. I argue that the modern welfare state's administrative immunity, historically rooted in administrative law, is being dismantled by reforms that redefine the relationship between citizens and the state. As a result, conflicts that once functioned as structured, legally objectified disagreements increasingly reappear in affective form, destabilizing both citizens' trust and the administration's self-understanding.

The argument unfolds in two movements-one historical, one contemporary. The first traces how administrative law in Denmark, between roughly 1849 and 1960, institutionalized conflict as a legitimate and even necessary component of the rule-of-law state. The second examines how, in contemporary public management reforms dealing with plurality of rapidly changing challenges, the conditions for legal, objectified conflict have eroded, leading to what I call *affectivized conflicts* between citizens and public institutions.

1. The legal construction of legitimate conflict

In the classical rule-of-law model, administrative law constituted an economy of expectations that allowed citizens to enter into conflict with the administration on predictable terms. Citizens could know *when*, *with whom*, and *about what* they could disagree. Administrative acts were required to be explicit, written, and justified; they were subject to appeal and review. This formalization did not simply protect citizens from arbitrary power-it also protected the administration from itself. Following Niklas Luhmann's systems theory, administrative law can be understood as a social immune system that transformed conflicts into learning. Conflicts functioned as "noes" that preserved the system's capacity to evolve: each legal dispute forced the administration to test its own norms and adjust them in response.

*Speaker

This juridification of conflict made disagreement calculable. By binding administrative decisions to legal form, the welfare state developed what might be called a *law-based expectation economy*-a stable structure of mutual anticipations between citizen and administration. Citizens could pursue their individual interests without threatening the system's stability, and the administration could process these disagreements without fear of breakdown. The citizen's right to say "no" to the state was, paradoxically, a foundational "yes" to continued communication within society.

2. The dismantling of juridified immunity

From the late 20th century onward, reforms inspired by managerialism, co-creation, and innovation began to reframe this legal architecture as bureaucratic rigidity. Administrative law came to be viewed as an obstacle to flexibility and trust. Decision-making procedures were replaced by dialogue, written reasoning by "constructive conversation," and hierarchical accountability by horizontal partnership. The citizen was no longer a legal subject in potential conflict with the administration but a co-producing partner-"at the center," "first," and "in dialogue."

While these ideals promise inclusion, they simultaneously dissolve the very conditions under which conflicts can be articulated and processed legally. When no formal administrative decisions are made, there is nothing to appeal, and when justifications are replaced by conversations, there is nothing concrete to contest. The citizen's "no" loses its object. The right to conflict-previously secured by administrative law-becomes illegible within an ethos that demands cooperation and positivity. The administration, in turn, becomes structurally incapable of receiving negation; it can only evade or deflect dissent.

The result is what I describe as the *affectivization* of conflict. When the formal hooks that allowed conflicts to be processed through law disappear, contradictions do not vanish-they migrate into emotional communication. Citizens' protests, frustration, and despair resurface as affective expressions: shouting, tears, social-media shaming, or withdrawal. These are not simply psychological outbursts but communicative operations that insist on conflict where the system no longer provides room for it. Affect thus becomes a substitute medium for negation-a way of saying "no" when there is nothing left to say "no" to.

3. The administration's self-immunization against affect

Empirically, this transformation is visible in the growing discourse on "harassment" of public employees, the categorization of "difficult" or "distinctive" citizens, and the administrative expansion of security measures and emotional management training. In these developments, the administration observes itself as being under threat from "affective citizens." It responds through a second-order immune reaction: protecting itself not against conflict as such, but against the affective overflow of conflicts that have lost their legal form. Staff anonymization, restricted citizen access, and new rules that limit requests for information are all examples of this self-immunization process.

The contemporary welfare administration thus becomes trapped in a negative spiral: by disassembling the juridical conditions for legitimate conflict, it generates the very affective conflicts it then seeks to suppress. The more it immunizes itself against affect, the more affect it produces. Citizens experience growing powerlessness and frustration; administrators experience stress and fear; and the legal horizon that once made disagreements productive collapses. What was once a self-regulating immune system-transforming conflicts into learning-degenerates into an autoimmune reaction in which the administration attacks its own capacity for learning.

4. Re-objectifying conflict: fragile counter-movements

The paper also identifies counter-movements that attempt to restore objectivity to citizen conflicts. Initiatives such as the social movement *#OneMillionVoices*, which collects and publishes citizen testimonies about welfare failures, exemplify efforts to transform diffuse emotional experiences into structured, collective critique. These attempts suggest that citizens still seek to anchor their grievances within legal and political forms. Yet their very necessity underscores the depth of the problem: the spaces once provided by administrative law for objectified conflict have moved outside the state and into civil society.

5. Implications

The shift from formal to affective conflict challenges core assumptions about democratic governance. When administrative law is hollowed out in the name of trust, flexibility, and dialogue, the state loses not only its procedural safeguards but also its immune function-its capacity to learn from its contradictions. The affectivization of conflict thus signals a crisis of democratic immunity: a society that can no longer legally process disagreement risks being overwhelmed by emotional protest or silent disengagement. Reclaiming the right to say "no"-not as refusal but as continued participation-may therefore be crucial for revitalizing both public administration and the rule of law.

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From Paperwork to Prompts: How Chatbots Affect Organizational Performance in Public Administration

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Some boldly claim that the latter years advancements in AI are revolutionary, portraying this technology as the steam engine of our era and a catalyst for the fourth industrial revolution (Charalabidis et al., 2024). AI-powered chatbots such as ChatGPT and Copilot are one of these transformative technologies. This technology have been widely adopted both professionally and privately, with ChatGPT reaching 800 million weekly users in 2025 (Ghaffary & Metz, 2025). Chatbots can analyze large datasets to identify patterns, generate human-like responses and can perform multiple tasks with greater speed, quality and accuracy than humans (Dong et al., 2021; Tangi et al., 2022).
The AI buzz has reached public organizations (PO) (Mikalef et al., 2022), with the technology being acclaimed as a significant tool for governments under mounting pressure to deliver more and better services with fewer resources (Gil-Garcia, 2012). One example being the Norwegian government aiming for 80% of PO's to use AI by the end of 2025, and full adoption by 2030 (Digitaliserings-og forvaltningsdepartementet, 2025). Public Administrators (PA) have experimented with chatbots in citizen communication, reports writing, quantitative analysis, and forecasts' modeling (Mehr et al., 2017; Taeihagh, 2021), fostering expectations of improved organizational performance. Nevertheless, it is important to note the range of concerns voiced by PA's, including issues of trust (Hoff & Bashir, 2015), biased outputs (Srinivasan & Chander, 2021) and the lack of knowledge among practitioners (Drobotowicz et al., 2023). All things considered, PA's seem to accept AI being used in the public sector (Broderstad et al., 2025).

Surprisingly, considering the growing interest and implementation of AI tools, we lack systematic comparative scholarship examining to what degree AI chatbots improve organizational performance, especially in the Nordic context. Based of the information system success model (DeLone & McLean, 1992), this study addresses both theory from the technological and social determinists (Lips, 2020). The technological determinists poses that machines and algorithms will create public value, reduce the administrative burden, enhance quality and mitigate "bounded rationality" (Simon, 1973). Public value is understood as the provision of services that balance operational performance and the needs and well-being of society (Moore, 1997). The social determinists find technology to be of no effect, being essentially natural to individuals and organizations.

Public sector information system (IS) research focusing on AI has increased (Al Naqbi et al., 2024). Focusing on AI chatbots, individuals using AI spent additional time but were more

*Speaker

productive, delivered higher-quality work, and experienced lower cognitive load and frustration levels compared to non-users (Schmidhuber et al., 2021). Organizations have experienced reductions to their administrative burden and shorter waiting times using AI (Chen et al., 2024). However, drawing on the garbage can model (Cohen et al., 1972), chatbots often resemble solutions in search of problems rather than tools developed to address clearly defined organizational needs, as chatbots are not specifically designed for public sector tasks and are rarely trained on country-specific contexts. This misalignment can complicate integration into individual workflows encompassing a plethora of roles, experience levels, demographics and organizations.

Despite growing interest of AI in PO's, research in public administration still provides limited insight into differences in perceived effects between different administrators. Most studies are built upon smaller N in experimental and interview-based settings and seldom comparing effects of distinct use cases of AI, sectors and roles within government. PA's and central government organizations are overlooked despite being key in execution of public policy (Bright et al., 2024; Giraldi et al., 2024; Nam & Bell, 2024). Though its findings are valued due to their transparent and highly digitalized governance systems (Nzobonimpa & Savard, 2023), PO AI scholarship from Nordic countries is lacking, highlighting a geographical gap. These gaps will be addressed through systematic analyses of chatbots impact on organizational performance on public administrators in Norway.

Drawing on classical and contemporary scholarship (Dunleavy, 2006; Simon, 1973; Wirtz et al., 2019), I argue that chatbots enhance the performance of PA's, though the magnitude of this effect is contingent on individual and organizational factors. I contend that administrators engaged in mostly routine tasks experience greater performance gains from chatbot use compared PA's engaged with dynamic and strategic responsibilities, such as leadership and management. The more ample users are expected to reap greater effects of AI compared to others. The study also expects variations across generations, gender, and experience.
At the organizational level, I further posit that more technically oriented directorates and digitally mature sectors derive proportionally greater benefits than less digitalized sectors of government. Health and finance public administrations have historically been more exposed to digital measures and now to AI compared to other sectors (Bright et al., 2024; Maragno et al., 2023; Schjøtt-Pedersen, 2024).

To examine these claims, this paper leverages quantitative data from the Norwegian Panel of Public Administrators collected in November of 2025, encompassing 1,500 PA's from the central government ministries and directorates. The analyses will be conducted in similar methodological fashion to relevant scholarship (Broderstad et al., 2025); descriptive statistics, marginal means and ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis. Drawing on a variable measuring professional chatbot usage, respondents who report using chatbots will provide their impressions of chatbots impact on: (1) the overall volume of work performed, (2) the time required to complete tasks, (3) the quality of outputs, and (4) the need for subsequent revisions of their work. The non-users of chatbots will answer reformulated versions of the same questions, responding regarding their perceptions of colleagues in their department who use chatbots, thereby providing an external perspective that enables interesting comparisons.

Theoretically, the paper adds to deliberations on the relation between technology and organizations. Even though this study emphasizes the gains or losses of performance with regards to AI chatbots, it is intertwined with value related concepts such as discretion, trust, accountability and legitimacy. As for policy relevance, these findings are especially important to internal policymakers and PA's coordinating AI efforts, as well as countries in close geographical proximity to Norway and those sharing similar administrative traditions (Peters, 2020).

This paper is a work in progress.
The analysis will be conducted once the dataset from The Panel of Public Administrators from KODEM becomes available Nov./Dec. 2025.

Gendered Power Struggles: A Micropolitical Conceptualisation of Organisational Resistance

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Resistance to organisational change is one of the most intensively researched topics in organisational studies. Against many learning- and psychology-based approaches that can be found in this field, feminist organisational research emphasised that organisational change, must also be understood in terms of incompatibility between organisational logics, a lack of resources and authority, hierarchies, and the resistance of powerful male dominated networks. This is very clearly demonstrated in research on the implementation of gender equality policies (Tildesley, Lombardo & Verge, 2022), the resistance to women in male-dominated fields (Bridges, Wulff & Bamberry, 2023), and the 'glass ceiling' for women in leadership positions. In our contribution, we aim to build on these findings from feminist organisational research on resistance in organisational change processes, in order to develop explanatory approaches to the current backlash against gender diversity in organisations.

We would like to develop a heuristic that allows us to better understand and explain concrete resistance to gender diversity in organisations. To this end, we conceptualise organisations, following micropolitical and power-theoretical approaches, as political fields characterised by gendered power imbalances. Here we refer in particular to power-theoretical conceptions of resistance, as developed early on by Rosbeth Moss Kanter. While Kanter assumed that an increase in the number of women could contribute to their successful integration, she also assumed that female leaders and managers would become the norm and thus no longer particularly visible once they exceeded the 15 per cent mark (Kanter, 1977). Other researchers (Yoder, 1991) emphasised that, paradoxically, an increasing proportion of female managers leads to a heightened mobilisation of exclusion mechanisms and increased visibility. As the proportion of women rises, they fundamentally challenge male-dominated gender-related structures and norms within the organisation, which can lead to more or less subtle forms of delegitimisation or even open conflicts over authority, leadership style and decision-making power. Especially in moments of internal organisational conflict, when disputes over scarce resources or interests are played out, 'mobilising masculinities' occur, social mechanisms through which male employees benefit from mutual support by implicitly assuming shared views based on gender (Benschop/van den Brink, 2014). This kind of political resistance can also extend to anti-feminist networks within academia (Clark et al., 2014). The organisational politics approach allows us to examine resistance to gender diversity on three levels: first, the strategies and tactics of organisational members for or against this change; second, the subjective perceptions of the actors on organisational politics; and third, the political strategies and competencies that the organizational members use to

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maintain and improve their position in the organisation. Gender becomes relevant at all three levels and the concept of power is crucial.

We apply our framework to the study of academia, focusing particularly on female university leaders. Our aim is to illustrate and discuss the explanatory power of a power-oriented organisational analysis perspective using data and studies on the German academic system. Academia is a particularly suitable field for such an analysis, as it has already been the subject of intensive research, with many empirical insights existing. Furthermore, significant positive developments have emerged in German academia in recent years. For instance, the proportion of female professors - a professorship being an important prerequisite for access to leadership positions in academia - increased from 10% in 2000 to around 25% in 2024 (Löther, 2024; Roessler, 2025). At the same time, the proportion of women in university management increased dynamically from 25% to 35% between 2021 and 2024. However, despite these successes, recent data show that female university leaders remain in office for shorter periods, resign more frequently, and are more likely to be forced out of office (Dehdarian/Hüther/Kirchner, 2024). Notably, unlike their male counterparts, they face greater hostility in the media (Egner/Uhlenwinkel, 2021).

Our presentation is structured as follows: First, we present our analytical framework for investigating gender power struggles within the organisation from a feminist perspective, focusing on micropolicies. Secondly, we examine the organisational context for advancement to a position of university leadership in Germany, paying particular attention to the micropolitical significance of media publicity for internal organisational power struggles within the context of the 'neoliberal academy'. Thirdly, we discuss the gendered aspects of micropolitics, analysing the representation and use of the media in two cases involving the early career exit of university leaders. Finally, we discuss the implications of our conceptualisation for the study of gendered power dynamics in university leadership in different national contexts. Our findings aim to contribute to current theoretical debates and improve understanding of the backlash against gender diversity and women in positions of power.

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Grist for the Mill: Confessional Labor, Inequality, and the Case of Hollywood Writers' Rooms

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Hollywood as a business environment is marked by volatility, uncertainty, and ambiguity (Caves 2002; De Vany 2003). In an industry where "all hits are flukes," cultural intermediaries, such as television executives, use the frames of genre, reputation and imitation, to justify and manage the reception of projects (Bielby and Bielby 1994; Goffman 1959). These frames and rhetorical strategies are gendered and racialized (Erigha 2021), and cultural intermediaries invoke them to reassure important constituencies (e.g. bosses, critics, advertisers, audiences, censors, etc.) that their decisions are appropriate and legitimate (Bielby and Bielby 1994; Fang 2024).
"Why this? Why now? Why you?" is another rhetorical strategy commonly invoked by Hollywood intermediaries, particularly executives and producers. That is, a writer who "pitches" (Gitlin 2000:20–26) an idea for a television series to executives must justify why *this idea* for a show should be selected, at *this moment* in time, and why *she* is the most appropriate person to create such a show. It is not only intermediaries, then, who use rhetorical strategies to frame the reception of projects in culture industries; rather, creative professionals are compelled to frame and reframe themselves, their qualifications, and their projects to potential employers and collaborators. These framings occur under conditions of organizational inequality within an endemically volatile, project-based labor market that is sensitive to the push and pull of fads and fashions (DiMaggio 1977; Faulkner 1983; Godart and Mears 2009; Hirsch 1972).

This paper uses the case of writers of television and streaming shows in Hollywood to ask, How do writers justify themselves as qualified to author? Drawing on 90 interviews with Hollywood professionals, this paper introduces the concept of *confessional labor* to reveal how TV writers(1) in Hollywood frame and justify their capacities to author. Confessional labor is performed by mining and offering forth autobiographical experiences-including memories, anecdotes, and incidents of trauma- to be received, interpreted, approved, and rejected by showrunners. In job interviews and writers' room, TV writers are compelled to enact three types of confessional labor: 1) generative-the confession serves to spark discussion, 2) surrogative-the confession legitimates the writer to serve as a proxy for a character or element in the show, and 3) corrective-the confession counteracts a (mis)representation within the world of the show. While writers of all races and genders perform confessional labor, corrective confessional labor is often performed by writers of color and women writers in regards to depictions of marginalized people and communities.

*Speaker

In explicating the types of confessional labor, this paper also reveals how writers' rooms are organized and operate. In contrast to novelists, TV writers author scripts collectively(2); the term "writers' room" refers to both the group of writers hired by studios and networks, and also the physical room where the writers are assigned to work. Similar to professional relationships between Hollywood bosses and their assistants (Dessauer 2025), writers' rooms are structured through patrimonial bonds; showrunners have broad latitude to hire, fire, and manage writers' rooms according to their idiosyncratic needs and wants. Showrunners implicitly and explicitly compel writers to perform different types confessional labor, both in job interviews and writers' rooms. Writers mine and offer forth memories, anecdotes, and incidents of trauma to demonstrate and justify their "appropriateness" (Wooten and Branch 2012) as authors. In an increasingly precarious labor market, confessional labor provides TV writers and showrunners with an "authentic" frame to answer the eternal query of "Why this? Why now? Why you?"

This paper examines how confessional labor overlaps with processes of typecasting and authenticity work (Bielby and Bielby 1992; Faulkner 1983; Fine 2006; Peterson 2005; Zuckerman et al. 2003) and thus answers calls for research on how underrepresented groups become advantaged or disadvantaged in cultural production (Banks 2024). Additionally, akin to theories of emotional labor (Hochschild 2012; Wharton 2009) and aesthetic labor (Mears 2011; Williams and Connell 2010), the concept of confessional labor reveals new ways in which workers, both within and beyond the bounds of culture industries (e.g. Chen and Goldstein 2024; Pedulla 2020; Rivera 2016; Sheehan 2022; Takacs 2020) are compelled to utilize and monetize the self.

(1) I use the term "TV writers" to encompass writers of fictional, episodic shows, which are aired on broadcast and cable television and/or streaming platforms.
(2) Although novelists work in community with their peers and associates (e.g. they share drafts in writing groups, receive training in MFA programs, collaborate with editors, etc.), the physical labor of writing a novel is typically a solitary act and credited to a single person (Childress 2017:17–20).

Growth-Related Conflicts of Recognition in SMEs: Social Orders Between Plurality and Inequality

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Introduction

Organizational growth is widely considered a key indicator of entrepreneurial success and strategic capability (Davidsson et al., 2006; Davidsson & Wiklund, 2013). However, while growth promises competitive advantages-economies of scale, innovation capacity, and market expansion-it also entails profound organizational transformations that unsettle established social structures. In particular, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) face unique challenges as their initially informal, community-oriented work relations become formalized and differentiated. These transformations generate new sources of social tension that are not merely functional but deeply relational and symbolic.

This paper examines *growth-related conflicts of recognition* in SMEs, focusing on how expanding organizations renegotiate the terms of visibility, participation, and esteem. It argues that processes of organizational growth produce *subtle but consequential inequalities* by reshaping internal recognition orders. In doing so, the analysis situates growth-induced conflicts within the broader organizational sociology debates on plurality and inequality, showing that social inequality is not only reflected in organizations but also actively *produced* within them-through everyday interactions and shifting norms of recognition.

Theoretical Background

The paper combines *differentiation theory* and *recognition theory* to explore the social dynamics of growth. Following differentiation-theoretical perspectives (Blau, 1970; Goldman, 1973; Meyer, 1972), growth is accompanied by increasing functional and hierarchical differentiation, leading to more specialized structures and roles. This differentiation enhances organizational efficiency but simultaneously challenges the coherence of social relations by fragmenting shared orientations and communication patterns.

From a recognition-theoretical viewpoint (Honneth, 2005, 2012; Voswinkel, 2012), organizations depend on stable patterns of reciprocal recognition that sustain cooperation and engagement. As structures formalize and work relations depersonalize, these recognition patterns are disrupted. Employees experience symbolic displacements of status and esteem, particularly when informal reciprocity and personal trust are replaced by impersonal evaluation systems or managerial control.

*Speaker

This study conceptualizes growth-related conflicts of recognition as those arising when changes in organizational differentiation and formalization alter established recognition expectations. Such conflicts highlight how organizational plurality-the coexistence of diverse rationalities, values, and role logics-creates conditions for internal inequalities. Unlike macro-level inequalities (e.g., class or gender), these are *micro-level inequalities*: uneven access to esteem, participation, and legitimacy within the social fabric of the enterprise.

By focusing on SMEs, the paper contributes to current debates on *relational inequality* (Tomaskovic-Devey & Avent-Holt, 2019) by illustrating how inequality is continuously enacted and negotiated in everyday organizational practices. The analysis thus extends the ICOS 2026 theme-*Plurality, Diversity and Social Inequality in Organizations*-to the level of the microprocesses that reproduce or challenge equality within organizations.

Methodology and Empirical Basis

The analysis is based on two qualitative case studies of growth-oriented SMEs operating in knowledge-intensive industries. Both were investigated through a combination of semi-structured interviews with founders, managers, and employees across hierarchical levels and participant observation. **Case A** is a company from the e-mobility sector in an early stage of growth, transitioning from an informal founder-centered structure to a more differentiated leadership and team system. **Case B** is an IT service provider that has already undergone a substantial phase of expansion and formalization.

The two cases are not contrasted in a comparative design but analyzed complementarily, representing different phases of the growth trajectory. Across both, the focus lies on reconstructing how actors interpret and negotiate growth-induced changes, particularly regarding evolving *social orders of recognition.*

The empirical analysis follows a reconstructive, interpretive logic: identifying recurring patterns of meaning and conflict that reveal how growth transforms the symbolic foundations of cooperation.

Findings: Recognition Conflicts in Growth Processes

The findings reveal three interrelated types of recognition conflicts that emerge as SMEs grow and their internal social orders evolve:

1. Conflicts over the recognition of contributions

Long-term employees often perceive that their efforts and informal commitment lose visibility when growth leads to more formalized evaluation and reward systems. Contributions that were once taken as central to the company's identity-loyalty, all-round engagement, personal initiative-become less valued than quantifiable outputs or specialized expertise (Becke, 2008). This generates tensions between *old-timers* and *newcomers*, as well as between informal and formalized criteria of worth.

2. Conflicts over fairness and participation

As decision-making processes become more hierarchical, employees experience selective exclusion from formerly accessible domains of influence. When organizational restructuring redistributes privileges or restricts participation, this is perceived as a *violation of fairness norms* and as a

form of *symbolic inequality* (Ikäheimo, 2022). These conflicts illustrate how growth destabilizes previously accepted reciprocity patterns: while formalization promises transparency, it may simultaneously undermine the moral economy of recognition that sustained early collaboration.

3. Conflicts over personal visibility and respect

Growth frequently brings about an increasing *depersonalization of relations*-through standardized communication, impersonal appraisal systems, or digital management tools (Kotthoff, 2000). Employees experience this shift as a loss of social attention and respect, particularly when their personal circumstances or individual identities no longer find acknowledgment in organizational routines. Recognition thus extends beyond performance alone; it encompasses being perceived as a *whole person* within a shared social space. When this dimension erodes, employees report feelings of alienation and disengagement.

Taken together, these recognition conflicts illustrate how *growth transforms the moral infrastructure of work relations.* Instead of merely generating structural coordination problems, growth triggers a redefinition of what counts as legitimate contribution, belonging, and worth within the organization. In both case studies, phases of intensified growth were accompanied by tensions between efficiency-oriented logics and community-based orientations, revealing the fragility of internal equality under conditions of expansion.

Discussion

These findings shed light on how *organizational plurality*-manifested in the coexistence of different functional, normative, and temporal logics-can translate into *inequalities of recognition.* SMEs are particularly instructive in this regard because they operate at the intersection of *personalized and formalized modes of coordination.* Growth requires formal differentiation, yet this very differentiation destabilizes the relational cohesion that once sustained equality among members.

By highlighting these micro-dynamics, the study extends classical organizational sociology toward a more relational understanding of inequality. The conflicts observed are not marginal disturbances but *structural expressions of the tension between plural rationalities and the demand for social integration.* They reveal how symbolic inequalities emerge whenever certain contributions, identities, or interactional styles gain institutionalized recognition over others.

Conclusion and Outlook

The study concludes that growth-related recognition conflicts represent a significant but often overlooked dimension of organizational inequality. In SMEs, these conflicts illuminate the micro-processes through which plural organizational logics-communal, functional, and economic-interact and collide. Far from being merely internal frictions, they show *how plurality and inequality are intertwined in the everyday reproduction of social order.*

Future research could extend this analysis by integrating comparative cases across sectors and national contexts, exploring how different institutional frameworks shape the negotiation of recognition. Moreover, linking recognition-based inequalities to questions of gender, class, or migration background could further bridge the micro-level of organizational practice with the macro-level of societal inequality-a key ambition of organizational sociology today. **(1129 words)**

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HR Managers in Russian Business Organizations: Role and Position in the Diversity and Inclusion Agenda

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International research and practitioner opinions indicate that the attitudes and perceptions of company HR managers play a crucial role in implementing diversity and inclusion (D&I) policies and responding to challenges related to workforce diversification. In creating inclusive workplaces and organizational cultures rooted in principles of diversity and equality, HR managers play a particularly important role (Lau et al., 2023; Usman Mohideen et al., 2024).
Currently, a growing body of academic literature examines the role of HR managers in promoting inclusion and diversity policies, analyzing drivers, barriers, and best practices of inclusion at the organizational level (Ayoko, Fujimoto, 2023). However, in the Russian empirical context, this topic has yet to receive sufficient attention within the scientific community (Antonova et al., 2022). HR managers' attitudes, opportunities, and barriers to establishing inclusive work environments are highly context-dependent, shaped by institutional regulatory frameworks, stereotypes, and societal prejudices toward specific socially vulnerable groups formed in Russian society.

Moreover, the role of stereotypes internalized by HR managers that lead to discriminatory practices affecting multiple socially vulnerable groups remains underexplored, even in leading international studies. Most research on HR stereotypes focuses on particular employee categories such as women (José González et al., 2019), migrants (Farashah, Blomquist, 2020), the elderly (Waligóra, 2024), and people with disabilities (Schloemer-Jarvis et al., 2021).

Thus, the role of HR managers in promoting inclusion in Russian business organizations remains insufficiently researched.

To address this gap, in 2021, a nationwide survey was conducted among HR managers titled "Prospects for Inclusive Employment in Russian Companies and Factors Affecting Diversity Management in the Context of Global Challenges" with a sample size of 2,050 respondents. The survey was implemented by scholars from the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE) within the framework of the Center for Interdisciplinary Human Potential Studies.

This report presents findings testing two hypotheses based on the survey data. The first hypothesis is that the professional identity of HR managers is linked to the proportion of women employed in the company and the presence of measurable KPIs related to their hiring and promotion. A multiple linear regression model was employed. The interpretation draws on Karl

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Weick's sensemaking theory and sociological neo-institutionalism as a framework for organizational research (Powell, Bromley, 2015).

Findings show that individual characteristics and professional identity of HR managers correlate both with the share of women in companies and the existence of relevant KPIs. The strongest predictor of changes in the proportion of women employees is HR managers' adherence to stereotypes about women. Formal institutions, such as international norms and regulations ensuring inclusion, tend to foster inclusive environments broadly but do not directly increase the share of women.

HR managers are more closely associated with hiring women but less so with systematically monitoring hiring and promotion practices for women. Consequently, formal institutions contribute to legitimizing corporate inclusion policies but are not primary drivers of women's hiring.

The second hypothesis contributes to understanding patterns of stereotyping socially vulnerable groups by HR managers and predictors for stereotypical attitudes concerning these groups based on HR manager characteristics. It posits that stereotypes held by HR managers about one group tend to extend to stereotypical perceptions of others. Correlation analysis revealed significant positive associations among nearly all stereotypical judgments related to socially vulnerable groups.

Cluster analysis identified groups of HR managers who hold these stereotypes to varying degrees-low, moderate, and high-regardless of the target group (people with disabilities, elderly, national minorities, migrants, or women). Predictors distinguishing these clusters included sociodemographic characteristics of HR managers, their job satisfaction, assessment of their role as HR professionals, and their geographic location.

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How ChatGPT Renews Old Practices: Democratizing Learning and Cheating Among University Students Through AI Chatbots

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The advent of ChatGPT and similar Artificial Intelligence (AI) chatbots has caused widespread upheaval in the education sector, including higher education. University students can use these chatbots for gathering information, refining their writing, finding relevant literature, obtaining feedback, brainstorming research topics, and producing substantial text. The growing use of such tools in higher education has sparked much debate about the opportunities and challenges they present (Ansari et al., 2024; Bhullar et al., 2024; Chan & Hu, 2023; Jafari & Keykha, 2023; MA et al., 2024). A particularly significant concern has been how such AI chatbots can be utilized to cheat in assignments, exams, and term papers. There has been much debate in the media as well as the academic community in this respect with many publications featuring the issue or discussing potentials for fraud detection (Choi et al., 2022; Cotton et al., 2024; Dalalah & Dalalah, 2023; Farhi et al., 2023; Johnston et al., 2024; Ofem et al., 2024; Perkins et al., 2024; Rasul et al., 2024; Saarna, 2024).
However, one core assumption that underlies this entire debate is that AI chatbots have indeed yielded completely novel possibilities of learning and cheating in the university context. As Ibrahim et al (2023), for example, write: "ChatGPT's ability to write essays and generate solutions to assignments has sparked intense discussion concerning academic integrity violations by school and university students." Similarly, Ofem et al. (2024) write: "ChatGPT use has been associated with academic fraud, malpractice, plagiarism, and privacy erosion".

In our paper, we challenge the common assumption that ChatGPT and similar AI chatbots have brought particularly new forms of academic fraud and malpractice. To do so we discuss the results of a qualitative study of university students' practices of using AI chatbots. Employing practice theory, we outline the different practices of AI chatbot usage by university students including different forms of cheating. For each of these practices we discuss to what degree they mirror or differ from practices that already existed before the introduction of AI chatbots. We will show that none of the possibilities that AI chatbots offer – be it as learning support, as a tutor, for support in academic writing, or for cheating – is indeed novel.

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Methods & Analytical Framework

We draw on the results of a qualitative study of university students' practices of using AI chatbots, which we have conducted in 2024. The dataset consists of 15 focus group interviews with 61 students – 45 female and 16 male. All interviewed students have been enrolled in the teacher education program and were taking German studies as their major and another subject as a minor.

For conducting our focus group interviews, we adopted the approach of the problem-centered interview (Witzel & Reiter, 2012) – a semi-structured approach suitable for focus group interviews (Kühn & Koschel, 2018). The problem-centered interview offers a combination of exploration and in-depth understanding (Witzel, 2000). Specifically, the problem-centered interview features a few questions that are relatively open in order to facilitate exploratory narratives by the interviewees. These open questions are supplemented by a broad variety of possible follow-up questions, which are prepared by the interviewer based on existing knowledge to gather specific information and clarify assumptions. To facilitate an open discussion – also on potential forms of cheating – we ensured the students full data protection. In addition, none of the students' teaching personnel was involved in the interviews, and 11 of the 15 focus groups were even conducted by interviewers from a university abroad.

For data analysis, we employed a particular version of grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) known as the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al., 2013). In line with an interpretative epistemology, the Gioia methodology systematically combines inductive and deductive elements to enable a valid and also flexible coding process. Following this methodology, we openly coded our data by identifying segments of meaning related to the usage of AI technologies. We assigned first order codes as data-driven descriptions and subsequently induced first-order categories by sorting together thematically similar codes.

We then cycled between these first-order categories and our analytical framework to identify theoretically meaningful second-order themes. As our analytical framework we employed sociological practice theory (Nicolini, 2013), especially structuration theory as devised by Anthony Giddens (Giddens, 1984). Through this process, we were able to identify the different practices of usage of AI chatbots by university students. This included several forms of misconduct and potential misconduct.

Results & Discussion

We identified the following generalized practices if AI chatbot usage by university students as well as a category of non-usage as shown in table 1: *AI as support tool, AI as learning facilitator/tutor, AI as sole author, AI as first author, student as second author, AI as second author, student as first author, Non-usage of AI chatbots.*

Using these practices, we analyze to what degree they mirror or differ from practices that already existed before the introduction of AI chatbots (see table 2). We find that none of the possibilities that AI chatbots offer – be it as support tool, as learning facilitator/tutor, sole author, as first author, or as second author – is indeed novel in itself. Every type of learning, writing or cheating practice that AI chatbots are used for, has in fact existed before. This also entails the conclusion that no new forms of cheating have become available through ChatGPT and other AI chatbots.

As our results show, none of the possibilities of learning, writing, and cheating yielded by AI chatbots is factually new. These involve support options like tutoring, extensive language and style editing, and tutoring, as well as cheating possibilities like ghostwriting and obscuring plagiarism through paraphrasing.

Instead, we argue that the novelty lies in the newly established widespread availability of learning, writing, and cheating possibilities to all students through the advent of AI chatbots. Before the availability of these chatbots, many possibilities of supporting learning and writing, and of cheating were only available to a small group of privileged students who possessed sufficient amounts of capital to leverage such possibilities. AI chatbots have merely brought a democratization of the options.

Hence, we argue that concerns revolving about AI enabled cheating at the university are in fact hypocritical in nature as they obscure the fact that these forms of cheating have indeed existed before. However, these forms of cheating did not lead to much concern as long as they were only available to a small group of highly privileged students. The conclusion we draw from this is that widespread concerns about potentials for academic dishonesty by students cannot be explained by the alleged novelty of possibilities that AI chatbots offer. Instead, the democratization of means to successfully cheat in assignments, exams, and term papers – and hence the fact that not only highly privileged students have access to these cheating options – can be seen as the cause of the widespread concerns, not the believed novelty of such possibilities. We will finish with a discussion of the implications for the reproduction and potential reinforcement of social inequalities amongst university students.

Scientific or scholarly significance of the study or work

We conclude that widespread concerns about potentials for academic dishonesty cannot be explained by the alleged novelty of possibilities that AI chatbots offer. Instead, the democratization of means to successfully cheat appear to be the cause of the widespread concerns. Thus, these widespread concerns revolving around cheating with AI chatbots exhibit the underlying structural discriminations of underprivileged students with limited capital.

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How Men Navigate Shifting Gender Norms: Uncertainty Regulation and Its Effects at Work and Beyond

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Organizations are key sites where social inequality is produced, maintained, and potentially transformed. Recent debates around gender equality illustrate this dynamic: as diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives become more visible, yet increasingly contested (Ng et al., 2025), stakeholders actively negotiate, reinforce, or resist traditional gender norms. While research generally focuses on women's experiences amid social change, less attention has been given to men, who may experience considerable uncertainty regarding shifting social expectations surrounding masculinity, a precarious construct to begin with (Bosson & Vandello, 2011). As traditional expectations coexist with more progressive norms, the question of "how to be a man" has become salient (Lund et al., 2019; Takizawa et al., in revision).
Understanding how men navigate these tensions is critical for explaining their attitudes and behaviors at work and beyond. While research on evolving masculinities is expanding, less work has been devoted to how men can be supported in adapting their gender identities amid these normative shifts. In the absence of such support, some men may interpret these tensions as threats to their identity (Dover et al., 2016), which can motivate defensive responses (Hogg, 2007; Wagoner et al., 2017), including resistance to diversity initiatives (Flood et al., 2021; Iyer, 2022). These dynamics also extend beyond the workplace (Selenko et al., 2025), reflected in growing attraction to extreme anti-egalitarian groups and communities (Franklin-Paddock et al., 2025; Pettersson et al., 2025).

Encouraging men to effectively regulate identity-related uncertainty may be key to constructive engagement with shifting norms. Recent work on uncertainty regulation offers a promising avenue (Griffin & Grote, 2020). Research shows that individuals can appraise uncertainty as either *disabling*, promoting avoidance and rigid responses, or *enabling*, prompting exploration and proactive engagement (Magni et al., 2025). Interventions that strengthen an *uncertainty-as-enabling* mindset can nudge individuals toward exploration (Strittmatter et al., 2024), which has been linked to openness and positive diversity attitudes (Takizawa et al., in press).

We apply the uncertainty regulation theory to propose a pathway through which men can reappraise uncertainty about masculinity. Specifically, this cognitive reframing may broaden men's understanding of masculine identity. In turn, cultivating an uncertainty-as-enabling mindset may reduce defensive reactions to perceived normative change and support more constructive engagement within organizations. Our conceptual model thus posits that cultivating an

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uncertainty-as-enabling mindset will allow men to (H1) expand their masculine identity, as evidenced by a decrease in gender role stress, and an increase in androgynous self-identification. In turn, we expect (H2) reduced attraction to anti-egalitarian movements in life and (H3) increased allyship at work.

Two studies will test these hypotheses in Germany, where debates about masculinity and retraditionalization are increasingly prominent (Bonakdar et al., 2025). At the time of submission, data collection is ongoing; this proposal outlines the theoretical rationale, preregistration plan, and methodological framework guiding implementation. Study 1 will provide correlational evidence on how uncertainty mindsets relate to masculine identity regulation and relevant outcomes reflecting attitudes and behaviors within and beyond the workplace. Using self-report measures of uncertainty mindset (Magni et al., 2025), masculine gender role stress (Swartout et al., 2015), gender role beliefs (Bem, 1981), allyship intentions and behaviors (Lyubykh et al., 2024), and support for anti-egalitarian movements such as the manosphere (adapted from Moskalenko & McCauley, 2009), it will test preliminary correlations while controlling for political orientation and sexism. These results will inform effect size estimates, refine stimulus materials, and guide the preregistered experimental design of Study 2, which will causally test the impact of uncertainty mindset interventions on men's identity flexibility and diversity engagement.

Study 2 will be a preregistered, two-wave between-subjects experiment testing the impact of an uncertainty mindset intervention (Strittmatter et al., 2024; Takizawa et al., in press), contextualized to normative change at work. After baseline measures, participants will be randomly assigned to the intervention or a control writing task. Mediators and outcomes will be assessed across two waves (Wave 1: H1; Wave 2: H2, H3).

Overall, this project advances theoretical understanding of how uncertainty mindsets shape flexibility in expanding social identities amidst changing norms. By focusing on the micro-level process of uncertainty regulation among advantaged men, it offers a novel, theory-driven explanation for resistance to DEI initiatives in organizations. We argue that reframing identity-related uncertainty from a disabling threat to an enabling opportunity may reduce defensive backlash among advantaged groups and foster adaptive identity regulation. Practically, the intervention provides organizations with an evidence-based tool for cultivating inclusion and constructive engagement with diversity efforts. Findings will inform evidence-based strategies to promote men's allyship and sustain support for systemic equality in the workplace (Van Laar et al., 2024).

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Humanness, generative AI, and slop. (Re-)constructing the human-machine boundary in organizations

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Ai-Da is a humanoid robot artist invented, continuously developed, and curated by gallerist Aidan Meller and a team of Engineered Arts, a robotics company. Ai-Da recently sold a portrait of computer scientist and 'intelligent machine' theorist Alan Turing for over a million euros, has had solo exhibitions around the world, and has been artist in residence on several occasions (for a discussion of the artist Ai-Da, see for example Ashton & Patel, 2024). On the other hand, aesthetic content of marginal quality, mass produced by generative artificial intelligence (AI) and denominated as 'AI slop' is currently overflowing the internet (Madsen & Puyt, 2025). While Ai-Da seems almost human, AI slop appears to be the output of a malfunctioning machine at best. Building on such contradictory experiences with and evaluations of emerging technology, this essay argues that the construction of the human-machine boundary (Suchman, 2007) is at the core of what is troubling, fascinating, and potentially truly transformative about generative AI in organizations, not least in the context of creative work (Grodal et al., 2024). This essay explores how we can theorize the human-machine boundary in the context of generative AI and, therefore, poses the research question: How is generative AI (re-)constructing the human-machine boundary in organizations?

To construct what is human and what is machine has been a recurrent topic in organizations, yet has arguably never been as delicate, porous, and at the same time contested as it is today in the context of generative AI (Grodal et al., 2024; Hinds & van Krogh, 2024). Struggles about how humans and machines relate to one another and deliberations what makes humans human and machines machine are accompanying technological developments in organizations for centuries (Benjamin, 1935; Grint & Woolgar, 1997; Suchman, 2007). Theorizing the human-machine boundary in organizations has, so far, focused on machines as objects (the technology that works for humans) and machines as actants (the technology that works with humans). Yet, organizational and management literature draws renewed attention to the human-machine boundary in organizations and urges to reflect the (potential of the) technology of generative AI (Amabile, 2020; Phillips et al., 2024; Hsu & Bechky, 2024; Pekarinen & Huising, 2023). Generative AI, the essay argues, forces us to consider machines as (artificial) humans (the technology that works without humans), which comes with a significant shift in our understanding of the human-machine boundary in organizations (Cornelissen et al., 2021).

A critical case for reflecting about the human-machine boundary in organizations in the context of generative AI is creative work. Generative AI, specifically large language models (LLMs) recombine data into explicitly aesthetic content such as text, images, or music. The technology

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uses predictive algorithms to create novel and – at times – even valuable outputs. In cases such as Ai-Da, generative AI even appears to execute agency over their creations (Ashton & Patel, 2024). While the internal processes of generative AI are nothing human-like (Lindsey et al., 2025), the aesthetic content they produce strongly resembles the original outcomes of human creativity from small, everyday ideas such as recipes or jokes to complete works of art such as poetry, paintings, or songs (Joas, 2012). Mimicking the outcomes of this traditional stronghold of authentic humanness (Haarjärvi & Laari-Salmela, 2024) is a potentially significant leap in the construction of the human-machine boundary (Ekbia & Nardi, 2017).

This paper argues that reflecting about constructions of the human-machine boundary in creative work benefits from the lens of evaluation (Lamont, 2012). This is, through the lens of the practices by which we assess and ascribe worth to individuals, objects, or ideas (see Dewey, 1939; see also Haarjärvi & Laari-Salmela, 2024 for a practice lens on humanness). From this perspective, constructing the human-machine boundary in creative work means to evaluate the relation between humans such as artists or writers and machines such as generative AI. An evaluation-lens on the human-machine boundary in creative work can attain to multiple evaluative dimensions of creative work (see Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). This essay will analyze the evaluation of the human-machine boundary in the context of generative AI from the dimensions of agency and the question of who is performing or controlling the creative work (Lee, 2024); originality and the quality and novelty of the creative products emerging from generative AI (Hsu & Bechky, 2024); and authenticity and whether generative AI creates socially legitimized products of creative work (Madsen & Puyt, 2025).

The full paper unpacks how organization theory so far viewed machines either as objects or actants and what it means for our understanding of the human-machine boundary when machines and their outputs turn increasingly more human-like as it is the case with generative AI. Thereupon, the full paper proposes three constructions of the human-machine boundary in creative work in the wake of generative AI: the resource construction, the more-than-human construction, the othering construction. It illustrates these constructions with empirical vignettes from longitudinal, qualitative fieldwork on generative AI platforms and on social media.

The resource construction upholds the human-machine boundary and evaluates machines as tools. In this construction, humans are and remain in control. Artists and/or the content they produce are original (or not) and the artist's identity is the baseline for authenticity. We find current examples of this classical construction of the human-machine boundary on platforms for generative AI music production. The more-than-human construction dissolves the human machine boundary and evaluates machines as actants. In this construction, humans and machines share responsibility in creative work, originality scatters across machine-produced uniqueness (such as in the case of Ai-Da) to versioning (such as in the case of AI slop), and machines can develop a distinct identity. The othering construction separates along the human-machine boundary and evaluates machines as humans. We find this construction in online communities that value digital art without generative AI or in 'absolute zero' generative AI technology that is supposed to create aesthetic content without any training data and, thus, without human involvement. In contrast to the more-than-human construction, agency here is split, which means that agency is context-dependently either fully associated with humans or fully associated with machines. Also, originality is either associated with human or with machine origin and authenticity depends on technological authentication separating between human and machine creations. This construction artificially erects boundaries between what is human and what is (technologically) non-human.

The full paper discusses organizational implications of these constructions beyond the context of creative work, what a plurality of human-machine boundary constructions implies for orga-

nizing, and the political and ethical implications of renewing the separation of humans from machines.

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Individualization of Responsibility for Accessibility at Universities: When Disability Accommodations Do Not Compensate for Disadvantages

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Despite recent rollbacks of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion programs, disability accommodations arguably seem to remain on organizational agendas. Accommodations that students – to date – can claim as compensation for disadvantages include exam accommodations, note-taking support, attendance and deadline modifications, assistive technology, accessible media, sign language interpreting or transcribing, consultation and advocacy, housing and dining accommodations, and disability parking or adaptive transportation (The Ohio State University – Disability Services 2025). Staff can, among other things, claim accommodations during the hiring process, workplace accommodations, accommodation equipment, medical leave, sign language interpreting or transcribing, accessible parking, and travel accommodations (The Ohio State University 2025). The suggested conceptual contribution asks why disability accommodations seem to be less targeted in recent rollbacks of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion programs and argues that organizations seem not to perceive disability accommodations as a social justice issue. To this end, processes how universities compensate for disadvantages are analyzed further. According to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN-CRPD), disability accommodations can be understood as reasonable accommodations in the sense of necessary and appropriate modifications and adjustments to facilitate equal participation. The UN-CRPD frames the denial of reasonable accommodations as discrimination (Article 2). Article 24(5) obligates state parties to take appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities can access higher education on an equal basis with others, including the provision of reasonable accommodations. In this sense, reasonable accommodations become necessary when accessibility is lacking. Accessibility is a key demand of disability rights movements worldwide. In contrast to legalized and bureaucratized conceptions of accessibility, this presentation draws on the emerging field of Critical Access Studies (Hamraie 2017: 13), which raises the question why (demands for) accessibility in architectural and technological design have not yet led to the realization of an inclusive society.

Like many other organizations, universities generally respond to a lack of accessibility – or persistent, ubiquitous barriers in built environments designed for able-bodied people – by establishing bureaucratized procedures for requesting disability accommodations. Although this allows for reasonable accommodations to be requested in accordance with the UN-CRPD, disabled people must invest their time and emotional energy to enforce their claims. They often

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face hostile reactions when making such claims, which can escalate into disputes about what accommodations can be considered reasonable (Inckle 2018; Price 2024). In a study of disabled faculty members at U.S. universities, Margaret Price (2024: 73) describes an 'accommodations loop' that must be tediously and repeatedly navigated, which represents a source of additional, unpaid labor for all applicants that remains largely invisible. This individualization of responsibility for accessibility can now be considered a dysfunctional social inequality or an everyday structural disadvantage in career and life opportunities, since the additional labor required could also be invested in academic achievements.

This additional, unpaid labor often translates to emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983) with its disabling effects on lived experiences, particularly on the emotional lives of disabled people (e.g., exhaustion or alienation), yet also understood as a structural disadvantage. In the process of claiming disability accommodations, emotional labor is expected based on specific feeling rules directed at disabled people. These feeling rules include the expectation to display suffering when requesting compensations for disadvantages, the expectation to be grateful for any support received, and the expectation not to display emotions stereotypically ascribed to disabled people, such as bitterness. The need to perform emotional labor is exacerbated by the individualization of responsibility for access and pleasant interactions. However, I argue that the disproportionate burden of emotional labor could be alleviated by challenging the expectation that disabled people should accept individual responsibility for (lacking) accessibility. A relational understanding of accessibility borrowed from Critical Access Studies and incorporating notions such as shared accountability (Price, 2024) for access and access intimacy (Mingus, 2011), can also facilitate the fair distribution of emotional labor within organizations like universities.

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Lawful Discrimination: How Ambiguity Makes Inequality Legal

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This paper investigates how ambiguities in the laws and regulations that govern organizational conduct generate opportunity structures for discrimination. Drawing on Edelman's (1992, 2016) theory of legal endogeneity and subsequent work on legal ambiguity, we argue that when legal directives are indeterminate, organizations exercise interpretive discretion that reflects prevailing hierarchies and power relations. Under conditions of uncertainty, law's normative force becomes mediated by organizational practices, such that compliance itself can become a vehicle for reproducing inequality. Rather than treating ambiguity as a mere compliance obstacle, we conceptualize it as a structural condition that enables organizations to align formal legality with informal interests.
The empirical setting is the COVID-19 lockdowns in the United States, which introduced unprecedented variability and uncertainty into the regulation of work. We assemble a novel dataset of state-level lockdown restrictions spanning all fifty states, capturing temporal, jurisdictional, and sectoral variation in the strictness, clarity, and enforcement of restrictions. U.S. states differed markedly in their definitions of "essential" versus "non-essential" work and in their guidance concerning remote work, furloughs, and workplace safety. These inconsistencies created a patchwork of legal and administrative ambiguity, producing a quasi-experimental context for examining how organizations interpret and operationalize uncertain rules.

Exploiting this cross-state and cross-industry variance, we analyze firm-level decisions regarding whether employees were (a) required to work in person, (b) furloughed or laid off-with or without pay-or (c) permitted to work remotely. We find that in more permissive and ambiguous state–industry pairs, firms were significantly more likely to engage in employment practices that disproportionately disadvantaged protected and marginalized groups, including racial and sexual minorities, older workers, and individuals with disabilities. Legal indeterminacy thus operates not only as a site of interpretive flexibility but as a mechanism through which social inequality is re-inscribed within organizational decision-making. Ambiguity functions as an institutional lubricant that allows managerial discretion and implicit bias to be exercised under the cover of necessity, flexibility, or efficiency.

Importantly, these effects are amplified in politically conservative environments. Firms located in Republican-leaning states-where political culture was more hostile to government regulation and enforcement less stringent-were especially likely to exploit legal uncertainty. The interaction between political ideology and regulatory ambiguity generates what we term a "toxic cloud" of discretion, in which the absence of clear legal boundaries legitimizes organizational behavior that undermines the intent of protective policy. This dynamic underscores the cultural embedded-

*Speaker

ness of legal interpretation and extends Edelman's insight that law acquires meaning through its enactment within organizational fields.

Our findings advance several theoretical conversations. First, the paper extends legal ambiguity theory by demonstrating empirically how organizations transform regulatory indeterminacy into a resource for managing risk and preserving hierarchical advantage. Second, it bridges literatures on organizational compliance and inequality regimes by showing that legal ambiguity-often introduced to promote flexibility or local adaptation-can paradoxically intensify the vulnerabilities of those it seeks to protect. Third, it contributes to the sociology of gendered and racialized organizations (Acker 1990; Ray 2019) by tracing how macro-level policy ambiguity cascades through meso-level organizational processes to produce micro-level disparities. Under uncertain rules, managers rely more heavily on informal schemas of competence, commitment, and risk, thereby reproducing existing inequalities in ostensibly neutral decisions about remote work eligibility, furlough assignment, or reemployment.

The evidence reveals that ambiguity in protective law transforms organizational discretion into a site of inequality production. During the pandemic, decisions framed as pragmatic responses to an evolving crisis frequently encoded preexisting racialized and gendered hierarchies. Women-and particularly women of color-were disproportionately excluded from remote work opportunities or concentrated in high-risk "essential" roles. Older employees and workers with disabilities were overrepresented among furloughed or permanently laid-off staff. These outcomes illustrate how the intersection of law, politics, and organizational practice can yield discriminatory effects even in the absence of overt intent.

The implications extend beyond the COVID-19 context. As contemporary governance confronts rising policy volatility, technological disruption, and climate-related uncertainty, the mechanisms we identify are likely to grow in significance. Legal regimes governing artificial intelligence, environmental adaptation, or public health may similarly rely on flexible or indeterminate provisions that invite discretionary interpretation. Our analysis cautions that under such conditions, organizations may harness ambiguity not only to navigate uncertainty but also to advance self-interested practices that exacerbate social inequality.
The paper concludes by emphasizing a central paradox: laws designed to protect vulnerable populations can, under conditions of ambiguity, reproduce or deepen their vulnerability. The U.S. lockdowns-intended to safeguard workers' health-simultaneously created environments in which marginalized employees bore disproportionate economic and physical risks. This irony reveals a structural tension in the governance of organizations: the capacity of law to promote equity depends not solely on its substantive content but on the clarity of its boundaries and the institutional contexts in which it is enacted. By foregrounding how ambiguity mediates the relationship between law and inequality, this study contributes to a broader understanding of the organizational foundations of discrimination and underscores the need for legal and policy designs that balance flexibility with accountability.

Leadership and the Development of Digital Culture in the German Armed Forces

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Society, along with the German Armed Forces (*Bundeswehr*) and the Federal Ministry of Defence (BMVg), has experienced a developmental dynamic in information and communication technologies in the second half of the 20th century that has scarcely bypassed any niche of the organization and the professional life of soldiers and civilian employees. This also applies to the *organizational culture* of the Bundeswehr. Organizational culture refers to the values and norms collectively accepted within an organization, the procedures and regulations, the hierarchies, the language, symbols, and rituals. It shapes how members interact with each other and generally influences their behavior. In this way, the organization provides adaptation benefits to society, for example, with regard to increasing digitalization. The individual within the organization also adapts to the cultural patterns of the organization in the course of organizational socialization. Leaders play a special role in this – it is based on the expectation of those being led to experience meaning and thereby absorb uncertainty. According to Luhmann (1964), *leadership* can be described as a functional equivalent to the institutionalization of norms (i.e., rules and expectations shaped by organizational culture). Leadership, as a personalized form of influence, is bound to the principles of selection and socialization and thus makes a special contribution to the development of organizational culture. (Robbins 2001, Elbe 2016)
The current challenges for the development of organizational culture create a need for innovation in the Bundeswehr, which, among other things, led to the creation of a guiding principle called *digital culture*. This concerns not only communication and collaboration in areas of administration and leadership but also extends to the core areas of military operational fields. The possibilities of information acquisition, information generation, and information exchange overall lead to new forms of cultural knowledge and social action. The four types of cultural knowledge (directory knowledge, recipe knowledge, dictionary knowledge, and axiomatic knowledge) are of particular importance as mediators between an abstract organizational culture and the concrete experiences of organizational members. (Sackmann 1991, Elbe 2002) The hierarchical structure of a knowledge-based organizational culture corresponds with Schein's (1984) organizational culture model. This also applies to the digital culture in the Bundeswehr as a facet of organizational culture, whose importance has been increasing for years. Due to the requirements and complexity of the Bundeswehr, it is necessary to increase agility, strategic and leadership capabilities, improve digitalization and networking, and strengthen the organizational culture. (Bundesregierung 2016: 134)

In two online studies conducted at the Bundeswehr, the handling of digitalization and digital culture was surveyed in comprehensive samples (response rate 2020: n=1,997; response rate 2022: n=2,452). The dimensions of the digital culture propagated by the Bundeswehr and also

*Speaker

empirically captured are a willingness to innovate, technological affinity, agility, personal responsibility, risk-taking, awareness of change, collaboration and networking, digital leadership, security awareness, and ethics, as Richter and Elbe note in their studies on the Bundeswehr's digital culture. These dimensions can be measured on two scales of digital culture concerning the individual digital mindset as well as the collective digital environment, and can also be interpreted with regard to the knowledge model of organizational culture. With the basic understanding of digital culture, a target vision for the Bundeswehr's organizational culture is formulated, which is intended to drive digital transformation within the Bundeswehr, for which internal Bundeswehr surveys contribute. (Richter/Elbe 2021, BMVg 2024)

The results of the *first digitization study* by the Centre for Military History and Social Sciences of the Bundeswehr (ZMSBw) can be summarized as follows (Richter/Elbe 2021): The changing framework conditions (with digitization, networking, and acceleration) pose significant challenges for the organizational culture of the Bundeswehr and the individuals working within it. The necessary adaptation and learning processes affect all areas of our daily lives: significant parts of communication and processes have shifted to the internet, which brings new patterns of action and, consequently, learning processes. All of this is new to many users. With the communication platform, spaces and rules have also changed. Learning now occurs on a massive scale, quickly, and sustainably.

The *second survey* on 'Digitalization and Digital Culture in the BMVg Area of Responsibility' 2022 conducted by ZMSBw is not yet fully accessible to the public (Richter/Elbe 2023, Elbe 2023), but key aspects were presented in the sixth Digital Report (BMVg 2024). In the 2022 study, there is a generally positive attitude towards digitalization in the Bundeswehr, although satisfaction with digitalization has slightly decreased since the first study in 2020. In particular, motivational effects and economic aspects, such as advantages in effectiveness and efficiency due to digitalization, were assessed more critically in 2022 (BMVg 2024). The learning-oriented mindset remains strongly pronounced: The importance of a learning orientation in the everyday work of members of the BMVg business division indicates a high willingness to internalize a strong digital culture. A clear majority expresses great openness to new technologies and a desire to use contemporary digital technology in the workplace. Independent planning and decision-making, a positive error culture, and a strong innovation culture are of particular importance in this context.

For a lived digital culture, the *leadership behavior* of supervisors is a central aspect. This particularly includes creating a work environment that promotes learning, utilizing IT-supported work methods and communication tools themselves, and encouraging their use within their areas of responsibility. At the level of artifacts, members of the Bundeswehr in 2022 assume that IT is up-to-date with current technological standards, which represents an improvement compared to 2020. Overall, the study on digital culture, based on the ten dimensions of digital understanding, generally shows a positive digital mindset, although the organizational aspect of the digital environment still needs to be strengthened (BMVg 2024). This requires the participation of soldiers and civilian employees in the digital culture, including those who have so far been hardly involved due to the nature of their work. Building a digital culture with the necessary mindset requires an adaptation in the structure of cultural knowledge in the organization. In the 2022 study, this is operationalized through the Digital Mindset (as an individual perspective) and the Digital Environment (as a collective perspective), each with 20 items.

The advantages and disadvantages of digitalization as a process of organizational development were looked at in the context of these studies using qualitative content analysis from two open-ended questions. With regard to the *advantages* of digitalization (Richter/Elbe 2021: 28), it is noticeable that from the perspective of organizational efficiency and social efficiency, as well as

from the perspective of change dynamics (as a measure of dynamic efficiency), leadership is not mentioned as an advantage of digitalization. (Elbe 2024) The situation is different with regard to the *disadvantages* of digitalization. Here, the lack of leadership (also in email communication) is specifically addressed. From the perspective of digital culture, it is particularly relevant to consider the extent to which supervisors create a learning-conducive environment and promote the use of IT-supported work methods and communication tools, while also using them themselves (Elbe/Peters 2021). Central to the implementation of digitalization and flexible working is therefore the supervisors' own use and promotion of these tools (Elbe 2024). Both the individual and the organization as a whole are embedded in the organizational cultural shaping of digitally mediated, spatially differentiated work: the digital culture.

In the context of digital cultures, organizations are to be conceived as new *spatial structures* (Lewin 2018, Löw 2019, Elbe/Peters 2021) that generate meaning and can be located in specific places. Even in the Bundeswehr, the integration of digitization processes into organizational culture is necessary to avoid the paradox of the temporary organization (Elbe/Peters 2016). For military leaders, this means that they must make leadership tasks more flexible in terms of increasing role diversity and can only fall back on hierarchy due to clear situational requirements. It is always necessary to clarify when actions are taken in expert mode and when leadership tasks are assumed – and this can change depending on the situation. In an increasingly digitized military environment, soldiers and Bundeswehr personnel want, on the one hand, to take advantage of the freedoms of self-organization when working from home, but on the other hand, to retain formal integration into the hierarchical structure as a source of social embeddedness.

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Localized Migration Governance and Educational Funding in Europe: Organizational Dynamics of (Child) Language Brokering in Germany and Spain

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Access to interpreting and mediation services is crucial for the participation of newly arrived migrant families, especially in education, where communication between parents and schools determines inclusion and student success. Yet, the availability of these services varies widely throughout different social sectors, shaped by organizational structures, funding logics, and governance frameworks that translate ideals of equity and diversity in increasingly multilingual societies into uneven practice. This paper examines how financial and institutional arrangements in Germany (Berlin, North Rhine-Westphalia, Bavaria) and Spain (Catalonia) influence access to interpreting support and how these arrangements sustain the informal practice of child language brokering (CLB), in which children translate for their parents in interactions with schools and other institutions.
The study approaches CLB as an organizational response to fragmented diversity governance. Drawing on qualitative policy analysis, expert interviews, and document review, it conceptualizes funding mechanisms as public policy instruments that organize relations between the state and its subjects (Lascoumes & Le Galès 2007). These instruments define who can access services and under what conditions, revealing how organizational fields mediate diversity and inclusion through bureaucratic and fiscal design. Building on Emirbayer and Desmond's (2015) concept of the *racial order* and Ray's (2019) theory of racialized organizations, the paper situates CLB within broader structures of social inequality, showing how organizations reproduce hierarchies through resource allocation and administrative practice.

In Catalonia, bilingual education policies promote inclusion and parental participation, yet interpreting services depend on decentralized and project-based funding. While the Generalitat finances inclusion programs, there is no cohesive budget line for school interpretation. Municipal and third-sector actors provide services through short-term tenders, resulting in uneven access and institutional discontinuity. This "projectified" governance model reflects a wider pattern within European countries in which integration responsibilities are outsourced to NGOs and temporary programs, producing an unstable infrastructure of linguistic mediation. Germany's federal education system exhibits a comparable fragmentation. Although legal frameworks guarantee equal access to public services, no federal law mandates interpretation in education. Responsibility is delegated to states, municipalities and individual schools, leading

*Speaker

to heterogeneous and often opaque arrangements. Berlin and North Rhine-Westphalia maintain and fund to a certain extend interpreter pools and intercultural offices, while Bavaria relies on volunteer mediation and civil-society networks. Across regions, short-term funding and administrative compartmentalization limit institutional capacity, forcing families and schools to rely on children as informal interpreters.

These cross-national findings demonstrate how organizations translate diversity norms into selective practices. Austerity-driven, project-based funding produces what can be called organizational ambivalence (cf. Ahmed 2012): diversity and inclusion are endorsed rhetorically yet undermined structurally. Schools and administrations operate within fiscal and bureaucratic constraints that externalize the costs of linguistic inclusion to families, particularly those already marginalized by migration status, class, or race. CLB thus becomes a mechanism through which inequality is reproduced under the guise of pragmatic adaptation.
From an organizational-theoretical perspective, both Catalonia and Germany reveal how the racial order is enacted through institutional design. Organizations assign value and legitimacy through their capacity to allocate resources; when interpreting services are absent or conditional, linguistic competence becomes a proxy for belonging. The delegation of linguistic mediation to children marks a form of organizational resistance to structural change – maintaining functionality while displacing responsibility. Diversity management, in this sense, remains procedural rather than transformative and overlooks the social realities in postmigrant societies (Foroutan 2019; Ohnmacht & Yildiz 2021). By linking policy instrumentation with the sociology of racialized organizations, the paper contributes to understanding how diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) objectives are shaped and constrained by organizational architectures. The persistence of child language brokering across distinct welfare regimes illustrates that inequalities in participation are not cultural residues but structural outcomes of governance. Sustainable inclusion requires rethinking the financial, institutional and relational foundations of linguistic access – moving from temporary projects to enduring commitments that embed equity into organizational practice.

Male homosociality and the overrepresentation of men as leaders in sport organisations

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Despite advances in gender inclusion among athletes (49% of athletes that competed at Paris 2024 were women), women are still grossly underrepresented and undervalued in sport leadership and governance positions within sport organisations across the globe (Adriaanse, 2019; Matthews & Piggott, 2021). A significant body of research has focused on this underrepresentation of women sport leaders, highlighting how formal and informal organisational dimensions can contribute to both the doing and undoing of gender across structural, cultural, inter-personal, and individual levels (Burton, 2012; Evans & Pfister, 2021; Piggott et al., 2024).
Despite this growing body of research, the overrepresentation and valuing of men in sport management and leadership positions has largely been ignored. That is, research in this field has mostly been conducted on women by women who draw on feminist and/or gender theories to examine how organisational and group structures, cultures, and practices continue to oppress women. Yet, research has largely ignored how (privileged) men maintain their position and power within sport organisations, and specifically how the dynamics of men's preference for interactions with other men (male homosociality) keep them at the core of sport organisations.

The purpose of this conceptual paper is to explore how discursive practices of male homosociality in sport organisations may contribute to the overrepresentation of privileged men in positions of sport leadership and shape organisational culture. We situate our arguments within a post-structural framework and draw on the notion of discursive affective practices to describe how male homosociality and bonding may shape culture and recruitment, selection and promotion in sport organisations. In particular, we are interested in the role of affect in the preference of men to be with and work with their male colleagues (male homosocial desire), and the extent to which the sporting context influences this.

Given the overall absence of sport-specific research on this topic, we primarily draw on the extant literature to explore specific manifestations of male homosociality within broader organisational contexts. This allows us to explore both similarities and differences between sport organisations and other types of organisations. It is particularly relevant to draw on research from other male dominated organisations marked by physicality, such as the construction industry and the military, and extend those findings to processes of hiring, promotion, and organisational culture in sport. Across such research, findings have highlighted the role of affective homosocial preferences in influencing criteria on what constitutes an 'ideal candidate' or a 'good fit' in hiring processes,

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the influence of homosocial enactment in shaping organisational cultures that celebrate and normalise heteronormative masculinity, and the resultant exclusiveness of information sharing and trust-building within spaces of male bonding (Holgersson, 2013; Karioris, 2014; Vanden Brink and Benschop, 2014) .

Sports provide well known spaces of affective comfort for men in business, with the sports bar or golf course being obvious examples. Yet, the role of sport in breeding male homosocial practices is particularly relevant in sports organisations where many of those working in these spaces have a history of (often elite) athletic involvement. Despite sport participation being celebrated for its cohesive potential, the mostly binary gendered structure of competitive sport means that, in fact, for the most part, it brings boys/men together and girls/women together. This results in many adult men being used to, and comfortable with, relying on and socialising with other men within sporting contexts. More insight is needed on how the connection between sport involvement and male homosociality might transfer into the sport workplace, its culture, and the shape of the contours of male homosocial practices amongst managers or those in positions of leadership in sport organisations. The embedment of sport within these organisations makes it likely that organisational members engage in sport activities as a (gendered) socialising space, and can also normalise these affective networking activities.

We believe that exploring the workings of discursive practices of male homosociality can aid as a starting point in developing new perspectives and insights on why men continue to dominate sport organisations, despite 40 years of research and advocacy exploring and addressing issues and strategies to challenge this. That said, we acknowledge certain methodological challenges and dilemmas in revealing homosocial enactments of men managers and leaders, and the invisible privileges that accompany that. Future research on this topic must, therefore, carefully consider the make-up of research teams, in addition to research design, and the implications for this in revealing invisible power dynamics within sport organisations.

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Meta-organizations as Pathways to Sustainability? Opportunities and Challenges in the Transition towards an Ecosystem Approach

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Terms such as 'blue economy' (Yuan & Failler, 2025), 'blue growth' (Barbesgaard, 2018), or 'blue acceleration' (Jouffray et al., 2020) capture trends toward an increasing expansion of human activities into the ocean. This expansion not only encompasses existing activities such as fishing, tourism, oil drilling, and shipping in increasingly remote and extensive areas of the ocean; it also comprises relatively new activities such as the installation of offshore renewables, mining, bioprospecting, and carbon storage (OECD, 2025). However, the extent to which such expansion processes are sustainable is highly controversial (Choudhary et al., 2021). Since this in turn depends on how these processes are organized, it is becoming clear that the blue acceleration requires new organizational approaches (Winther et al., 2020).
These approaches, which are usually described as holistic or ecosystem-based, are dependent on new ways of knowledge generation such as *Integrated Ecosystem Assessments*. These are tools to assess complex interrelations, e.g., between fishing, tourism, offshore renewables, and ocean preservation, meant to make scientifically sound recommendations to policymakers. The recommendations they generate should integrate the state of knowledge of different – often mutually contradictory – knowledge communities, e.g., scientists, fishers, industry or environmentalists (DePiper et al., 2017).

Only in exceptional cases can such new forms of knowledge generation be developed from scratch. In most cases, they have to be incorporated into *existing* organizational structures. Those structures include, on the one hand, 'normal' organizations such as national environmental agencies, political authorities and research institutes. On the other hand, however, they also involve inter-organizational configurations. Meta-organizations are increasingly being studied as *one specific* kind of such inter-organizational configurations (Grothe-Hammer & Rachlitz, 2025). This refers to organizations whose members are themselves organizations. The growing research on such meta-organizations has provided valuable insights into how they are involved in sustainability transitions in general (e.g., Alo & Arslan, 2023; Berkowitz et al., 2020b; Chaudhury et al., 2016) and in ocean-related transformations towards sustainability in particular (Berkowitz et al., 2020a; Berkowitz & Grothe-Hammer, 2022).

More specifically, empirical studies show both positive and negative cases of how meta-organizations contribute to sustainability transitions. Based on a literature review, Coulombel & Berkowitz

*Speaker

(2024, p. 16) argue that meta-organizations "exhibit a dynamic interplay between adaptability and inertia." Hence, on the one hand there is empirical evidence that meta-organizations – although they are member-governed (Berkowitz & Souchaud, 2019) – can handle changing environments similar to 'normal' organizations (Cropper & Bor, 2018; Laurent et al., 2020). On the other hand, there is empirical evidence of meta-organizations resisting change (König et al., 2012): Their tendency to bureaucratization makes both alternative approaches (Vifell & Thedvall, 2012) and short-term goal changes (Berkowitz & Grothe-Hammer, 2022) less likely.

Against this backdrop, I ask the following research question: *what are opportunities and challenges in the meta-organizational transition towards an ecosystem approach?*

To answer this question, I offer empirical insights from an in-depth case study of the *International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES)* and its change process towards an ecosystem approach. ICES is a meta-organization consisting of 20 states and supplies scientific knowledge and advice needed for marine management to states and a variety of intergovernmental organizations. At the same time, as is typical for meta-organizations (Bor & Cropper, 2023), ICES relies on contributions and resources from its member states, ranging from research equipment (vessels, laboratories, etc.) to data to the experts themselves. This places ICES in an unusual position, yielding a focus on the practical difficulties of formulating knowledge in an international context. I build on existing work on ICES, specifically regarding its change process towards an ecosystem approach (Clay et al., 2023; Fuller et al., 2023; Stange et al., 2012; Wenzel, 2017; Wilson, 2009), as well as on my own extensive qualitative research.

By analyzing 20 qualitative interviews with a wide range of ICES-affiliated researchers, ICES leadership and ICES Secretariat, I show three things. Firstly, beyond grand statements about paradigm shifts, the transition towards an ecosystem approach does not take place as a big bang but rather in an incremental manner. Secondly, the meta-organizational setup offers a number of opportunities in the sustainability transition – such as the pooling of knowledge from different organizations or the greater possibility of influencing international policymakers. Thirdly, I distinguish two dimensions of meta-organizational challenges to an ecosystem approach: (1) challenges based on the structures of the *member states* of ICES – which ICES as a meta-organization cannot control like a 'normal' organization could; (2) challenges due to the *meta-organizational structures* of ICES such as its member-based remit, its policy-centric set-up, and its working group structures.

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Negotiating Merit and Inequality: Evaluations of worth in German student scholarship programmes

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Currently, exclusive selection decisions by companies, scholarship programmes and universities are predominantly framed as a matter of meritocratically "selecting the best" (see in detail Guse et al. 2024, Böker 2021, Bloch 2015, Saner 2019, Wagner et al 2023). At the same time, other discourses on contradicting values and structural problems (such as diversity and inequality) are increasingly important for the legitimacy of organisations and their practices. In my contribution, I will examine how, in the field of scholarship programmes, one organisation addresses these specific ruptures and contradictions through its selection process.
The ethnographic PhD-project examines the decision-making process of a scholarship programme for secondary students. It is a case of organisations deliberately seeking to resolve the dichotomy of meritocracy and inequality, since in each selection decision, both criteria of talent and social disadvantage are considered. In normative terms, the selection procedure seeks not only to avoid reproducing inequalities, but to actively contribute to more educational equality.

For the committee to make these evaluations, the applicants are encouraged to share not only their achievements but also open up about personal obstacles and hardship. The evaluation problem that emerges from the inequality-sensitive selection process strikingly is *not* to which extent lower performance should be "tolerated" in the selection decisions. Rather, and more fundamentally, the question is, what merit means when recognizing intersecting axes of privilege and disadvantage. How can inequality and individual suffering be compared and evaluated?

Aim of this contribution is to demonstrate *how* members of the selection committee make such decisions and how they consider both social disadvantage and talent: Analytically, I discriminate between the organisational processes and the interactional negotiations, in which the valuation regimes of social disadvantage and excellence are interwoven.

Regarding the conceptual framework, I enter the field with a system-theoretical understanding of decision-making processes (cf. Groddeck et al. 2016, Luhmann 1999 (1964)). The aim is to trace how social norms and values are translated into organisational practices and interwoven with organisational rationalities. I draw on Bettina Heintz (2010, 2019) to show how numerical difference disambiguates two contradicting registers of valuation, so that individual experiences of talent but also marginalization, social disadvantage, hardship or trauma become comparable. Following Büchner et al. (2025), I track how the cases of applicants then move through the

*Speaker

organisation, how they are transformed from numbers into constructions of individuals, to fit the committees subjective reading of educational equality.

In my contribution, I will primarily draw on the evaluation-process of the application files: First, the file is allocated to two jury members, who evaluate the applicants' merit and disadvantages along distinct categories, such as motivation, excellence, or the degree of educational alienation: They grade these categories as proxies for talent and disadvantage in separate scores (rating), which then are added and sorted to rank the candidates (for differences between rating and ranking cf. Heintz 2019: p. 57ff.). While this process of rating and ranking works well for other institutions primarily judging on the grounds of talent (Wagner et al. 2023), in my case-study, this process is frequently challenged on morals grounds by its members. Strikingly, the ranking system in which talent and disadvantage are assessed separately and then added up does not correspond to the jury members' individual notions of justice within this moral organisation (cf. Armbruster & Besio: 2021).

So, after a formal process, the decision-making authority and responsibility is transferred to the interactional negotiations of the committee. Individual readings of the evaluation registers "merit and disadvantage" are discussed by the jury members on a case-by-case basis. They also deliberate informal selection criteria, that are functional to the organisation, i.e. the candidate's prospective educational success, the candidate's mental health and motivation to participate in workshops and seminars.

While the ranking tool mostly becomes irrelevant, the jury now tries to "justly" interweave the selection criteria with the multitude of information offered in candidates' applications. However, the committee is confronted by the "sacrality" of the individual, especially in their narrations of suffering (Dorn & Meier 2024: 12). In these instances, the jury's emotions allow the process to move from evaluation and decision (cf. Meier & Peetz 2021). Recognizing their pain is a precondition to the decision making and the committee members' emotions become a source of knowledge on the candidates' potential trajectories (Voswinkel 2008) and the fit into the scholarship programme.

Throughout these processes and interactions, I trace the organisational and communicative transformation of morality and values in the decision-making process, which are combined and – for outsiders sometimes erratically – "stacked" until the jury members are able to justify the morally difficult decisions (cf. Dorn & Wilz 2021).

Referring to the theme of the conference, I want to illustrate, how the organisation's aim to recognize criteria of diversity as tantamount to those of excellence, leads to unanticipated problems. With dual selection criteria, the decision on who "deserves" a scholarship only becomes possible through situationally switching on or off formality and through the interpersonal discussions about evaluations, the selection criteria and their legitimacy. The multifaceted and even chaotic discourse I observed is useful to the organisation, because it functions a placeholder for a complex and ambiguous social discourse. In the case-study, individual opinions and different perspectives flow into the evaluation, and are interwoven (or stacked) until a moral decision can be flexibly justified. A situation of ambiguity and uncertainty – produced by complex social discourses – is resolved not by fixed decision-making programmes that the members merely execute but by subjectivity and individual sentiments (cf. Matthiesen et al. 2022).

This ethnographic research draws on an estimate of 100 hours of participant observation during the selection process, workshops and seminars as well as the admission- and graduation ceremonies, 20 qualitative semi-structured expert-interviews with all actors involved in the selection process as well as a qualitative document analysis of the assessment instruments and applica-

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Organisation and Diversity: between Neo-Institutionalism and Functionalism

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Organisation and Diversity: between Neo-Institutionalism and Functionalism

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Organisational Resistance and Inclusion: Intersecting Gender, Digitalization and Social Inequality in Pakistani Export-Oriented SMEs

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In Pakistan's export-oriented small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), organisational responses to digitalization, diversity, and inclusion initiatives frequently remain superficial or face structural resistance rooted in patriarchal norms, socio-economic stratification, and institutional inertia. Despite increasing exposure to global markets and corporate governance reforms, many Pakistani SMEs continue to operate within traditional power hierarchies where digital transformation and inclusion are treated as compliance requirements rather than developmental imperatives. This study seeks to explore how organisational actors in these enterprises mediate change processes across three interconnected domains-gender diversity, digital transformation, and social inequality-and how these dynamics collectively shape inclusion outcomes.
The study uses a mixed-methods approach, including a cross-sectional quantitative survey, along with qualitative interviews. The quantitative component focuses on 312 export-oriented SMEs in Lahore, Karachi, and Faisalabad, cities that export textiles, leather, and light engineering products. For the quantitative component, a survey was designed based on previously validated organisational and inclusion scales to assess the degree of digitalization developed, gender-inclusive management, and socio-economic diversity of the employees. The focal dependent construct, organisational inclusion performance, captured perceptions of employees regarding feelings of belonging, fairness related to promotion, and turnover of underrepresented or minority groups. For increased rigor, the study added a mediation–moderation approach with the organisational culture of change-readiness as a mediator and organisational size (micro, small, medium) as a moderator.

The paper conceptually combines the Resource-Based View (RBV) of organizations, the Institutional Theory of resistance to change, and Intersectionality Theory to analyze the role of technology, gender and class in shaping inclusion performance. Within the RBV, digitalization is positioned as a strategic capability that organizations can use to improve their competitiveness and inclusion. Institutional Theory justifies the explanation of why many firms symbolically conform to external inclusion pressures while retaining informal exclusionary structures. Intersectionality Theory expands on this by revealing the ways in which gender and class disparities combine and how they are reinforced or countered by digital technologies and organizational policies.

*Speaker

The results from structural equation modelling with SmartPLS 4 highlights the impact of digitalization on the positive inclusion performance ($\beta = 0.312$, $p < 0.01$). This relationship is strengthened in the presence of gender-inclusive management practices (interaction $\beta = 0.278$, $p < 0.05$). This suggests that the technological gains on inclusion are dependent on institutional support for inclusion of women. Yet, socio-economic diversity on its own is unlikely to have positive outcomes on inclusion. In fact, when the culture of change-readiness is weak, diversity is negatively associated with inclusion ($\beta = -0.175$, $p < 0.05$) and thus, organisations that are unprepared are likely to find it difficult to convert diverse workforces to performance benefits. This is in direct relationship with the change-readiness as it is a significant mediator, especially with the internal cultural openness which seems to align formal diversity policies with the lived experience of inclusion.

The qualitative phase of this research included 21 semi-structured interviews with upper-tier operational staff holders, senior managers, and human resources heads. This phase still focuses on understanding the nuances of the relationships captured in the preceding quantitative chapter. From the interviews, it was starkly brought out that informal decision-making and mentorship networks often exclude individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Women employees face both hidden discrimination and structural barriers to advancement, especially in non-family firms. Additionally, most arguments favoring investments in digitalization focus on cost reductions and automation of compliance, rather than digital tools and processes as means to deepen equitable engagement. managers view inclusion as a compliance burden rather than a moral or strategic imperative, which accounts for the prevalence of token initiatives without continued engagement.

Thematically analyzed data affirm that organizations which practice participative leadership with open and flexible communication flows, as well as transparency in promotion decision-making systems, all enjoy higher levels of inclusion, regardless of the enterprise's size. Even more positive, medium-sized enterprises, as opposed to micro-enterprises, more successfully operationalize institutionalized alignments of gender and class inequities. This is from the available resources, international buyers, socially- compliance standards, and professionalized human resources. Micro-enterprises depend more on family and kinship networks for employment, which strengthens and perpetuates patriarchal and class structures. Digital tools, especially AI-driven HR analytics and e-learning systems, can democratize access to opportunities, but most small firms do not fully exploit these potentials.

This study implements a convergent parallel design to integrate quantitative and qualitative results for a holistic view of organisational inclusion. For the survey, managers and non-manager employees were proportionately stratified sampled as respondents to gain representativeness across different organisational sizes and industries. Reliability analyses showed all scales yielding Cronbach's alpha of 0.80 and above, and convergent validity was established as the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was above 0.50. Discriminant validity was confirmed using the HTMT criterion. For the qualitative part, interview data were inductively coded using NVivo, and quantitative results were used to cross-validate themes to pinpoint convergence and divergence. Triangulation of sources further confirmed methodological rigour as well as contextual validity.

The contributions made to organizational sociology and management literature are threefold. First, the findings explain the simultaneous coexistence and interdependence of digitalization and inclusion practices in emerging economies. However, digitalization and inclusion are also interdependent. One side, the technological transformation of an economy, cannot achieve equity without institutional support, and the inclusion strategies and practices without the technological support fail. Second, the study extends the organizational change literature by providing

empirical evidence from Pakistan, which has been characterized by informal labour relations and strong patriarchal structures, thus also challenging Western-centric theories and assumptions. Third, the study makes recommendations to practitioners and decision makers, which is to strengthen organizational culture toward change-readiness, embed digital literacy programmes that take the needs of the most marginalized employees as a priority, and develop gender and diversity gap indicators that are tightly woven to the performance management system. This, the author believes, would enhance inclusion considerably.

Overall, the paper situates multiplicity gender, class, and technology within an organisational framework that reflects both promise and resistance to inclusion initiatives in Pakistan's export sector. It aligns directly with the ICOS 2026 conference themes of plurality, diversity, and social inequality in organisations, and with its focus on how organisational changes can be rapid or gradual, superficial or profound. By illuminating how digitalization interacts with gender and class inequalities, the study invites reflection on how organisations in developing economies can move from performative diversity gestures toward transformative inclusion. Its implications resonate beyond Pakistan, offering comparative lessons for other emerging markets navigating similar tensions between global competitiveness, technological transformation, and socio-cultural embeddedness.

Organizaing the Whaling World: the IWC and Aboriginal Whaling

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The IWC was formed after WWII by whaling states for the purposes of regulating and protecting the whaling industry. It's founding required the definition of many terms, such as "whale", "whalers," and "whaling" while it evolved into the international organization with the widely-recognized authority to construct and reconstruct such categories and to admit or deny actors entry into them.
For the first decades of its existence, the IWC proved unable to achieve its goals of regulating the take of whales or the production of whale oil. Large amounts of whales were taken, and additional species were depleted. Some observers argue that the IWC had succeeded in establishing the norm of observing the best available science by the 1970s, however, around that time, the budding environmental movement discovered the whaling issue and made protection of whales a banner issue. This began a 10-year battle among commercial whalers, scientists, environmentalists, conservationists and animal-welfare groups over the acceptable way to treat and think about whales. The organization slowly evolved from a resource management organization into a conservation organization. Today, the "industry" it is concerned about is whale-watching.

Over the course of this battle, other voices emerged from alternative whaling communities. These voices often came from some fairly marginalized first peoples communities, frequently located within the geographical boundaries of whaling states. Their small-scale whaling produced food resources rather than whale oil and was conducted with a mix of modern and traditional technologies. The product was distributed via a variety of mechanisms, including market mechanisms.

This whaling, designated as "aboriginal and subsistence whaling" by the IWC, became a political issue as the organization transitioned against the will of some states into a conservationist organization. But what is "aboriginal and subsistence whaling"? This category is notoriously difficult to define. In this transition, the category became a hotly debated "boundary object" with activists on all sides quarreling over how to understand, characterize, and place aboriginal subsistence whaling and who should be placed in that category. The following characteristics proved problematic: Which whales were targeted (frequently among the most fragile), what technology was to be acceptable (what was authentic and hence truly "cultural") and the degree to which any market mechanism was acceptable. The IWC battles contributed to group identity-building, challenges to identity (including strife within groups), and alliance construction. Today, the IWC oversees only the whaling done for these reasons.

This paper traces the evolution of the "aboriginal and subsistence" whaling category in the

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IWC, and the organizational impacts of constructing this category and of the efforts to ban commercial (as opposed to subsistence) whaling. It argues that the IWC battles had a significant organizational impact on native peoples around the world. The battle led to the construction of alliances that had in turn organizational consequences. The paper focuses on the emergence and trajectory of the World Council of Whales, the North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission and the Makah Tribe in the United States. It is a document study and does not rely on interviews.

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Organizational Classism and Gender Tokenism as Predictors of Inclusion Satisfaction among Female Employees of Corporate Sector in Pakistan

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Organizational Classism and Gender Tokenism as Predictors of Inclusion Satisfaction among Female Employees in Corporate Sector in Pakistan
Abstract

Across the global workforce, inclusion has become a critical benchmark of organizational progress, yet many workplaces continue to reproduce subtle hierarchies that shape employees' sense of belonging and participation. In developing economies such as Pakistan, these hierarchies often manifest through organizational classism and gender tokenism-two intertwined social dynamics that determine how women experience inclusion in professional spaces (Thuma, 2020). Organizational classism refers to the reproduction of socio-economic boundaries within formal work environments, where employees' access to recognition and advancement is influenced by their educational background, linguistic expression, or perceived social class (Adisa et al., 2025). Gender tokenism, on the other hand, emerges when women are included in organizations symbolically to signal diversity rather than to promote genuine gender equity (Chow, 2024). Together, these dynamics create complex layers of exclusion that continue to shape women's experiences in Pakistan's corporate sector, where traditional social norms intersect with emerging corporate cultures.

Rationale and Objectives: The research study focused at the predictability of inclusion satisfaction among female workers within the corporate sector in Pakistan by organizational classism and gender tokenism. The study has a theoretical foundation of social identity, organizational justice, and inclusion climate theories, which in combination offer a comprehensive explanation of the effect of structural and interpersonal factors on the sense of belonging and empowerment of employees (Abulbasal et al., 2024). The paper seeks to bring into the limelight the unaddressed aspect of the issue of exclusion based on classes that act in concert with gender inequality as well uncover how symbolic practices of inclusion retard the emergence of the equitable organizational cultures (Ito & Bligh, 2024). The study offers insight into the relationship between class and gender as it becomes included in the number, which sees how social hierarchies are permeated in everyday workplace relationships.

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Methodology: The study used a quantitative research design to develop empirical evidence on these associations. A structured questionnaire was used to gather the data on female employees working in various corporate organizations in Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad on the concept of organizational classism, gender tokenism and inclusion satisfaction. SmartPLS was used to run the Structural Equation Modeling analysis of the data to test the postulated relationships between the study variables. The model tested the direct impacts of the organizational classism and gender tokenism on the inclusion satisfaction and the interaction of those two in the attitude women take towards fairness, belongingness, and professional value within the corporate settings.

Findings and Results: The results indicate that organizational classism decreases the level of inclusion satisfaction among women to a great degree, supporting the reinforcement of the existing boundaries of privilege in the workplace culture (subtle, but persistent). The less elite employees (both in educational or lingual capacity) were found to be less satisfied with inclusion policies as they thought that merit and ability were frequently displaced to class-based prejudices in promotional and visibility frameworks. Gender tokenism also demonstrated high level of negative relationships with inclusion satisfaction with women who felt themselves to be merely symbolic representatives of an organization expressed greater disengagement and mistrust toward organizational equity programs. Interestingly, the interplay between classism and tokenism showed that there is a compounding effect such that the lower socio-economic status of women led to more significant exclusion even in organizations that are publicly proclaiming diversity and inclusion. These results show that the efforts to make the gender inclusive will never be complete without considering the class-based structures that inform the professional credibility and access to opportunity.

Implications and Contributions: The practical and theoretical implications of this study are both practical. In the context of corporate organizations in Pakistan, the results point to the fact that diversity and inclusion strategies currently followed should be critically reconsidered by concentrating on a limited approach to the concept of gender representation but overlooking the existing hierarchies in the organization. Inclusion of diverse women in the workplace needs to recognize the presence of class as one of the strongest factors undermining equity and the formulation of intersectional inclusion practices to address the differences in women experience in the social ladder. To break the class-based advantages related to human resource practices, mentoring, and promotion should be integrated by the human resource departments which will help the women to become participants in the decision making and leadership process and not just a symbol.

Theoretically, the study adds to the developing body of diversity, equity, and inclusion literature by adding the gender inequality debate to include a discussion of discrimination based on classes in the Global South. It places the corporate world in Pakistan into a serious context on how the contemporary professional systems bargain with the traditional hierarchies and global inclusion patterns. In addition, the research contributes to the field of intersectionality research within the context of the organizational behavior, which has not been researched extensively in South Asian literature, by the use of SmartPLS-based structural modelling. Conclusively, it is important to state that neither of the two, symbolic and structural inequalities that remain in the professional set up could be discussed as long as sustainable inclusion in organizations is not attained. The article provides an empirical approach to diversity that can be adopted by organizations to go past performative diversity to the inclusion culture that is grounded in social justice and equity as it connects organizational classism and gender tokenism to inclusion satisfaction.

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Organizational innovation and collaborative governance in sustainability transitions: A case study of land stewardship and ecotourism development in Spain.

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We investigate the land stewardship agreement between the Foundation for the Conservation of the Bearded Vulture (FCQ) and the Aínsa-Sobrarbe municipality in Spain as a case of institutional innovation that addresses organizational responsibility in the context of biodiversity conservation, climate action, and sustainable regional development (Castillo-Salazar, Sanagustín-Fons, & Pardo, 2025). Drawing on recent scholarship on organizing sustainably (Delbridge, Helfen, Pekarek, Schuessler, & Zietsma, 2024), we conceptualize the land stewardship agreement as an organizational form that seeks to coordinate activities in ways that contribute to social and ecological thriving while preserving and developing rather than depleting human and environmental resources. Our research contributes to organizational sociology by analysing how organizations navigate the plurality of competing demands inherent in sustainability transitions, while addressing issues of equity, inclusion, and power dynamics in multi-stakeholder governance processes that can be assisted by technologies (de Curtò, de Zarzà, Fervier, Sanagustín-Fons, & Calafate, 2025).
Like the energy cooperatives studied by Besio, Arnold, and Ametowobla (2022), the land stewardship arrangement represents an "unconventional organization" characterized by participatory structures that enable it to advance radical imaginaries and innovative practices of sustainability by integrating different social groups and concerns in decision-making processes. Mountain regions worldwide face unprecedented pressures from climate change, biodiversity loss, rural depopulation, and tourism development, creating contexts where organizations must develop innovative governance mechanisms that can integrate diverse stakeholder interests while maintaining focus on long-term sustainability goals. The Sobrarbe region, with its six UNESCO recognitions and exceptional biodiversity, exemplifies these challenges while offering insights into how organizational innovations can facilitate more inclusive and adaptive approaches to environmental governance.

Our theoretical approach draws on Actor-Centered Institutionalism (Scharpf, 1997) to analyse the complex interactions between institutional structures, organizational actors, and policy outcomes in the context of sustainability transitions. We complement this with an organizing

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perspective on sustainability (Delbridge et al., 2024) that is particularly sensitive to the variety of forms and practices of sustainable organizing, the social institutions and logics in which these practices are embedded, the power and politics of promoting sustainable organization, and the ways in which work, voice, participation, and inclusion are organized and contribute to develop societal capabilities. We argue that the land stewardship agreement represents a form of distributed organizational responsibility, where accountability for sustainability outcomes is shared across multiple organizational actors operating within a negotiated institutional framework. This aligns with Besio et al.'s (2022) observation that participatory organizational structures can allow various groups and audiences to access the core of organizations, systematically including diverse stakeholders in key decision-making processes to consider a plurality of concerns. This perspective aligns with New Institutionalist approaches that emphasize how formal and informal rules structure organizational behaviour while recognizing the agency of actors in reshaping institutional arrangements (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010).

Our methodological approach combines comprehensive document analysis of the land stewardship agreements (signed in 2016, renewed in 2019 and 2024) with thirteen in-depth semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including FCQ representatives, local government officials, tourism business owners, community organization representatives, and technical experts.

The land stewardship agreement creates a multi-stakeholder arena bringing together organizations with different missions, cultures, and accountability structures, generating both creative tensions and coordination challenges as actors negotiate shared strategies. As Delbridge et al. (2024) emphasize, sustainability as a concept is inherently contested, and there is a need to be specific on what, for whom, and to which ends organizations and organizing can become sustainable.

Second, our analysis highlights how organizational responses to sustainability challenges evolve through processes of gradual institutional change. The evolution of the land stewardship agreement through three successive renewals demonstrates adaptive capacity, as actors have incorporated new elements including climate change adaptation measures, enhanced scientific research components, and strengthened provisions for community benefit-sharing.

Third, while the land stewardship agreement has succeeded in improving communication and trust among core stakeholders, interview data reveals persistent concerns about the representation of certain groups, particularly small-scale farmers and traditional land users. This finding resonates with Delbridge et al.'s (2024) argument that there is no sustainability without social justice, and that delivering system change requires engaging with notions of just transitions in which tensions and conflicts emanating from making organizations more sustainable are resolved through social dialogue with internal and external stakeholders. This speaks directly to fundamental questions in organizational sociology about whose voices are heard in organizational decision-making processes and how power dynamics shape the distribution of costs and benefits from organizational actions (Cleaver & Whaley, 2018).

Fourth, the case reveals tensions between organizational responsibility commitments and practical implementation challenges. The FCQ's evolution from a species-focused conservation organization to a broader facilitator of sustainable regional development demonstrates organizational mission expansion in response to complex sustainability challenges. However, this expansion has generated questions about organizational boundaries, expertise, and legitimacy. Some stakeholders expressed concerns that conservation organizations may lack the mandate or capacity to address socio-economic development issues, while others argued that separating environmental and social dimensions of sustainability is neither feasible nor desirable. These tensions reflect

the challenges faced by unconventional organizations that attempt to introduce marked value orientations in economic matters while maintaining operational viability (Besio et al., 2022).

The integration of local ecological knowledge into conservation planning represents a particularly important dimension of our findings related to organizational diversity and knowledge pluralism. The collaborative arrangement has created mechanisms for incorporating traditional knowledge from shepherds, farmers, and long-term residents into scientific conservation strategies. This knowledge integration demonstrates how organizations can move beyond purely technocratic approaches to environmental management by recognizing and valuing diverse forms of expertise (Tengö et al., 2014). However, our findings also reveal ongoing challenges in ensuring that local knowledge is not merely consulted but genuinely integrated into decision-making processes, and that knowledge contributions are appropriately recognized and rewarded.

The case also reveals the paradoxes and contradictions inherent in sustainability transitions. Tourism development in Sobrarbe generates economic benefits that support conservation goals while simultaneously creating environmental pressures that threaten the ecological values that attract visitors. Organizations must navigate these tensions through ongoing negotiation and adaptation, making trade-offs that satisfy diverse stakeholders while maintaining commitment to long-term sustainability. As Delbridge et al. (2024) observe, organizational success in sustainability transitions depends not on eliminating contradictions but on creating governance mechanisms that can surface conflicts, facilitate deliberation, and enable adaptive responses to emerging challenges, what they describe as democratizing governance through both bottom-up participation and collaborative institutional arrangements. Our findings suggest that organizational success in sustainability transitions depends not on eliminating these contradictions but on creating governance mechanisms that can surface conflicts, facilitate deliberation, and enable adaptive responses to emerging challenges (Chaffin et al., 2014).

Sobrarbe demonstrates institutional innovation creating collaboration possibilities requiring attention to inclusion, power dynamics, and adaptive capacity. Echoing Besio et al. (2022), land stewardship agreements must preserve participatory nature while adapting. The evolution of the land stewardship agreement through successive renewals suggests that building flexibility into institutional arrangements enables organizations to respond to change conditions while maintaining core commitments to sustainability and collaboration (Folke et al., 2005). By connecting our empirical analysis to recent theoretical developments in organizing sustainably (Delbridge et al., 2024) and participatory infrastructures of sustainability (Besio et al., 2022), we contribute to building an organizing perspective on sustainability that advances both theoretical understanding and practical guidance for addressing the urgent challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss, and social inequality.

Keywords: organizational responsibility, land stewardship, collaborative governance, actor-centered institutionalism, sustainability transitions, multi-stakeholder arrangements, organizational innovation, organizing sustainably.

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Organizations as Laboratories of Societal Value: Equal Opportunity and Sustainability as Experimental Fields

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This paper centers on the dynamic interplay between organizations and society in the context of societal values currently exposed to political and economic pressures-most notably, the values of equal opportunity and sustainability. From the perspective of the "organization society" (Arnold et al. 2021; Mormann & Hasse 2024), organizations are understood not merely as mirrors of societal structures, but as active drivers of societal development. The paper draws on this theoretical approach to systematically illuminate and conceptualize the institutional interplay of societal expectations, organizational structures, and professional practices.
At the heart of this analysis lies the critical potential of institutional theory, stemming from the linkage of three established strands: formal organizational structures, societal discourses, and professional practices. Formal structures and management issues have been central research topics in institutional theory since the 1990s (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). Broader societal discourses and belief systems are particularly prominent in the works of John W. Meyer and colleagues (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Meyer, 2010). As shown by Richard Scott (2008) and Frank Dobbin (2009), professional practices link organizations to their environment by translating normative expectations into organizational programs.

At first glance, equal opportunity and sustainability may appear as distinct discursive fields, yet they share essential properties: in both cases, they concern the implementation of normatively charged expectations that cannot be fulfilled by technical solutions or administrative directives alone. Rather, both values call for ongoing negotiations within and between organizations. Empirical analysis shows that societal values become anchored and further developed in organizations through professionalization dynamics and specific practices of value translation. The analysis reveals that implementing societal values is not a binary matter of success or failure, but rather an ongoing process of societal self-organization through organizations. Especially in current research on equal opportunity and sustainability, it becomes clear that the translation of societal expectations is often marked by a phenomenon of decoupling between formal regulations and actual practice. Particularly relevant is the interaction of classical and new professionals (such as diversity officers and sustainability managers), who operationalize, further develop, or even transform institutional values through their practices. In this way, societal values are constantly renegotiated within organizations, appearing less as fixed objectives, and more as enduring, dynamic practices of value work.

Drawing on the theoretical framework of organization society, I propose a systematic com-

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parative approach to analyze equal opportunity and sustainability as societal values that are institutionalized, transformed, and also constrained by organizations. I argue for understanding organizations in their dual role as societal actors and institutional entities-as central stages for processes of translation and negotiation of values. This transformation of societal values is shaped primarily by the interplay of rationalization (standardization, certifications, reporting obligations) and individualization (participation, empowerment) as complementary organizational principles (Mormann 2020). Organizational professions play a key role in mediating and working on societal values: they ensure operative implementation, reinforce knowledge networks, and act as agents of institutional change.

By comparing cases in the areas of equal opportunity and sustainability, this paper invites us to understand these domains as core experimental spaces of the organization society. The case studies-such as the development of diversity management or the establishment of sustainability standards in enterprises-demonstrate how professions, embedded in organizational structures and societal discourses, function as catalysts for the translation of societal values, making organizations stages for social innovation.

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Organizing the non-existent: The emergent organization of a digital voucher system

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The paper builds on organizational sociology debates on types of organizations (Apelt and Tacke 2012) and develops an extreme type of organizing: the organization of the non-existent. Empirically, we draw on research into the establishment of a digital voucher system for the management of scarcity in a European state. Theoretically, the paper combines a sensemaking perspective (Weick 1995) with structuration theory-based organizational sociology (Giddens 1984; Ortmann et al. 2023).

What is to be organized is non-existent in two respects. The digital voucher system is intended to be deployed in situations where critical goods become scarce and market mechanisms fail. It represents a reaction of several ministries to recent crises (e.g. the COVID-19 pandemic, wars). It is therefore a state-run system. The historical model for this system are the food ration cards that were used after the Second World War. Some of these paper documents still exist in the archives of public administrations, yet they remain as historical artefacts rather than functioning instruments. In a contemporary crisis, it would be unclear how they could be used - or, in other words, how they would have to be organized. The IT system to be developed is intended to allocate a state-defined quantity of rationed goods to eligible individuals (i.e. all persons residing in the country). Purchasing these goods in retail stores would then only be possible with a corresponding QR code and within the allocated quota. To ensure that the IT system remains up to date for a future use, it is being developed with an interorganizational embedding. The development is led by ministries and other public authorities, while a state data center is to operate the IT system. Central linkages and dependencies exist with organizations from the private retail sector. The development process involves engineers and computer scientists as well as ourselves as organizational sociologists. However, the problem of scarcity of critical goods is not known as an existing or currently experienced societal or organizational situation. This is the first facet of non-existence. At the same time - and in contrast to emergency organizations or networks such as fire departments, police, or disaster management agencies (Bode 2023; Ellebrecht 2020; Berthod et al. 2016) as well as temporary forms of organizing in crises (Grothe-Hammer et al. 2025) - there are no prior experiences or competencies related to comparable situations. This has implications for the division of labor, as responsibilities are not only undefined but in some cases entirely unknown.

The case is also extreme because it does not involve a formal organization established for this

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purpose. Rather, organizing requires the coordinated activities of actors from various state organizations (e.g. ministries, municipal administrations) and non-state organizations (e.g. retail corporations). This also means that only very limited resources are allocated to it. This is partly because it remains entirely unclear - and contested - whether such a scarcity of goods will ever occur and what kinds of crises it might be associated with.

We accompanied the emergence of this extreme form of organizing in an application-oriented research project, both as experts and as researchers. The collected material (interviews, field notes, documents) can be analyzed through a combination of two process-oriented theoretical perspectives: the sensemaking perspective and structuration theory–based organizational sociology.

We understand sensemaking as the continuous activity through which actors produce meaning from perceptions and experiences in order to act (Weick 1969, 1995). In organizations, this aims at producing shared meanings and relevances (Balogun and Johnson 2004; Gephart et al. 2010). This perspective has frequently been used to understand organizing in crises and disasters (Weick 1993; Maitlis and Sonenshein 2010; Jensen and Mahmud 2023; Weick 2010), including in interorganizational contexts (Mills and Weatherbee 2006). It helps to explain how actors in organizations respond to exceptional situations. However, we focus on a specific manifestation of sensemaking: one that concerns not the perception and interpretation of an existing crisis, but of a non-existent and not-yet-experienced crisis situation of scarcity management. Moreover, this sensemaking is directed toward the appropriate (future) organization of that situation. To address this, we complement the sensemaking perspective with a structuration theory perspective on organization.

In this perspective, organizations are social systems that are reflexively regulated (Ortmann et al. 2023; Windeler 2001; Windeler and Jungmann 2024; Jungmann 2019; Giddens 1990). Such reflexive regulation - or the establishment of an organization of the non-existent - can be understood in conjunction with sensemaking. We therefore conceptualize sensemaking as the activity through which reflexive actors interpret and simultaneously constitute social situations, thereby generating organization.

The case under study aims to contribute to organizational sociology debates on crisis, security, and prevention. As an extreme type of organizing, it also serves as an analytical counterpoint: its particular characteristics make visible many aspects that are typically taken for granted in studies of formal organizations or interorganizational networks.

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Prison by Numbers: Measuring Security and Rehabilitation Between Gradual Change and Organizational Resistance

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Public administrations, including prison systems, are increasingly confronted with a widely shared "deficit diagnosis" captured under the label of *bureaucracy criticism*. This critique, rarely questioned in public or political discourse, positions bureaucratic organizations as inefficient, rigid, and in need of reform. As a consequence, prisons, like other public institutions, face significant pressure to innovate and to demonstrate measurable improvements in their operations. One response to this pressure has been the introduction and integration of artificial intelligence systems, algorithms, and digital management tools into organizational structures. These systems possess both "structural" and "structuring" characteristics, which are shaped by existing organizational arrangements, while simultaneously reshaping internal routines, priorities, and interpretations of institutional objectives.
In the case of the Austrian prison administration, digitalization initiatives have been closely tied to the pursuit of organizational goals such as enhancing efficiency, ensuring security, facilitating rehabilitation, and legitimizing the allocation of public resources. These goals can be understood as the organization's own interpretation of external expectations emanating from the political sphere, the public, and administrative reforms associated with New Public Management (NPM). The legal framework for these developments includes the Federal Budget Act (2013), which formalized performance-based steering mechanisms, and the upcoming Freedom of Information Act (2025), which reinforces demands for transparency and accountability. Within this context, prisons increasingly rely on the production and control of data and key performance indicators as forms of legitimate evidence of institutional success.

However, conceptions of what a public administration should be and how it should act vary considerably within its organizational environment. The process of defining objectives and measuring outcomes represents not merely a technical procedure, but an interpretative act that reveals a deeper tension. As Männle and Witt (2023, p. 295) note, administrations fulfill an inherently social and normative function that cannot be adequately captured through performance indicators alone. When prison performance is measured primarily through quantifiable metrics, the social, rehabilitative, and moral dimensions of imprisonment risk being overshadowed by managerial logic. Consequently, efforts to modernize prisons through data-driven reforms produce both organizational restructuring and parallel forms of resistance.

This paper offers an analysis of how "management by objectives" operates in Austrian prisons under these conditions of digitalization and reform. It explores which aspects of organi-

*Speaker

zational restructuring become visible and how resistance emerges among different actor groups in response to interpreted environmental demands. Drawing on a combination of qualitative methods, including artifact analysis of digital management tools and interviews with both managerial and operational staff, the study reconstructs the diverse interpretations and practices surrounding datafication. Preliminary empirical findings indicate that while the formal organization is being reconfigured around data-driven management logics, operational staff partly perform resistance. These tensions are observable in the domains of programs, communication, and personnel (cf. Kühl, 2020).

To uncover the informal structures underlying these dynamics, the analysis also focuses on actor groups and dimensions excluded from formal management tools. This includes exploring how prison officers and middle managers attempt to reconcile the conflicting demands of datafication, rehabilitation, security, and punishment. In line with Garfinkel's (2000, p. 116) observations on informal practices, these actors develop locally situated solutions and workarounds that enable the organization to function despite, or even because of, the limitations of formalized management instruments.

Finally, the paper discusses how digital management tools inscribe particular interpretations of environmental expectations into organizational decision-making processes at multiple levels. Following Liebling's (2005) work on prison performance, the analysis suggests that digitalization may inadvertently intensify monitoring and measurement activities, reinforce data-based control, while failing to enhance the core goals of security and rehabilitation. The study finally wants to explore how digitalization and management by objectives reshape not only the formal structures of public institutions but also their normative foundations and everyday practices.

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Problem and Solution Entrepreneurs: Organizations in a World of Competing Ideas

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How can society allow existential problems-such as the climate crisis-to escalate when demonstrably effective solutions already exist? This "Sociodizee question" (Bourdieu 2000; Nassehi 2024) serves as the starting point for what I will call "solution entrepreneurs". These are organizations that seek to persuade diverse societal actors-here specifically regarding solutions to the climate crisis. Solution entrepreneurs such as *Project Drawdown* do not assume that merely demonstrating solvability is sufficient for implementation. Instead, they attempt to persuade various societal stakeholders-business leaders, investors, philanthropists, technology developers, field professionals, practitioners, civil society leaders, cultural leaders, communities, households and individuals-that (and how) the climate crisis is solvable. However, solution entrepreneurs compete with one another, for instance regarding the question of what role technical solutions should play. While some push for a shift in behaviors and others advocate for an entirely different economic model-different from capitalism-for yet others the solution lies in technical solutions ranging from improved energy consumption monitoring in industrial operations to climate intervention (solar geoengineering).
On the other hand, we have to deal with "problem entrepreneurs". These are characterized either by sowing doubts about the significance of a problem (for the *Center for Renewing America* and the *Heritage Foundation*, the climate issue is non-problematic in this sense), or by directing their efforts toward prioritizing the problem they focus on. Initiatives by *Open AI* and the *Future of Life Institute* offer instructive examples here: efforts are made to convince others to regard the potential development of "AI superintelligence" as the paramount societal challenge. It basically says: "When this problem unfolds, everything collapses, rendering all other existential issues moot." Consequently, we observe a competition of urgency-over attention, resources, funding, and time-among advocates of various problems, each of which is framed as existential. And, crucially, this competition takes place between organizations.

Thus, if one asks why sustainability transitions struggle to gain traction, the competition between solution and problem entrepreneurs would constitute a thesis-like answer to this question. This thesis, however, can itself be questioned: Is the concept of entrepreneurship (Abrutyn et al. 2025) appropriate in this context? Or does it carry too strong an economic bias? Moreover, are we creating an excessive and empirically unmanageable complexity by assuming so many different problem and solution entrepreneurs? As Stichweh (2017: 109) succinctly summarizes: "Society obviously consists of billions of control projects which reciprocally limit their probabilities of success." Seen in this light, neither we as sociological observers could master this

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complexity, nor are these organizational projects in practice likely to "get things done". What prevails societally as a problem or solution can, this perspective holds, systematically only be reconstructed in retrospect, but cannot be accompanied in ongoing processes-such as the sustainability transition.

In contrast, the proposed paper advocates for focusing on the ongoing work of societal transformation and assigning organizations a key role such processes. (Organizational) Sociology neither needs to capitulate to the complexity of society nor oversimplify matters by assuming clear causalities (e.g., "this organization will cause that change").
Instead, the concept introduced leads to questions such as: What image do problem and solution entrepreneurs hold of the society they aim to persuade of their ideas? And consequently: What kind of society do these organizations co-create through their persuasive efforts? Organizations therefore play a special role, as they are precisely the places where work is being done on what society perceives as an urgent problem and as the corresponding solution.

Programmable Accountability and the Semantics of Sustainability

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The transition toward sustainability is increasingly seen not only as an ecological and technological transformation but as a reconfiguration of how responsibility is attached meaning. Organizations like private firms, NGOs, and public bodies, stand at the center of this process. Their actions mediate between political, economic, and broader moral expectations for justice and transparency. Yet they also generate unintended consequences that reproduce inequalities. Against this background, the paper examines how environmental, social, and governance (ESG) reporting functions as a communicative mechanism through which organizations both assume and distribute responsibility within the sustainability transition.
The demand for transparent, comparable, and decision-relevant ESG information has turned corporate reporting into an instrument of societal coordination. Yet overlapping frameworks, competing standards, and shifting political agendas have created a fragmented and contradictory semantic field (Neisig, 2023; Pucker, 2021). This complexity is especially challenging for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which are embedded in supply chains and regional economies but often lack the communicative capacity and institutional support to manage sophisticated sustainability disclosures (Burinskienė & Nalivaikė, 2024; Dörr et al., 2023; Hu et al., 2024). For these organizations, ESG reporting becomes less about compliance and more about translation, internalizing societal expectations into operational codes and decision premises.

The paper conceptualizes this process through Niklas Luhmann's social systems theory (Luhmann, 1980–1995, 1995, 1997, 2012–2013, 2018) and related work on sustainability and communication (e.g. Roth & Valentinov, 2020; Knudsen, 2024; Valentinov, 2014, 2017, 2019). From a systems-theoretical view, organizations are autonomous systems reproducing themselves through decision communication. They respond to societal expectations only through their own operational programmes like profit, efficiency, or legitimacy. This perspective reveals ESG reporting not as a neutral accountability tool but as a semantic interface governing how organizations couple with other function systems such as the economy, politics, science, and law.

Building on research into semantic governance and organizational meaning-making (Neisig, 2021, 2022, 2024), the paper advances the concept of programmable accountability to describe how organizations navigate the semantic complexity of sustainability. Prior studies show that sustainability transitions involve a rearrangement of structural couplings between social systems and their environments (Neisig, 2022) and that management science may help form new "next-era" semantics guiding these transformations (Neisig, 2024). Within this framework, ESG reporting becomes a site where new semantics are operationalized. Reporting frameworks and digital infrastructures act as semantic programmes defining what counts as sustainability, risk, or ma-

*Speaker

teriality and what is rendered visible or excluded from accountability.

ESG reporting thus constitutes a form of semantic governance; a communicative infrastructure that programs the meanings through which sustainability, responsibility, and justice are articulated. Standards such as the EU Taxonomy, the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), and the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) do not simply measure realities; they define what counts as materiality, impact, or value creation. These codifications are performative: they shape how organizations perceive their boundaries and responsibilities. ESG frameworks are therefore not only regulatory systems but also programmes (Luhmann, 2012–2013) that structure inclusion and exclusion within the sustainability discourse. What is recognized as sustainable, just, or responsible depends on the semantics embedded in these programmes.

For SMEs, the implications are significant. While large corporations can engage consultants and specialized departments to manage ESG compliance, SMEs, not mandated to CSRD requirements, must navigate expectations within limited capacities and local contexts. Yet precisely here a new form of responsibility emerges - programmable accountability. This captures the recursive process through which organizations adopt, adapt, and reprogram sustainability semantics to align with their operational logic and societal expectations. Programmable accountability is not fixed compliance but reflexive meaning management, iteratively encoding and decoding societal values within organizational communication.

As earlier Luhmannian analyses suggest (Neisig, 2021, 2025a), sustainability transitions require organizations to co-design semantic reservoirs such as shared vocabularies and interpretive frameworks enabling coordination across polycentric networks. Drawing on cross-border projects supporting SME participation in the digital and green ("Twin") transitions explained by (Diodato et al., 2023; European Commission, 2019, 2022), the paper explores how digital infrastructures, open-access platforms, and AI-based tools mediate this translation process (Amoroso et al., 2022; Philbin et al., 2022; Martínez-Peláez et al., 2023). Building on Rachlitz's (2023) notion of *platform organizing*, these infrastructures can be seen as processes where technology provision, regulation, integration, and orchestration occur simultaneously entailing semantics through which responsibility and ESG are enacted. Like participatory organizations that act as infrastructures of sustainability (Besio, Arnold & Ametowobla, 2022), these digital systems structure not only data flows but also inclusion and influence within sustainability governance. They facilitate data collection and reporting but also act as semantic filters determining what is visible, measurable, and communicable as sustainability. Through algorithms, templates, and automated indicators, digital tools pre-structure accountability semantics, deciding which environmental and social dimensions are included and which remain excluded. For instance, carbon accounting and gender equity metrics may appear in dashboards, while local community well-being or informal labor relations remain outside the measurable frame. Thus, digital ESG infrastructures not only support but also shape organizational responsibility, embedding sustainability semantics into software architectures and communicative routines.

From this perspective, ESG reporting becomes a double-edged phenomenon within the social dimension of sustainability transitions. On one hand, it enables organizations, including SMEs, to participate in discussions about sustainability, justice, and the twin transformation, providing structures for comparison, transparency, and reflexivity, which are conditions necessary for legitimacy and coordination. On the other, it risks reinforcing asymmetries of power and knowledge. When reporting practices privilege metrics suited to large organizations or when sustainability semantics are standardized around Western, technocratic, or growth-oriented worldviews, the result can be an exclusionary process reproducing inequalities between sectors, regions, and social groups. As Neisig (2025b) argues, *regenerative semantics* using nature as a communicative and organizational medium that goes beyond sustainability semantics to also restore what

has been degraded, offer alternative pathways for inclusion but remain marginal in mainstream ESG discourse. Thus, the semantic architecture of ESG reporting becomes a site where social inequalities are represented, reproduced, but potentially also reimagined.

This paradox is intrinsic to organizational communication in functionally differentiated societies. Sustainability transitions involve conflicting programs such as economic profitability, political legitimacy, scientific validity, and moral responsibility, that cannot be harmonized through regulation alone. ESG reporting, in its fragmented and contested form, reflects this multiplicity. Rather than eliminating fragmentation through universal standards, it may be more fruitful to treat ESG reporting as an ongoing process of semantic negotiation; a dynamic interface through which organizations recalibrate accountability toward multiple, often contradictory, societal expectations.

Recognizing ESG reporting as a process of semantic governance highlights the social dimension of sustainability in a new light. Responsibility, inclusion, and justice are not moral imperatives imposed from outside, but communicative achievements reproduced within organizations. The social effects of sustainability practices, whether they reduce or reinforce inequality, depend on how these semantics are interpreted, operationalized, and re-embedded in decision-making. Programmable accountability underscores the importance of reflexivity, contextual sensitivity, and participatory learning in sustainability transitions. It invites organizations, particularly SMEs, to see themselves not merely as implementers of standards but as co-constructors of the semantic infrastructures that define sustainability itself.

In conclusion, debates about ESG standardization and sustainability metrics must expand to include their semantic and social dimensions. Fragmentation and contestation are not signs of regulatory immaturity but expressions of the diversity of societal values sustainability transitions must reconcile. By framing ESG reporting as semantic governance and introducing programmable accountability, this paper contributes to understanding how organizations influence, and are influenced by, the broader transformation toward sustainable and socially just futures. For SMEs, this perspective opens new pathways for participation in the Twin Transition, grounded not in uniform compliance but in reflexive, adaptive, and justice-oriented forms of semantic engagement.

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Reconceptualizing Intersectionality: Diversity and Social Inclusion at the British Broadcasting Corporation

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The management of diversity, equality and inclusion has remained an enduring area of interest and inquiry within organizational settings (Bernstein, 2021; Farndale, Biron, Briscoe & Raghuram, 2015; Köllen, 2019; Oswick & Noon, 2014; Yadav & Lenka, 2020). More recently, there has been an increasing focus on the challenges posed by taking an intersectional perspective on forms of discrimination and social inequality within organizations (Hendricks, Deal, Mills & Helms Mills, 2021; Pullen, Rhodes, McEwen & Liu, 2021; Thatcher, Hymer & Arwine, 2023; Woods, Benschop & van den Brink, 2022).
Drawing upon the seminal work of Crenshaw (1989), 'intersectionality' has been described as "a way of thinking that understands gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, religion and other categories of social difference as interlocking and mutually constitutive at the micro level of individual experience and at the macro level of institutional and societal structures and cultural ideologies" (Castro & Holvino, 2016:329). Castro and Holvino (2016) go onto explain that such intersections can be "understood as relations of power - privilege and disadvantage - that result in complex inequalities, which are more than the analysis of any one category by itself or the mere sum of various categories" (p. 329). The proposed paper seeks to explore the 'interlocking and mutually constitutive' interplay of social differences and the nature of 'complex inequalities' by exploring these issues in relation to a large and prominent UK-based media organization, namely the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC).

The study focuses on a representative group of incumbent frontline news staff employed on BBC television and radio (and also contributing to BBC Online). The sample is comprised of newsreaders, reporters, correspondents, and weather forecasters, based in the UK and abroad (n = 323). This cohort was selected for two main reasons. First, they are all in the 'public eye' as named, outward-facing representatives of the BBC. As such, this offers direct access to visible and overt aspects of diversity and inclusion (e.g. gender representation and the proportion of black journalists/reporters). Second, because the individuals chosen have a public presence it is also possible to draw upon social media, published material, and internet sources to gather information on other less visible and obvious sources of data concerning diversity (e.g. on social class by analysing schooling, university attendance, qualifications, occupation of parents, and so on).

The analysis undertaken has tentatively revealed several interesting findings that will be discussed in greater detail in the full version of the proposed paper. For now, the insights derived

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can be summarized as follows:

- Gender balance remained relatively even and stable across the cohort and over the years (i.e. 49% female representation in total).
- Over the past decade, following the publication of the BBCs "Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2016-2020" (and subsequent 2021-2023 strategy), there has been a significant and substantial increase in the recruitment of black frontline news staff.
- In terms of social class, there has been and continues to be a disproportionate overrepresentation of reporters and correspondents from privileged backgrounds.
- Of the high level of black and ethnic minority appointments since 2016, the overwhelming proportion of appointees have come from privileged backgrounds.

Two significant inferences around intersectionality and representation can be drawn from the analysis. First, with regards to intersectionality, there is a clear and evident interplay between social differences and complex inequalities. The BBC has made substantial progress in addressing the underrepresentation of black people in news reporting. However, in doing so, it has perpetuated the inherent inequities of social class that have plagued the BBC over the years. By predominantly focusing on appointing black middle/upper class staff, to compliment the incumbent white middle class elite, intersectionality starts to play out in an unusual way inasmuch as there is a hierarchy of value in terms of employability at the BBC that places the black middle class at the top, followed by the white middle class, with white and black working class applicants at the bottom. Put simply, social background matters (Friedman & Laurison, 2020). More specifically, within the mix of complex mutually constitutive intersectional factors, class at the BBC seems to continue be a dominant and enduring social category that trumps other areas of social difference (such as race and gender). This challenges the notion that intersectionality is predominantly situationally contingent, and it also raises questions about how differences traditionally associated with disadvantage (e.g. race) can be become a source of competitive advantage when combined with class.

Second, having more black representation in high profile frontline media roles is generally perceived to be a good thing in promoting and advancing a meaningful diversity and inclusion agenda. However, the strategy being pursued by the BBC is not a straightforward and unproblematic one. BBC news broadcasts attract millions of viewers, and one might hope that having black reporters and correspondents would act as a source of identification and encouragement for young black people aspiring to work in the media. However, the extent to which young black working-class viewers are able to meaningfully identify with black news reporters from privileged backgrounds is an interesting question. The nature of TV broadcasting, and to slightly lesser extent radio broadcasting, means that whether consciously, or unconsciously, it is possible for viewers to pick up on signals of privilege (i.e. accent, attire, grammar, vocabulary, posture, gesture, mannerisms, and other non-verbal cues). The 'signals of difference' (i.e. they are not like me) may actually have a detrimental effect upon media career aspirations of young working-class black people. Moreover, if the existing class-based inequalities at the BBC are perpetuated, the actual opportunities that arise for working class applicants, both black and white, are likely to remain limited.

In summary, the paper contributes to our understanding of intersectionality, and it demonstrates how an organization's positive efforts to embrace diversity and inclusion can potentially

have the reverse impact if a nuanced intersectional perspective is not adopted.

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Rethinking the challenge of sustainability: Navigating the Paradox of Money and Gift in public organizations

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Rethinking the challenge of sustainability: Navigating the Paradox of Money and Gift in public organizations
By: Niels Thygesen, Department of Business, Humanistic and Law (BHL), CBS

This paper explores how the pursuit of sustainability in public governance and organizations is shaped by a paradoxical dual programming: one rooted in the monetary economy, and another emerging through the logic of the gift economy. Drawing on systems theory and socio-economic perspectives, the paper argues that while public organizations are traditionally structured around compartmentalized budgets and control and thus service-differentiation and service-group segmentation, an alternative relational logic is gaining ground.

This alternative, the gift economy, organizes value through social relations between multiple actors, reciprocity, and shared purpose. Empirical cases from Danish municipalities, including the island of Samsø, illustrate how sustainability initiatives are grounded in gift-based organizing such as community-led energy transitions, circular resource sharing, and co-owned infrastructures.

The paper introduces the concept of sustainabilising to describe how sustainability, when approached through the gift economy, becomes a generative process. It is not merely about achieving predefined targets, but about cultivating ongoing, reciprocal relationships between people, institutions, and ecosystems. While this shift from 'separation' (mediated by money) to 'relations' (mediated by the gift) resonates with recent developments in public value theory, it has rarely been framed as an internal organizational challenge.

The paper argues that public leaders today must navigate the paradox between transactional and relational governance, and ultimately between two economic medias - money and gift-, calling for a form of second-order leadership capable of holding space for both. Ultimately, the paper contributes to organizational theory and the sociology of sustainability by framing sustainability as a complex demand for paradox navigation and institutional reflexivity.

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Sexism in Silicon Slopes: Religion and Gendered Organizational Structures in the New Economy

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This study investigates the role of religion in perpetuating gender inequality within contemporary workplaces, focusing on Silicon Slopes. Applying gendered organizational theory, I show how religious beliefs sustain discriminatory organizational norms and practices because religion is built into the gendered logic employed by company founders and their employees. Through 94 in-depth interviews and 147 hours of ethnographic fieldwork, I use an innovative social network strategy to examine the impact of Mormon religious beliefs on gender and labor dynamics in Utah's emerging tech space. This study reveals three key insights:
1. Religion shapes educational and professional norms, leading to the structural disenfranchisement of women within organizations, irrespective of women's religious affiliation.

2. Religious teachings continue to influence corporate norms and language, even when divorced from their original source, thereby perpetuating gender biases in the workplace.

3. Despite shifts in religious dedication among company founders, religiously influenced gendered logics persist, impacting organizational dynamics of a growing company with employees from around the world.

These findings underscore the profound and direct impact of religion on women's economic precarity, particularly when they are closely associated with LDS male professional gatekeepers who adhere to gender complementarian beliefs. Furthermore, religious leaders wield significant influence over the global economy through the creation of structuring documents on gender, labor, and family dynamics.

KEYWORDS: Religion, Gender, Workplace, Tech, Gendered Organizational Theory, Mormon, Silicon Slopes, Sexism, Latter-day Saint

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Shaping Socio-Technical Change: How Organizations Influence and Navigate Sustainability Transitions

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Drawing on conceptualizations that highlight the interdependence of larger social transformations and organizational processes, my presentation focuses on the role played by a specific type of actor in the transition of the German energy sector towards more sustainability: **'Verteilnetzbetreiber' or Distribution System Operators(DSOs)**.(1) Focusing on these organizations is essential: recent developments (e.g. the growing share of the renewables in the grid, the expansion of e-mobility, and the decarbonization of industry and the heating sector) have increasingly put pressure on electricity grids and by extension those responsible: the DSOs (dena 2012). This raises the question how DSOs navigate multiple such new and partly conflicting expectations.
Traditionally, DSOs in Germany have been oriented towards external expectations of technical reliability, cost efficiency, and regulatory compliance (such as the provision of equal access to the grid). Their legitimacy was tied to them being able to foster stability and predictability in a highly regulated market environment. Recent efforts to initiate transitions towards more sustainability have disrupted this equilibrium. New expectations originate from multiple sources: policymakers demand faster integration of renewables and contributions to climate neutrality; technology providers and entrepreneurs advocate for digitalized, flexible, and data-driven grid solutions; what is more, a highly diverse set of stakeholders at multiple levels (municipalities, industries, e-mobility projects, energy storage providers) form an increasing demand for grid access. These overlapping and sometimes conflicting expectations have awoken DSOs from their quasi-dormant state and force them to reconsider established organizational routines and ways of making decisions. For example, DSOs are increasingly expected to show commitment to the energy transition by implementing technical innovations in their grids while also having to continue their reliance on established technologies to guarantee long-term grid stability and provide non-discriminatory, cost-efficient, and reliable services.

Our understanding of how DSOs navigate these challenges in the context of larger transformations has thus far remained limited. In my study I use the concepts *re-specification* and *re-combination* by Besio and Meyer 2018, 2022) to analyze the strategies and practices applied by DSOs to modernize grids under these difficult circumstances. According to this view, modern organizations do not resemble 'cultural dopes' - passive agents of regulations and social norms – but are actually endowed with an autonomy that allows them to selectively observe their environment, to "re-specify" abstract societal expectations and re-combine various expectations internally. From this perspective, we can expect that DSOs try to proactively *re-combin*e legal,

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technological, and economic expectations in order to address current challenges.

The empirical basis of the presentation is a qualitative study on DSOs in Germany that draws on documents, semi-structured interviews with managers, engineers, and regulators, and secondary analyses of pilot projects in grid modernization. Examples of organizational recombinations include mutually beneficial collaborations with universities and technology providers, as well as unconventional interpretations of existing legislation that enable DSOs to accommodate innovative and even experimental projects within the current legal framework governing the refinancing of investments.

Ultimately, my study suggests that DSOs act as both *enabler* and *bottleneck* in decentralized approaches to energy transition. This has two important implications: first, a closer look reveals that even the most "rigid" of organizations such as DSOs, deeply constrained by technological path-dependencies and regulatory frameworks, can in fact have agency (s. dazu auch Skripchenko et al. 2023); second, while analyses of sustainability transitions often gravitate towards a macrosociology view and emphasize technological challenges, organizations, as meso-level actors, are just as much important to these transformations and must therefore be accounted for.

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(1) In this presentation, I focus on DSOs responsible for electricity distribution (as opposed to gas or other networks).

Structural and Institutional Factors in Work Transformation within Organizations Using Artificial Intelligence

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In Japan, a boom in the social implementation of generative AI (Artificial Intelligence) occurred in the spring of 2023. Initially, it was hailed as a magic wand, while conversely, threats like humans becoming unnecessary in the workplace were also widely discussed in the media. Even now, new algorithms and applications in the workplace continue to emerge rapidly. People are overwhelmed by this accelerated technological innovation, where information from just six months or a year ago can already feel outdated. Even if AI enters our lives as a black box, people are likely to gladly embrace its convenience and ease of use. However, AI developers are facing situations where they cannot explain the logic behind the proposals generated by AI, leading to extensive discussions about social responsibility in societal implementation (Arrieta et al. 2020; Chang et al. 2024). The introduction of automation technology impacts many workplaces, sparking debates about worker unemployment (Frey and Osborne 2017) and arguments that, rather than focusing on occupations, breaking jobs down into tasks-where AI's impact is considered minimal-could mitigate effects (Arntz et al. 2016), and the theory of employment polarization driven by AI and automation replacing routine computer-based jobs while increasing demand for both high-skilled professionals and manual laborers (Autor and Dorn 2013). In contrast, Japan faces severe labor shortages. Regular employees are less likely to lose their jobs; when AI reduces workload, workers are often redeployed to other labor-short areas, not making mass layoffs like those seen in the US uncommon. However, job reductions are observed among non-regular employees and freelancers, indicating that employment status and AI impact are beginning to be observed (Fujimoto 2023, 2024; Fujimoto, Ikeda, and Guo 2025).

This study conducted interviews focusing on social phenomena occurring during the transitional phase of new technology adoption-such as motivations, applications, changes in work, and challenges-to capture the impact of AI introduction and development on workplaces since since 2021, prior to the generative AI boom. The data used in this presentation comes from our team's portion of the Japan Group survey within the OECD's Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI) Future of Work (FoW) initiative. Three patterns of AI usage emerged: compensating for "labor shortages," pursuing "efficiency," and "social homogenization" (Fujimoto 2025). Japan is facing a serious labor shortage, and many organizations are actively introducing automation technology to compensate for the lack of workers. However, in the use cases of AI, we see not only labor shortages but also "social isomorphism." The social isomorphism in this analysis uses the concept of institutional isomorphism by DiMaggio and Powell, referring to one phenomenon of isomorphism enforced by institutions and another of bandwagon-effect-like mimetic isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). This study analyzes cases of the impact of

*Speaker

social isomorphism, in addition to labor shortages and economic efficiency, based on surveys of AI usage by several Japanese local governments and the national government (2022 and 2023 surveys) and a case study of the relationship between large companies and subcontractors in the translation industry (2023 survey).

Analysis of these cases reveals that while automation technologies like mechanical automation, IoT, and algorithms have been used previously, the strong government encouragement for AI adoption has led to an increase in organizations exploring AI usage. Particularly among local governments, some were exploring AI usage even for non-essential purposes, or where AI adoption itself became the goal, with organizations searching for potential applications. Behind this lies a proactive attitude: aligning with government recommendations to avoid disadvantageous budget allocations for their own organizations in the following fiscal year. Furthermore, incentive programs like subsidies for AI adoption in information-scarce rural areas and micro-enterprises have been established, with the government actively working to ensure AI reaches the grassroots level. Additionally, in the private sector, large corporations have demanded lower pricing and faster delivery of results through AI when outsourcing work to small and medium-sized enterprises. Structural and institutional factors driving AI adoption include not only the necessity for organizations to use AI, but also strong recommendations from higher-level organizations. Examples were also observed where organizations felt compelled to use AI due to pressure from above, such as needing to meet client demands. Therefore, AI adoption is driven not only by necessities like halting industrial decline or economic efficiency goals, but also by structural elements like the passive role of lower-level organizations responding to requests from above, and institutional elements like recommendation systems.

The Interaction Order of Organisational Order

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In this presentation we ask the question if dominant strands of organizational sociology today are too concerned with structures rather than practices. Important contributions, such as Barley and Kunda's (2001)suggestion of "bringing work back in", has had impact a little more than 20 years ago, but we wonder if some of their suggestions has lost their popularity. We promote in our paper the relevance of micro-sociological perspectives, with emphasis on Erving Goffman's concept of the *interaction order* (1983), Randall Collins' *interaction ritual chains* (2004) and Harold Garfinkel's concepts on *artfulness* and *accountability* (1967) to analyse the situated, embodied, and interactional practices through which institutions are enacted and experienced. Some "movements" within organizational sociology, such as *Workplace studies* (cf. Luff et al., 2000) and studies of *communities of practice* (for instance Hutchins, 1995; Lave & Wenger, 1991), have emphasized detailed analyses of performances, disruptions and how practices are negotiated between relevant actors. Many of these studies appeared in the dawn of a "practical turn" as a critique of the over-rationalized view within organization studies, perhaps triggered by some important studies, such as the one of Lucy Suchman (1987), who was critical of the exaggerated emphasis on planning. Although such studies were taken into consideration by many, perhaps they never represented a core of organisational sociology. In any case, we ask in our paper the question if the sociology of organization has lost (or forgotten) some important insight from these core micro-sociological (and anthropological) inputs, in favour of systems theory and emphasis on structure, management, and formal mechanisms. Ultimately, we suggest a renewed dialogue between organizational theory and microsociology, arguing that institutions are not only systems of rules and resources, but also arenas of interactional labour, emotional management, and symbolic negotiation.

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The Paris 2024 Olympics: An Arena for Institutional Actors and Civil Society Organizations

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Social inequalities, while permeating most contemporary societies, are exacerbated in the context of sporting mega-events, most notably the Olympic and Paralympic Games. This is true regardless of the fact that they are officially framed as being-environmentally, economically and socially-sustainable events which foster opportunities for urban regeneration and social cohesion. This paper examines the Paris 2024 Olympics to analyze how organizational logics associated with mega-events can reproduce, mask, or challenge inequality and how non-institutional actors intervene in these organizational dynamics. Empirically, I focus on Le Revers de la Médaille (RdM)-an inter-organizational activist collective-which mobilized around the notion of Olympic "social cleansing" to contest the displacement, invisibilization, and marginalization of vulnerable populations during the Games. Attention is paid to the social planning of the Paris 2024 Olympics, identifying both the actors responsible for it and the measures implemented in the context of the Games. Then, I investigate the effect of mega-events on advocacy strategies carried out by non-institutional actors on matters of social inequalities and spatial exclusion. Building on a relational approach, particular focus is placed on the interdependence of the actors involved and-more interestingly-on shifts in the balance of power engendered by the urgency-driven agenda of the Games.
I argue that-both institutional and non-institutional-organizations understand the Olympics as a political window of opportunity. However, media attention on the political and social dimensions of the mega-event, alongside strict time constraints, privilege a shift in the balance of forces in favor of non-institutional actors. This was especially true in the case of RdM for an additional reason: by targeting not the Games per se, but the difficult materialization of a positive "social legacy", they were able to credibly challenge institutional legacies and alter organizational equilibria. Targeted framing, coupled with relational homophily-shared personal and educational backgrounds between RdM members and their institutional interlocutors-facilitated smoother communication and understanding, reduced barriers and helped stabilize inequality on the organizational agenda. However, it is important to stress that this was but a contingent result: once the urgency of the mega-event faded, so did the bargaining power of RdM.

The study relies on a qualitative, multi-method design. I conducted six months (June-December 2024) of ethnographic fieldwork in Paris attending RdM demonstrations and volunteering with one of the humanitarian associations that are members of the collective. Then, I complemented observational data with nine in-depth semi-structured interviews (in three interviews, two interlocutors participated) with members of RdM and institutional actors. Additionally, I analyzed

*Speaker

through process tracing internal documents, institutional reports, and meeting minutes, with particular attention to the lexical choices actors made when referring to one another and to points of contention. This design allowed me to map interdependency links among actors and to trace contingent shifts in power balances associated with RdM's advocacy. It also showed how RdM renegotiated with institutional interlocutors the meaning of "social legacy," reframing it to advance its claims.

This research demonstrates how diversity- and inclusion-related claims are kept on-or removed from-organizational agendas, highlighting the interplay between change and resistance to change under exogenous pressures exercised by factors such as hosting the Olympics and Paralympic Games. Substantively, the analysis suggests that organizational change during mega-events is possible but precarious and most often contingent: windows of access open through frame-targeting and relational alignment that translate claims into organizationally legible demands. The study outlines a portable template-combining ethnography, in-depth interviews and process tracing-to compare organizational responses to inequality claims across national contexts and organizational types. While based on a single case, the mechanisms identified-targeted framing, homophily-based access, agenda maintenance under pressure-travel to settings where organizations publicly commit to inclusion, but operate under conflicting logics and diverging expectations.

The leader and the already mobilized citizens: Three positions (plus a fourth alternative) on leadership and mobilization

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In the literature on co-creation and also in the broader literature on citizens mobilization, leadership has been a topic of interest (Tortzen, 2017; della Porta 2016). Not surprisingly, as it seems pivotal to processes of change that someone takes the lead. But who should conduct the leadership and how?
This paper takes evidence from a broader European network on local mobilization into social sustainability, green development and democracy from below (https://www.interregnorthsea.eu/speak-up). The network, in which the author has taken part, has produced a number of hands on studies on leading citizens participation. The empirical studies show that participation opens to intriguing questions for the leading organizations engaged with citizens. The organizations are met with opposing expectations. On the one hand, the organizations are expected to contribute to the change processes through acts of leadership. On the other hand, the organizations are expected to stay away so that development grows out of the local citizen groups themselves.

So, take a lead! But who should do the mobilization? The experiences from the studies in the European network are that municipalities are important part takers and have a leading role in mobilizing citizens, but often, however, the municipalities do not deal with their leading role – at least not as a strategic issue on its own. Perhaps because, placed in an impossible position, the municipalities respond with non-decisioning on a strategic level and instead stick to the actual facilitative work on ground level. The municipalities must facilitate processes that they must also keep their fingers crossed for, since the processes should preferably be as self-driving as possible. The municipal hope is that their street level workers manage co-creative spirits, and that the citizens do co-creative engagements without causing too much trouble.

In other words, the municipality must take leading responsibility for mobilizing citizens, as if the citizens were already mobilized. When the municipality makes itself available, it requires an already mobilized citizenship to engage with.

Confronted with the challenges of facilitating green mobilization in a rural district of Denmark, a municipality has developed its own understanding of leadership into co-creation.

In the paper, the municipal experiences are analyzed. The paper discusses three established positions in the literature on mobilization. The positions are, respectively, the community or-

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ganizing perspective (Ganz, 2010); the resource mobilization perspective (Russel, 2022; Russel & McKnight, 2022) and collective impact (Kania & Kramer, 2011; 2013).

All three perspectives have formulated leadership as a central category (and do it quite differently), but none of the three positions have offered sufficient space for understanding the municipality as an political-strategic agent of change. And even though the three positions do deal with leadership as part of mobilizing, they do not sufficiently recognize the processual aspects of doing mobilization. Therefore, the paper argues for a fourth position to mobilization informed from systemic theory. The article presents facilitated mobilization as a fourth perspective with a focus on the municipality's role as a third order facilitating party (La Cour & Højlund, 2011; 2013).

In the paper, facilitation of facilitation is discussed as important competencies among the professionals involved. Citizens should, preferably, be willing and able to do things themselves. But at the same time, the municipality's people are important contributors, as they help to keep the processes going and ensure that the involved parties' experiences become meaningful and useful for changes in the local contexts. A well-functioning and at the same time socially just local community cannot be created from the outside, but must arise from within. But will need to be kick-started from time to time. This is leadership with a "defibrillator" or jump-starter. The local is helped to generate energy, so to speak, through people engaged in shared learning processes. In the best cases, such processes will prove to be both exploratory, critical and reflective, and at the same time, an inner motivation or an inner fire must be fanned, which is already smouldering in, for example, the local enthusiasts, the civil society-based voluntary organizations and the active environments where the local community lives and resides (Højlund, 2025).

The author presents in dept studies of co-creation processes in relation to mobilization of citizens in two rural village clusters. The studies give evidence that it takes persistent relational work to establish and support a well-functioning, socially inclusive local community, it requires both a pluralistic value orientation and a high degree of process pragmatism, so that ongoing learning can contribute to developing the structures (Højlund, 2025). This is the article's normative argument: A group of relevant actors gathered around a common problem and a municipality processing in and out of a concurrent facilitation.

Finally, the article discusses possible strategies for how local ownership and a broad local anchoring of the co-creative processes can be established.

Key words: Leadership, co-creation, local community development, mobilization, community-based, strength/resource-based approach, collective Impact, municipality

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The myth of algorithmic rationality. Rationalizing decision-making through digital information systems

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The myth of algorithmic rationality.
Rationalizing decision-making through digital information systems
Anne K. Krüger and Ingmar Mundt

Digital information systems continue to diffuse into ever more social contexts. They are adopted to inform human resource management (Kellogg et al. 2020), to direct police work (Brayne 2020; Heimstädt & Egbert 2025), to produce insurance scorings (Cevolini & Esposito 2020), to analyze financial markets (Borch & Hee Min 2022), or to support medical treatment in hospitals (Carboni et al. 2025; Scarbrough et al. 2025). These digital information systems are no longer simply implemented to structure and standardize data collection and work processes. They are moreover set up to provide new kinds of information for calculating decisions and rationalizing decision-making.

In organization studies rational decision-making has been a recurring topic from the very start. Max Weber addressed bureaucratic administration as the most rational form of authority built on clearly defined rules and standards, fixed hierarchies, transparent documentation, and expert knowledge (Weber 1978), which he considered to be fundamental for improving the calculability of organizational decision-making processes and thus as crucial for the development of democracy as well as capitalism. Following administration and organization scholars referred to Weber's idealtype of bureaucratic administration as rational organizing. However, they put a significant question mark behind the assumption of organizations as behaving rationally. With their concept of "bounded rationality", for instance, James March and Herbert Simon, set clear theoretical boundaries to the possibility of an empirically existent "objective rationality" (March & Simon 1958). James March and colleagues continued this research with their "garbage can model" (Cohen et al. 1972), but also other researchers such as Nils Brunsson with his concept of "action rationality" (Brunsson 1985) or Karl Weick with his focus on "sense-making" (Weick 1995) emphasized that decisions do not depend on a given relationship between particular means and ends, which allows for calculating rational decisions most effectively. Instead, they all have highlighted that already the definition of means and ends depends on social dynamics and the particular context or the collectively defined situation in which decision-making takes place. That rational decision-making is rather a collectively shared myth than organizational reality

*Speaker

also constitutes a cornerstone of the sociological new institutionalism. From its very start, it has been demonstrated that although organizations are perceived as acting rationally (Zucker 1977), they are rather seeking legitimacy from their environment than being oriented towards clearly defined means-ends relations in making organizational decisions (Meyer & Rowan 1977). Here, the perception of rationally acting organizations builds on the 'strategic actor' as a collectively shared myth pervading Western societies (Meyer & Jepperson 2000).

However, as digital information systems continue to diffuse into constantly more contexts, the question of rationality in organizational decision-making processes emerges again, albeit in a new form. While Weber understood rationality in terms of decision-making through transparent rules and documentation and thus as based on the calculability of its process, exercised by trained experts, which altogether allow the "users" of bureaucratic structures to expect certain outcomes, with the advent of digital information systems decision-making processes cannot be thought of as 'rational' in Weber's terms any longer. Rather, in the abundant literature on such systems (see above), we find ample evidence that neither are the rules and standards within digital information systems in decision-making processes made transparent nor is human expertise any longer the only source to produce and interpret information and calculate decisions. Furthermore, we do not only find a constant growth in the development and adoption of such systems, but also see an ongoing diffusion into areas where decision-making had been reserved before exclusively to human expertise. The rationalization of calculating decisions through digital information systems has thus turned into a 'rationalized myth' (Meyer and Rowan 1977) itself which diffuses also towards areas which so far were less affected by standardized decision-making due to a lack of clear-cut means-ends relations and of the idea of calculability as such.

In this presentation, we therefore investigate the institutionalization of this "algorithmic rationality" of decision-making through digital information systems. We ask how this idea of algorithmic calculation of information for decision-making diffuses into constantly more contexts. Yet, instead of solely focusing on the actions and sense-making of developers and users, we expand the perspective towards the role of technology itself in this institutionalization process. Building on Orlikowski and Scott's (2023) idea of a less visible but even more generative "digital undertow" that influences "institutional displacement" and its references to the 'material turn' by actor-network theory and new materialism literature, we argue that in particular the 'intra-action' (Barad 2003) between technology and their developers needs to be taken into account for better understanding technology's role in institutionalization processes. We thus argue for a perspective that takes the effects of the entanglement of technical capabilities and human sense-making seriously to better understand the institutionalization of the "algorithmic rationality" of digital information systems.

For doing so, we examine two distinct cases, namely research governance and humanitarian crisis intervention, based on qualitative interviews and ethnographic observation. The first case study deals with the development of research information systems which are intended to rationalize decision-making in research governance through calculating 'research performance' for job promotion, resource allocation, and research collaboration. The second case study investigates the development of digital information systems for humanitarian crisis intervention which are designed to rationalize decision-making through calculating future risks and preventive actions. These two cases vary in their context and also type of information system. Nonetheless, in both cases, digital information systems are designed to calculate decisions and to rationalize decision-making. They are applied for enabling decisions in the present about actions to be taken in the future based on data from the past.

In the presentation, we thus aim to demonstrate based on a comparison of these two cases how a collectively shared myth of 'algorithmic rationality' has become institutionalized with the

development of digital information systems, which emerges from the entanglement of technical capabilities and how developers of digital information systems make sense of them. We thus highlight that these systems have themselves a generative effect on how 'algorithmic rationality' is becoming institutionalized across diverse domains.

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Think Tanks as "Epistemic Influencing Organizations" in the German Energy Transition

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The German *Energiewende* represents a complex and often contested sustainability transformation. It is not merely a technical or economic endeavor but a deeply social and political process, shaped by competing visions of the future, divergent interests, and contested expertise (Laux 2021). Amid this complexity, think tanks have emerged as pivotal yet understudied actors. While political observers and scientists (Rich 2004; Abelson 2002, Plehwe 2021) frequently acknowledge their influence, especially in the role of epistemic intermediaries, systematic research on *how think tanks shape the Energiewende as specific organizations*-and what organizational strategies enable them to do so-remains scarce (see e.g. Laux 2019, Medvetz 2012a, 2012b, 2015). This presentation offers first insights from the ongoing DFG-project "Masterminds of a realizable energy transition? Think Tanks Strategies of Epistemic Influencing as Field Activities" and addresses this gap by investigating the epistemic influence strategies of think tanks as field actors in the German energy transition, asking: *What organizational practices, structures, and external relationships allow think tanks to shape societal perceptions of a feasible energy transition, and where do the limits of their influence lie?*

The Role of Think Tanks in Shaping Sociotechnical Futures

Think tanks are often described as "idea factories" or "policy entrepreneurs," but their role in the *Energiewende* extends beyond traditional lobbying or advocacy. Unlike interest groups or industry associations, which primarily represent specific stakeholders and their concrete interests, think tanks operate as hybrid organizations that bridge science, media, politics, and civil society (Medvetz 2012a, 2012b). They do so by producing and disseminating expertise, crafting narratives about feasible futures, legitimizing their work through a discourse of scientific soundness and neutrality, and orchestrating coalitions among diverse actors-from policymakers and corporations to environmental NGOs and social movements (Laux 2019, 2021; Plehwe 2021). Their influence is not merely direct (e.g., via advising governments or campaigning) but also indirect, shaping how other field actors-such as regulatory agencies, courts, grassroots initiatives, or civil society-perceive and act upon the challenges of the energy transition.

The *Energiewende* provides a critical case for studying think tanks because it is characterized by heightened uncertainty, competing path dependencies, and contested visions of sustainability (Geels et al. 2017; Köhrsen & Huber 2021). Recent events-such as the gas shortages triggered by

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the war against Ukraine, the German Constitutional Court's 2021 ruling on climate protection, and the European Green Deal-have further intensified debates about the pace, direction, and feasibility of the transition. Think tanks have seized upon these moments of crisis to advance their agendas, advocating for both a multiplicity of goals (e.g., accelerated renewable expansion, a return to coal and/or nuclear power, or skepticism about the need for a transition at all) and methods (both scientific and political, e.g., more market-based or more state-based solutions). Yet, despite their prominence and diversity, we lack a systematic understanding of *how* think tanks construct and deploy expertise to influence such a heterogeneous and often contested field *via their distinct organizational form*.

By treating think tanks as *reflexive organizations* (Ortmann et al. 2023; Windeler and Jungmann 2024) that continuously adapt their structures and recombine societal expectations (Besio and Meyer 2022) with field-wide patterns of cooperation and conflict (see Laux 2019; Medvetz 2015) to influence fields, this project contributes to a practice-theoretical understanding of how such hybrid organizations operate in transformative issue-based fields (Hoffman 1999; Windeler and Jungmann 2023) like the Energiewende (Jungmann et al. 2026).

Hypotheses and Dimensions of Influence

To address this question, the presentation focuses on preliminary findings on five interrelated dimensions and carves out first hypotheses concerning patterns of epistemic influence:

- **Expertise as a Tool for Coalition-Building:** Think tanks leverage moments of heightened uncertainty-such as supply crises or regulatory shifts-to produce scientifically robust and seemingly neutral expertise while simultaneously addressing the interests of diverse field actors. By framing their proposals as both technically sound and politically viable, they seek to build coalitions across otherwise fragmented groups (e.g., industry representatives, environmentalists, policymakers).
- **Selective Emphasis and Epistemic Governance:** Think tanks do not merely present facts; they strategically emphasize certain aspects of complex issues while downplaying others to showcase a unique standpoint and take a distinct position vis-à-vis other think tanks and other actors in a distinct subfield of the energy transition concerned with the production of expertise.
- **Organizational Hybridity and Competence:** Think tanks distinguish themselves from traditional lobbying organizations by cultivating a hybrid identity that combines scientific rigor and neutrality with political engagement. Medvetz (2012a) argues that think tanks' hybridity-spanning academic, media, political, and economic spheres-grants them unique leverage in policy debates, and we aim to unravel how they can only do so via distinct organizational practices of assembling competencies.
- **Networked Influence and Personnel Strategies:** Think tanks' ability to shape the *Energiewende* depends on their embeddedness in networks that span politics, industry, civil society, and academia. By reflexively selecting personnel with ties to key organizations, they can not only mobilize resources, access decision-makers, and amplify their messages (Plehwe 2021; Götze & Joeres 2020), but also enable project cooperation and stable learning via interpersonal networks (similarly to insights on project ecologies and networks in other contexts).
- **Positioning and Exclusion in Heterogeneous Fields:** Think tanks not only promote their own visions but also actively position themselves *against* competing experts and

organizations (see e.g. Laux 2019, 2021). These positioning strategies-whether through confrontation or subtle exclusion-are critical to understanding how think tanks navigate contested fields. At the same time, they need to be seen as a highly risky, strategic means of coalition building and cooperation with others, as political and epistemic orientations shift rather quickly. Stable strategic positioning is especially possible for those think tanks with a rather long-term funding, only loosely connected or separate from government funding. In effect, think tanks seem to be split into two classes concerning this structural element.

To test and refine these dimensions and hypotheses, the project employs a comparative case study design (Yin 2009) focusing on five think tank types with divergent orientations (ecological movement roots, social-ecological modernization, market-liberal, philanthropic and climate-change skepticism). This "most-different-cases" approach allows for identifying common patterns in how think tanks operate, despite their ideological differences (Kelle & Kluge 2010). Data collection is ongoing and combines semi-structured interviews, quantitative network analysis, document analysis, participant observation and group discussion.

Conclusion

Research on the *Energiewende* has largely focused on industry incumbents, social movements, or state actors (e.g., Geels et al. 2017; Köhrsen & Huber 2021). Think tanks, however, play a unique role as *epistemic intermediaries*-translating scientific knowledge into political narratives and vice versa, and towards realistic business models. Through analyzing their strategies, this project sheds light on how contested futures are constructed and legitimized in socioecological, sustainable transitions. The *Energiewende* is at a crossroads. The war in Ukraine, climate litigation, and technological breakthroughs have created both opportunities and risks for accelerating the transition. In this context, think tanks are not passive observers but active *shapers* of what is deemed possible, desirable, or necessary. By uncovering their strategies, this project provides critical insights into how societal transformations are negotiated-and by whom. It also offers a cautionary tale about the role of unelected experts in democratic decision-making, particularly in fields as consequential as energy policy. As Germany and other nations grapple with the challenges of decarbonization, understanding the mechanisms of epistemic influence is key for understanding both pathways of future societies to come and how organizational types beyond the large formal-hierarchical administration or corporation shape them (Arnold et al. 2025; Bartley et al. 2019), e.g., via orchestrating organizational fields (see Barley 2010).

Uncertain Knowledge, Precarious Agency and the Social Organisation of Women Self-Driven Transit Migrants in Morocco

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Introduction

This paper explores women's knowledge, agency and social organisation in their migration experience passing through a North-African transit country on their way to Europe. Based on qualitative interviews with women migrants temporarily residing in Morocco, we explore their knowledge, trust and decision-making ability before migration, en route and once they come to a transit country. We situate the women's experience within a broader economy of global mobility (Glick Schiller 2015), where we problematize the Eurocentric notion that migrants are subjects in need of 'rescue or 'integration' (Mohanty 2003; Verges 2019).

Building on the critical approaches to transit migration (Collyer 2007; Collyer, Düvell & de Haas 2012) and critique of the agency/structure divide (Squire 2016), we conceptualize migrant women's agency as emerging within, rather than outside, constraint. Specifically, we focus on self-driven women migrants and observe their experiences as complex reality structured by their (partial) knowledge and mediated options in a context of profound inequality. As such, our research question is the following: *How do undocumented women engaged in self-driven transit migration exercise agency while confronting irregularized legal statuses and the absence of institutional care, and how do they collectively organize social life through gaining reliable knowledge, informal networks, care practices, and solidarity mechanisms?*

Methodology

This study takes place in Morocco. The country functions as a major transit territory for migrants originating from West Africa, the Sahel, and increasingly Sudan and South Sudan. Its geographical position near Europe, combined with relative political stability and economic opportunities, makes it a strategic hub for transit migration. Most women arrive legally-either with a visa or with travel documents that allow visa-free entry depending on their country of origin. After three months-the maximum stay duration allowed without a residence permit-their presence shifts into an irregular status, marking the beginning of a precarious phase in their migration trajectory.

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The study is based on prolonged ethnographic immersion with groups of migrant women. Data collection included participant observation in spaces of migration service-delivery settings, field notes, and informal and semi-structured discussions, enabling an in-depth understanding of migrants' practices, meanings, and social dynamics.

Preliminary findings

Women begin gathering knowledge and building networks before migration, and the information they hold derive not from verified channels, but from friends, neighbours or acquaintances who 'heard from someone' already in Europe. The motivations of women to migrate are various and have to do with their country of origins and their personal circumstances: for some this means leaving war zones or poverty, pursuing better living conditions and stability. For others, it means following a relative with aspirations of self-development or for protection of dependants. Across several cases observed and discussed, it appeared that some women could, in principle, have pursued viable livelihood projects in their home countries, given existing social systems, infrastructures, and available forms of support. Nonetheless, they opted for migration, driven by expectations that life abroad-despite hardship-would lead to a more fulfilling future. Europe, in particular, is imagined as a space where any effort, however modest, would translate into success.

Unlike men, self- driven migrant women are more likely to travel by plane as the journey-on-foot is more dangerous. However, this comparatively safer journey requires significant financial contribution that is usually draining their resources. In a transit country, therefore, they seek for opportunities to earn money before continuing their journey – and local or international humanitarian services often provide them with the necessary knowledge. Building on the Sahraoui & Tyszler's (2021) call for research into the gendered implications of humanitarian governance at borders, our study similarly draws on interviews and participant observation with a religious humanitarian organization in Morocco. By situating women's experiences within this humanitarian spaces, we examine how gendered assumptions shape both women's own practices and decisions, as well as the provision of care in navigating the constraints of transit life.

Discussion

Morocco, as a transit country, presents a middle point in women's journey: they have already migrated from their home countries and intend to stop before heading off to Europe. Here they experience simultaneous 'displacement and embeddedness', a notion explored by Drotbohm and Winters's (2021) on their nowadays more and more 'fragmented' journey due to the difficulties in documented migration (Collyer 2007). This is where they seek help from humanitarian organisations, where they can access food, clothing, receive counselling and most importantly, gain additional knowledge on how to get access to healthcare facilities and programmes to develop skills and access the job market.

Once in the transit country, women face a knowledge gap: the promises made by intermediaries, such as better opportunities and quick passage to Europe, dissolve into housing problems, bureaucratic barriers, restricted mobility and discrimination and systemic exclusion. They sometimes turn to informal or illegal networks for assistance with paperwork and travel arrangements, only to discover these networks operate within unreliable and exploitative systems. Here knowledge itself becomes a source of inequality, where women's trust and lack of verifiable knowledge are traded as commodities.

Within this unequal and exploitative terrain, women's agency is contested. Traditional notions of agency as resistance do not apply – however, they are not entirely stripped of agency, but must make do with the knowledge hey gain and informal networks they form. Their agency

unfolds through the micro-practices and decisions in their day-to-day life, such as negotiating short-term work in informal economies like nanny services, cooking, sewing etc. and taking care of children and their families they brought with them or left in their home country. Often employed as providers of care or domestic services and especially for migrant women, domestic work is frequently the entry point into the labour market – an entry that researchers have identified as deeply gendered (van Hooren, Apitzsch & Ledoux 2018, Sahraoui & Tyszler 2021), but which is nevertheless, one of the few accessible livelihoods for them.

In this context, informal social networks emerge as vital infrastructures of support. Connections formed in shelters, service points, shared accommodations, and informal gathering spaces develop into systems of mutual assistance that depend also on newly available technologies (Collyer 2007). Through these networks, women exchange information, temporary shelter, care, and modest financial help. These relational systems, built on trust and shared precarity, mitigate the absence of institutional safeguards and contribute to the construction of a sense of belonging in transit. They represent adaptive forms of collective organization that enable women to navigate insecurity while maintaining hope for anticipated futures.

Conclusion

In this paper, we explore how women make sense of contradictory information by drawing on their competence and informal networks. We therefore conceptualise agency not as a predefined variable, but as stemming from women's own vocabularies of endurance and their capacity to navigate systemic exclusionary practices. Additionally, we aim to enhance understanding of the organisation of informal migrants by documenting how undocumented women organise socially to function as informal welfare systems, support networks and mechanisms of collective survival. Finally, we highlight some challenges for future research in transit migration and the geographies of mobility, with a focus on the intersection of gender, knowledge, and agency in global mobility regimes.

Understanding the Backlash against Diversity: Gendered Organization and Nerd Masculinity in the Gaming Industry

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The IT and high-tech industries, particularly the gaming industry, represent an ambivalent field: On the one hand, the gaming industry is seen as being young, dynamic, and creative. It is also committed to diversity and distinguishes itself deliberately from traditional work sectors (Saeed/Baloch/Riaz 2022). This self-perception conveys an image of openness and innovation. On the other hand, recurring sexism scandals such as Gamergate and #MeToo cases reveal a darker side: women and girls are sexualized and harassed, both as players and as developers (Bailey/Miyata/Yoshida 2019; Drummond/Salgado/Viterbo 2021). These cases demonstrate that, despite the industry's progressive self-perception, male-dominated networks and androcentric work cultures remain firmly established. At the same time, critical debates have emerged concerning the representation of women in games, which often depict them in stereotypical or sexualized ways (Tompkins/Martins 2021).
Although sexism in gaming communities has been relatively well researched, the everyday working practices and organizational structures of gaming companies have received comparatively little attention (see also Foust 2023; Bergstrom 2021; Crandall/Brown/McMahon 2021). Against this background, we examine the gendering of work and organization within the gaming industry, with a focus on androcentrism and masculinity at structural, cultural, social and individual levels of the organization. In doing so, we extend existing research on nerd masculinity", which has so far been situated mainly in the context of online communities and gamer cultures, by introducing an organizational-sociological perspective on work cultures within the gaming industry. Analytically, we draw on feminist organization studies, particularly Acker's (1990) concept of the gendered organization" and inequality regimes" (Acker 2006; Bates 2021), as well as more recent research on bro culture" in Silicon Valley (Carrigan 2024). These studies identify a "habitus of misogyny" (Foust 2023), which we argue is perpetuated and reinforced by the organization of work itself (see also Bergstrom 2022).

Empirically, the presentation is based on organizational case studies conducted in German game studios as part of the DFG-funded project "The Regime of Emotions as Strategy? An Analysis of Economic Subfields – Emotions, Emotional Capital, and Gender in the Late-Modern World of Work" (2020–2024). The findings reveal that the work culture is publicly presented as diverse

*Speaker

and "family-like," reflecting a form of neo-communitarianism. Shared gaming sessions, celebrations, and informal networks convey an image of cohesion and belonging. However, behind the scenes, significant inequalities become apparent: the culture is deeply homosocial and androcentric. This shows, for example, in excessive working hours ('crunch', Cote/Harris, 2021) and the idealisation of 'family-like' cohesion, as well as in the mechanisms of exclusion towards women within male support networks and in sexist stereotypes towards women in the workplace. At the same time, the sector is under ongoing economic and public pressure to diversify its staff and product lines, which is beneficial for the implementation of diversity and equal opportunities policies. However, these efforts to diversify remain largely superficial, as the intersectionally androcentric structures of work organization remain untouched.

In conclusion, we discuss how these findings can help to explain the ongoing resistance to diversity initiatives in technology-oriented industries – particularly in IT and the high-tech sectors. Thus, the presentation contributes to an organizational-sociological understanding of gender, power, and masculinity in digitalized fields of work.

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Uneven Diversities in Universities: Institutionalization and Resistance Across Categories of Diversity

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Institutionalization of diversity work has emerged as a global phenomenon in higher education. Building on world-society perspectives (Ramirez, Bromley & Garnett Russell 2009), scholars refer to a "diversity era" (Vertovec 2012). Universities worldwide have established diversity offices and policies. Yet this **institutionalization of diversity work remains uneven**. Diversity work often proves symbolic (Nojan 2023), and diversity workers face resistance within gendered and racialized institutions (Acker 1990; Ahmed 2012; Ray 2019). Its transformative reach remains limited and largely confined to the Global North (Dobbin & Kalev 2018, 2022; Kaasila-Pakanen 2015). **Only select dimensions**-gender, race, and disability-have achieved **relative institutional stability**, while others remain contested (Claeys-Kulik, Jørgensen & Stöber 2019). Meanwhile, **deinstitutionalization pressures** are mounting as right-wing populism spreads globally (Novais & Christofoletti 2025), fueling resistance and attacks on universities. Categories such as **transgender identity, religion, and race** have become trigger points (Mau, Lux & Westheuser 2023).
Against this backdrop, the article examines **how institutionalization and deinstitutionalization** unfold in universities as a distinct organizational type shaped by internal and external dynamics. Drawing on a comparative study of the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany, **we analyze how categories of diversity-gender, race, disability, and religion-are institutionalized, resisted, or destabilized in universities**. Specifically, we ask:

(1) Which categories of diversity are embedded within universities, and through what conditions?

(2) Which categories encounter stronger or weaker forms of institutionalized resistance?

(3) How do political, cultural, and organizational dynamics shape the varying degrees of institutionalization, resistance, or deinstitutionalization of different categories of diversity across organizational and national contexts?

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While prior research has documented the global diffusion of diversity work in higher education, we know less about how and why these arrangements stabilize, resist, or erode **across categories of diversity** and **national contexts**. Existing studies often examine diversity work in terms of compliance or symbolic management (Funder, Gruhlich & Hossain 2023), but rarely address the state of institutionalization and deinstitutionalization across different categories. The inclusion or omission of dimensions of diversity always entails struggles over hegemony (Frieß 2024). Most research concentrates on a **narrow range of categories** while other dimensions remain largely overlooked (Yadav & Lenka 2020). Moreover, studies tend to focus on **single-country contexts** (Gabriela, Overbey & Ramirez 2025; Kwak, Gavrila & Ramirez 2019), with few comparative analyses across universities and national settings (Danowitz 2015; Warikoo 2018; Warikoo & Allen 2020). Finally, universities are seldom examined as a **distinct organizational type** whose professional logics and autonomy shape the institutionalization of diversity.

To address the research questions, the article proceeds in **two steps**. First, it develops an **integrative theoretical framework**. Second, it presents a **comparative empirical study**.

Theoretical Background

The theoretical framework builds on institutionalization theory to integrate three strands of scholarship: concepts of institutional work, approaches to diversity work, and organizational theories on the distinctive nature of universities.

Institutional theory provides the foundation for understanding how diversity work becomes embedded or unsettled within organizations. **Institutionalization** occurs when practices align with societal norms and become taken for granted (DiMaggio & Powell 1983; Meyer & Rowan 1977), while **deinstitutionalization** marks their erosion as legitimacy and power relations shift (Oliver 1992). Building on this, **institutional work** refers to the intentional actions through which actors create, maintain, or disrupt institutions, emphasizing the agency inherent in institutional change (Lawrence & Suddaby 2006; Palinkas et al. 2015). Such institutional work is shaped by **external dynamics**-including legal reforms and laws, political pressures, and social movements-and **internal dynamics**, such as institutional entrepreneurs (Battilana, Leca & Boxenbaum 2009; Edelman, Leachman & McAdam 2010; Jacobs, van Witteloostuijn & Christe-Zeyse 2013).

Diversity work in universities can be understood as a form of **institutional work** that translates normative ideals into organizational structures and routines (Ahmed 2012) and aims to **transform the racialized and gendered nature of institutions** (Acker 1990; Ahmed 2012; Ray 2019). Practitioners revise missions, craft policies, and build offices to make diversity actionable, yet **this work is deeply ambiguous,** as the priorities of diversity differ across contexts (Risberg & Corvellec 2022). Diversity work **centers on categories of diversity** (Hirschauer 2023) that are continuously constructed, deconstructed, and redefined through practice (Hearn & Louvrier 2015). Which categories come to "matter," in turn, reflects historically contingent power relations (Bührmann 2021) as well as the **internal and external dynamics** that shape organizational change.

How diversity work becomes institutionalized or undone **depends on organizational types** (Funder, Gruhlich & Hossain 2023). In universities, institutionalization is often fragile or symbolic, as they operate as **loosely coupled expert organizations** characterized by high autonomy and weak coordination (Cohen, March & Olsen 1972; Weick 1976). Although **New Public Management** reforms have made them more complete organizations with hierarchies, performance metrics, and managerial logics (Hüther & Krücken 2016), **nationally institution-**

alized structures and **cultures** continue to shape universities (Krücken 2021).

Methods

To examine the research questions, this study draws on **expert interviews** with diversity workers-professionals who design, implement, or advise on diversity policies within universities. Expert interviews were chosen because these practitioners possess **specialized contextual knowledge** about the organizational implementation of diversity work.

Between May 2024 and March 2025, **63 semi-structured expert interviews** lasting around 60 minutes were conducted with diversity workers in the **United States (22), the United Kingdom (20), and Germany (21)**. The **purposive sample**, includes universities varying in size, profile, and disciplinary orientation. The data were analyzed using **structuring qualitative content analysis** with a coding team.

Preliminary Findings and Contribution

The comparative analysis is expected to reveal both shared patterns and national specificities in how **categories of diversity** are institutionalized, resisted, or deinstitutionalized in universities. Across contexts, diversity work reflects a **partial and fragile form of institutionalization**. Institutionalization is strongest where categories are **legally and financially** anchored. **Gender and disability**, in particular, remain the most stable across all three countries. We argue that universities' growing dependence on third-party funding ties these categories to regulatory and accountability frameworks. In **the US** various third-party public and private funding initiatives have focused on **gender and racialized minorities**.

Other categories depend more on **local dynamics** such as student activism, disciplinary clusters (e.g., religious studies), individual advocates, or institutional histories, which can enable the institutionalization of new categories such **as class, lookism, or bodyism**. Because of their **organizational autonomy**, universities are particularly responsive to these local dynamics, allowing context-specific adaptation but also uneven diffusion.

Resistance follows national patterns. In **Germany, race and Muslim religion** remain contested; in the **United Kingdom, trans inclusion** has become a major fault line; and in the **United States** opponents have framed DEI as **anti-merit and anti-whiteness**, prompting political pressure that drives the deinstitutionalization and reframe diversity around **community outreach, first-generation status, or "viewpoint" diversity**, particularly conservatism.

Overall, the findings highlight that the **institutionalization of different categories** of diversity results from the interplay between the **university's organizational logics** and **internal as well as external dynamics**. Building on these insights, our comparative design underpins a mid-range theory that identifies the mechanisms through which diversity categories become organizational stabilized, resisted, or deinstitutionalized-**what we theorize as "uneven diversities."**

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Warriors against wokeness? Accepted, contested, and ignored diversity in military organizations

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In a dramatic and widely noted speech to the entire General Staff in October 2025, Defense Secretary Hegseth announced the end of all DEI programs in the US military. But the Secretary's aim wasn't merely to restrict the rights of minorities or eliminate transgender soldiers from the armed forces. He also prohibited wearing beards. Hegseth justified the end of integration efforts and the exclusion of minorities with (claimed) dysfunctional effects. He argued that societal demands and political interventions aimed at strengthening DEI had undermined the combat power of the US military. From now on, he asserted, only warfare would be decisive for the structures and composition of the military. Hegseth's tirades and the decisions of the Trump administration point to the ideal of homogeneity inherent and typical for military organizations. Uniformity is considered a desirable ideal in armies, perhaps more so than in any other organization. At the same time, armed forces, like any other institution, are always characterized by inherent plurality, diversity, and heterogeneity. Despite this obvious tension, organizational sociology (especially in Germany and Europe) rarely considers the armed forces as an arena for societal debates about DEI. This article aims to fill this gap and examines – by relying on the theory of recognition and by using the distinction between accepted, contested, and ignored diversity – how military organizations perceive, regulate, and instrumentalize heterogeneity. To this end, the paper analyzes three aspects:
First, it investigates which categories of diversity military organizations accept and which forms they openly reject or tacitly neglect. For example, armies have a pronounced and codified system of proportional representation between ranks (officers, NCOs, enlisted soldiers etc.), services (army, navy, air force etc.), and military branches (infantry, tanks, artillery etc.). Membership in one of these groups is linked to certain rights and entitlements. These claims are openly communicable and officially recognized. At times, they are even reflected in administrative regulations and quotas. In contrast, other categories (such as gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation) prove difficult to mobilize in military organizations. Membership in one of these groups therefore does not confer any rights of representation. To justify this preference for certain criteria and the rejection of others, armed forces point to functional necessities. The definition of such functionalities, in turn, is considered a prerogative of the military profession, which again serves to deflect societal and political expectations of the military.

A similar circular argument emerges in the second area under consideration: The article analyzes the interplay between perceived homogeneity and heterogeneity in soldiers' interactions and group dynamics. Pioneer research during the Second World War argued that social ho-

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mogeneity is a prerequisite for military cohesion and functioning military groups. Accordingly, socially and culturally homogeneous units are supposed to cooperate successfully. In heterogeneous units, a lack of trust in comrades and superiors should diminish combat morale. This argument long served armies as leverage to exclude women, homosexuals, and ethnic minorities. Once again, the military employed a functional argument to resist societal and political expectations. The exclusions were simultaneously an expression of organizational interests and power politics. The persistence of the claim that heterogeneity undermines military effectiveness is hardly surprising given the ideal of uniformity in military organizations. However, as the article shows, it is not supported by current research. Military sociology has shown that armies that are subject to social, cultural and functional pluralization do not necessarily lose their fighting power.

Thirdly, the article examines how individual soldiers deal with the homogeneity requirements of the military organization. Armies demand that individuals follow guidelines and standards. The most obvious expression of this homogenization is the identical clothing: the uniform. However, the claim of standardization goes further, extending even to the soldier's body. Only those who meet certain physical criteria (such as weight and height) can become soldiers. A soldier's appearance is also prescribed. Armies have regulations regarding tattoos, wearing jewelry, hair length and style, or even prohibit beards altogether, as Defense Minister Hegseth recently did. In this way, military organizations aim to de-individualize its members. Soldiers are meant to appear homogeneous, submit to the hierarchy, and merge into the collective. Anthropological research has shown that and how individuals circumvent and resist these demands. Soldiers test the rules regarding uniforms and appearance, deviate from the guidelines, and modify uniforms. Through this approach, soldiers express their individuality and carve out spaces for themselves – but only inside a certain framework. Therefore, it is a matter of debate in research whether these actions have subversive effects and undermine military power. Or do these limited deviations have stabilizing effects and reinforce the military hierarchy and power?
For each of these three aspects, the article examines the empirical manifestations of heterogeneity and homogeneity in the armed forces, how military organizations deal with them, and the role that research has played in the (de-)legitimization of organizational policies. Taken together, the findings not only speak to the theory of recognition and point to the handling of diversity, equity, and inclusion in armed forces, but also reveal the power structures of military organizations. In particular, the reliance on – supposed – functional logics and necessities often serves armies to counter societal and political demands. Military professionals aim to increase their professional autonomy while neglecting their responsibility towards civilian society. The article focusses on internal military power relations and provides insights into the (power) position of armed forces within civilian society. Furthermore, the influence of researchers on the legitimization and stabilization of military power and organization politics is discussed reflectively and critically.

What accounts for the failure or success of efforts to address childhood inequalities?

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Schools and educational systems face increasing pressure from budget limits and ongoing debates about priorities. Using Charles Tilly's Durable Inequality, we see that the dominant values and priorities related to inequality and equity in Nordic basic education are more complex and contradictory than they appear in previous research. This complexity is partly due to different interpretations of strategic policy goals at both the municipal and school levels, and partly because actors see inequality as either equity or social division. Additionally, childhood inequality is often addressed through a bureaucratic approach that focuses on organizational innovation in early childhood and school environments-without critically examining how problems are defined by actors or whether these definitions are based on equity, organizational control, or other policy issues.
The central question guiding this presentation is: How are equity and inequality understood in templates and actions, and to what extent are these understandings based on coherent, competing, or contradictory beliefs?

This paper is based on a study of basic education systems in three Nordic cities, incorporating interviews with teachers, principals, top bureaucrats, managers, and politicians, as well as register data, policy papers, and annual school plans. While some educational fields have visible actors who set clear priorities, others remain opaque, with limited insight into daily operations. Given that basic education is heavily regulated by legal frameworks, it can function as a proxy for powerful actors who either facilitate or hinder innovation.

In Sweden, the dual school system-combining municipal and private schools-illustrates a highly contested educational landscape shaped by competing power relations and institutional logics. Municipal schools tend to balance equity and academic performance, while private schools emphasize academic outcomes more strongly. Finnish schools, although formally aligned with New Public Management (NPM) principles, exemplify a well-functioning bureaucratic system with delegated authority and less ideological contestation, sparking our interest in how this is possible despite political differences and divisions. The Norwegian case is also notable for its strong commitment to equity and inclusion, though with a looser structural connection than in Sweden and Finland, especially concerning the organizational links between the administrative level and local schools. Essentially, it leaves it to schools and principals to prioritize measures that promote equity and reduce social exclusion. A common pattern across all three cities is that schools in socially privileged areas understand and prioritize very differently from schools in less privileged areas. The idea of what childhood inequality entails, or how to address it,

*Speaker

differs systematically, illustrating how schools are part of the local ecosystems they serve and respond to in their school missions.

In short, these extensive case studies of educational fields illustrate examples of both tightly coupled and loosely coupled systems; systems driven by a shared understanding versus those marked by high levels of contestation; and insights into what to prioritize in policies aimed at addressing childhood inequalities. We also observe that the understanding of inequality in childhood varies systematically between schools in high- and low-SES areas and that the information about and resources allocated to each school are highly dependent on the overall bureaucratic organization of the early childhood and education systems.
A theoretical framework, drawing on Tilly's Durable Inequality, proposes that issues of inequality, fairness, and organization often mirror a more general 'class logic', with schools and welfare systems responsible for managing an expanding set of societal 'problems'. However, our data show a more nuanced view of the role and function of basic education-highlighting both the possibilities and limitations of efforts to reduce childhood inequalities. The case studies demonstrate how social reproduction of inequality operates in some situations and for some groups, but they also serve as examples of systems that effectively reduce inequalities in schools and childhood.

What is the sociological in organizational sociology?

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In his seminal book from 1992, Harrison C. White argued that identities only can emerge or be maintained when control ambitions of other entities fail. Any identity formation is based on such failure, and, according to White, such failure is more likely when control ambitions come from different directions. Consequently, being embedded in two or more networks does not just result in overdetermination but provides degrees of freedom and the opportunity to develop an identity. Our contribution seeks to provide a research perspective for organizational sociology by utilizing this insight.
There are obviously two frames of reference which need to be taken into consideration: organization research and sociology. Regarding sociology, the situation seems easy, since organizational sociology can be seen as a subfield, institutionalized in research committees, sections, or chapters of sociological associations. Organizational sociology is then characterized by the simple fact that it – one way or the other – focusses on organizations. Apart from accepting that organizations are a legitimate and sociologically important research object, it only requires a shared understanding of what organizations are and what distinguishes them from other phenomena such as, e.g., markets, families, or networks.

In the case of organization research the situation is less clear. Other social sciences, particularly from business studies, political sciences, and, more recently, higher education research are integral parts of this research field. Apart from the general interest in organizations or certain types thereof, two features characterize this research field: It is a social science whose theorizing is mainly descriptive (although we also find some normative missions), and it is devoted to the study of organizations which includes empirical interests in types, changes across time, and, e.g., sectoral variation. Against this background, one may ask what is the specific contribution of organizational sociology in this context?

In our contribution we argue that the analysis of organizations is not the unique selling point in the context of organization studies. Although heavily imprinted by classical contributions of sociologists, such perspective on organizations or specific types thereof integrates most, if not all organization studies. The same holds true for research interests in changes, organizational variations across sectors and regions, and the identification of types of organizations.

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Against this background it may be promising to follow those organizational sociologists who have been interested in identifying features that distinguish organizations from other social formations such as, for example, families, markets, and neighborhoods. Indeed, a great bulk of the sociology of organization's attention has been devoted to these characteristic features (e.g., formal structures, membership, goal setting and strategizing, collective decision making). The problem with this approach is that organization research has found plenty of evidence for the fact that one also finds rather unspecific elements in organizations – and that these unspecific elements can be key for understanding what is going on in or between organizations. Informal structures, routines, social practices, networking, status issues, inequalities are examples for such unspecific features. We find them in organizations – and most organization sociologists would agree that they may be crucial factors worth being investigated – although we also find them in the above mentioned non-organizational settings of families, markets, or neighborhoods.

Instead of searching what distinguishes organizations from all other social formations, we thus suggest another 'unique selling point' for organizational sociology: the inclusion of sociological preconditions and consequences. In the history of ideas, Max Weber's organization theory provides the most prominent starting point in this direction. His core idea was that a dominant organizational form (the modern bureaucracy) provides society with a push towards rationalization.

In the second part of the 20th century, Max Weber's approach stimulated highly influential researchers to further develop this research perspective. The concept of 'organizational society' shed light on organizations as a highly influential structural feature of current society. The organizational society-perspective was developed in both social theory and organizational sociology. It integrated various sociological paradigms and prominent authors such as James Coleman, Arthur Stinchcombe, Charles Perrow, and Niklas Luhmann. Their common ground was the assumption of a dominant organizational form – large and powerful, based on hierarchy and a division of labor. Other organizational forms were portrayed as either less relevant or disappearing.

In the 21st century, we find contributions which emphasize that Weber's bureaucracy as well as conceptualizations which have developed his organization model further no longer provide a proper understanding of dominant organizational forms. On the one hand, there are models of organization that have served as starting points for developing best management practices, such as agility and holacracy. On the other hand, there are sociological contributions which have attracted the attention of organization researchers. Particularly the contributions of Gerald Davis, Nils Brunsson, and John Meyer have been widely discussed.

As we recently argued elsewhere, the conceptualizations of platform organization (Davis), partial organization (Brunsson), and hyper organization (Meyer) provide promising starting points for updating the organizational society perspective. At the same time, they share two weaknesses: Firstly, they suggest the integral replacement of traditional organizational forms by only one new type of organization – thus, neglecting both the persistence of traditional forms and the variety of new ones; secondly, they consider societal preconditions and effects only selectively – sometimes more interested in cultural foundations, sometimes based on socio-economic considerations, and sometimes viewing technological developments as drivers for organizational changes.

Against the background of these weaknesses, we suggest a less theory driven approach with respect to organizational forms and contexts. We will illustrate this research perspective by re-interpreting our current or recent contributions to organizational sociology all of which are related to the specific situation in Switzerland:

- The reproduction of inequality by school tracking

- Interorganizational networks of pharmaceutical innovations

- The diffusion of diversity management as business case

- The marketing of sustainability in financial investment

- The market formation of certified fairtrade products

- The transformation of waste into a commodity

Two conclusions can be drawn from these re-interpretations of empirical investigations: Firstly, the consideration of preconditions and consequences includes organizational issues, i.e. conditions and consequences are not limited to a 'non-organizational environment'. Instead, organizations are integral parts of these preconditions and consequences, but they are not the only ones. Secondly, the variety of organizational configurations cannot be reduced to abstract types and models of organization, i.e. it neither suffices to identify organizational types like regulation agency, business firm, and meta-organization, nor does it help to identify organizational models such as, e.g., platform organization. Instead, one must consider organizational varieties that go beyond types and models.
Emphasizing sociological preconditions and consequences provides organization sociology with a specific focus in organization research. It helps to relate its research to other fields in sociology. Depending on empirical cases and research questions, it can – or, rather, should – connect organizational sociology with the sociology of education, family, innovation and technology, work and occupation, media and so forth. Instead of just incorporating methodological standards or grand sociological theories (what also characterizes many non-sociological contributions to organization studies), the suggested research perspective provides a starting point for establishing a dialogue with various subfields in sociology – and this may be seen as a big advantage of a specifically sociological organization research that puts more weight on preconditions and consequences of organizing.

Woes of an 'Uncertain Giant': The Past, Present, (and Future) of Organization Studies

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Building on – and extending – previous work (Ringel, 2024), my presentation adopts a sociology of science perspective to examine organization studies (OS), a once-interdisciplinary field that has come to be dominated by business school faculty over time. While remarkably successful in institutional and financial terms, those in control of OS also appear to experience high levels of epistemic insecurity as evidenced by a recurring series of self-diagnosed crises about the perceived quality of their collective scholarship. This presentation therefore asks: *what factors drive members of OS, arguably a well-funded and guarded academic field, to consistently question their own scientific authority?*
To understand the persistence of epistemic insecurities in contemporary OS, we must take into account a series of past events in the business school sector, A form of higher education that emerged in the late nineteenth-century United States. For a long time, business schools saw it as their primary mission to professionalize management through the provision of 'rationalized' and 'scientific' managerial tools, much in the same way that medical schools and law schools were the main sites of knowledge production for the medical and legal professions. As a result, business schools inspired little (if any) interest in basic research among their faculty, who thus did not seek recognition from peers in traditional university departments.

The situation changed rapidly in the 1950s, when an elite coalition (of university presidents, law makers, policy experts, journalists, and even esteemed scholars) began to openly criticize the state of affairs of business schools, arguing that as higher education institutions, they were in dire need of improvement. A frequently-used and derogatory label for business schools at that time was that of the 'uncertain giant in the halls of higher education' (Gordon & Howell, 1959: p. 4), which denotes that whilst being popular with students and in possession of lavish resources (a 'giant,' no less), the knowledge created and taught at business schools was no match for the intellectual rigor of traditional university disciplines. Following the legitimacy challenges they had been facing throughout the 1950s, more and more business schools underwent dramatic changes in the course of the 1960s and 1970s: besides adopting new criteria for hiring and evaluating their faculty, they reformed study programs in the spirit of science-based education. As a result, the professionalization project became decidedly less important and had to make way for a new mission: improving the standing of business schools in academia by committing to the holy grail of basic research.

Instilled with an appetite for science as an end in itself, business school faculty felt compelled

*Speaker

to disavow the epistemic practices and forms of knowledge they had up until recently taken for granted. Instead, they were now emulating established university disciplines such as economics, psychology, and sociology. The academic study of organizations – by then, still an interdisciplinary space – soon began to attract business school faculty who transformed OS into a well-funded and guarded intellectual jurisdiction, or settlement, in Abbott's (2001) sense. This transformation frustrates organization scholars from traditional disciplines, such as organizational sociologists, who feel that their "bread and butter is vulnerable to be taken off our plates" (Holmwood, 2010, p. 648).

Yet despite their institutional success, business school faculty identifying with OS often display a marked lack of confidence. Claims of "impostor syndrome" (Bothello & Roulet, 2019, p. 854) reveal anxieties that OS's scientific credentials could be exposed as mere "surface bluster" (Starkey & Tiratsoo, 2007, p. 35). Many link these epistemic insecurities to OS's continued dependence on intellectual imports from traditional disciplines. Some even worry about a 'balance of trade deficit' (Whetten et al. 2009, p. 537–538), creating the impression that OS remains a derivative of fields such as sociology. The roots of this deficit lie in OS's origins: by discarding their own earlier epistemic practices, business school scholars built a field largely from externally derived materials-bits and pieces of economics, psychology, and sociology. The epistemic core of OS, therefore, becomes o an ecology of knowledge production that almost inevitably gravitates toward borrowing from these disciplinary sources.

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"Do You Really Fly the Plane?" Gender, Power, and Petro-Masculinity in Commercial Aviation

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Despite ongoing efforts by airlines to improve gender equality across the industry, commercial aviation pilots remain one of the most gender-segregated professions in the world. According to the International Society of Women Airline Pilots (2021), women currently represent around six per cent of all active airline pilots globally. While this figure has increased marginally over the past few decades, the rate of progress has been remarkably slow, especially when compared to other technical and high-status professions. Moreover, research has repeatedly shown that female pilots continue to encounter pervasive gender bias, misogyny, and negative customer perceptions, with passengers often expressing distrust upon learning that their pilot is a woman (Bridges, Neal-Smith and Mills, 2014; Davey and Davidson 2000; Ferla and Graham 2019; McCarthy et al. 2015; Mitchell et al. 2006; Smith et al. 2021; Yanikoğlu et al. 2020). These encounters reveal not only individual prejudice but also the persistence of structural and cultural forms of sexism that underpin the profession. Such attitudes exemplify hostile sexism in practice, reinforcing the cultural narrative that aviation, and particularly the profession of airline pilot, remains a distinctly masculine domain.
Therefore, with these ongoing cycles of workplace sexism and prejudice, this paper raises the question, why does the occupation of airline pilot remain so deeply masculinised despite all of the gender equality initiatives, diversity programs, and targeted recruitment strategies, and what structural, cultural, and symbolic mechanisms continue to reproduce this imbalance? Drawing on qualitative interview data collected from both male and female airline pilots, as well as secondary data from industry reports, academic research, and media discourse, this paper explores the enduring gender norms that have historically shaped and continue to define the airline pilot profession. The analysis is framed through feminist theoretical perspectives, particularly the concepts of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995) and petro-masculinity (Daggett 2018). By combining these frameworks, the paper aims to move beyond surface-level accounts of discrimination or representation and instead interrogate the deeper sociotechnical structures that sustain gender inequality in aviation.

The concept of hegemonic masculinity helps to explain how dominance, authority, and control are endorsed within the pilot identity, setting an idealised standard of professionalism that is both exclusionary and gendered. In the context of aviation, the figure of the pilot has historically been constructed around ideals of rationality, stoicism, and technical mastery, qualities long associated with masculinity. Meanwhile, petro-masculinity, as articulated by feminist political

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ecologists such as Cara Daggett, provides a critical lens through which to analyse the intersections of fossil-fuel dependency, patriarchal power, and masculine identity. Petro-masculinity theorises the relationship between energy regimes, political economy, and gendered social orders, arguing that the domination of high-energy systems, such as oil, aviation fuel, and heavy machinery, reinforces a cultural ideal of masculine control over nature, technology, and risk.

Furthermore, the paper examines how aviation organisational culture reinforces these gendered dynamics through its structures of command, hierarchy, and discipline. The profession's reliance on military-derived models of authority through the captain and first officer chain of command embed an institutional logic that privileges certain ways of being and behaving. These cultural codes, often framed as technical or safety imperatives, carry implicit gender meanings: the ideal pilot is decisive yet calm, assertive yet unemotional, endlessly mobile, and perpetually available. Such attributes align with normative masculine life patterns, marginalising those who deviate from them, whether through caregiving responsibilities or simply different ways of performing competence and authority. In doing so, the industry sustains an exclusionary model of professionalism that goes beyond hiring statistics. Gender inequality becomes embedded in the rhythms of work, in rosters that assume 24/7 flexibility, in training and promotion systems that reward uninterrupted service, and in the social spaces where belonging is negotiated. Female pilots, even when highly skilled and qualified, often describe having to constantly prove legitimacy, such as responding to passenger questions like, "do you really fly the plane?", a question that encapsulates the disbelief surrounding women's authority in such a technically and symbolically charged field.

Ultimately, this paper argues that gender inequality in commercial aviation cannot be fully addressed through representation or diversity programs alone. Instead, it requires a critical examination of the material and cultural foundations of the profession itself: its dependence on fossil-fuel infrastructures, its endorsement of masculine ideals of control, and its organisational cultures of command and endurance. By situating aviation within the broader framework of petro-masculinity, the paper contributes to feminist sociological understandings of how energy, technology, and gender intersect to sustain inequality in the global economy. It concludes by reflecting on how a transition toward more equitable forms of aviation must also entail a reimagining of who is seen as capable of "flying the plane."

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Author Index