

# 'Inclusive institutions' – online meeting by IOS stream Inequality on 20 November

**On 20 November, the stream 'Inequality' from strategic theme Institutions for Open Societies hosted an interesting hybrid meeting on the concept of 'Inclusive institutions', with three presentations and lively debate afterwards.**

First, social psychologist **Wiebren Jansen** presented his work on what he defines as inclusiveness in organizations. An inclusive institution or organization, according to Jansen, would form a representative mirror of society, in the sense that different groups of people are equally represented in the organization, and feel like they can both be themselves and fit in the organization. Jansen developed a matrix with two axes: *belonging* and *authenticity*, two things most people strive for when interacting with groups of people, such as a company or organization. In case of low belonging and low authenticity, the organization can be typified as “exclusionary”. In an organization with high belonging, but low opportunity for authenticity, we speak of “assimilation”. Low belonging, but high authenticity in turn leads to a differential organization, whereas an organization with high authenticity as well as high belonging would lead to inclusivity.

Second, **Jamila Mascat**, working in postcolonial studies, reflected on why she actually does *not* so much use the concept of inclusive institutions in her work. She presented views from a number of critical scholars, most notably Sarah Ahmed, who point out that the question about the degree of institutions’ “inclusiveness” always presumes that there is exclusion going on, otherwise inclusivity would not have to be something to problematize in the first place.

Rather, Mascot prefers to talk about (in)equality, in relation to injustices that have taken place historically and at present. She believes that we as scholars should take a normative stance about inequality, and that although we cannot undo injustices such as slavery and racial or gender segregation in the past, we can use our insights about these injustices to try and learn from them in order to create a more just present and future. In this sense, she pointed to the importance of *transformations* instead, perhaps, of the usefulness of a concept such as inclusive institutions.

Finally, **Maarten Prak** provided a (socioeconomic) historical perspective, by showing how many scholars from the field of economics, political science and sociology have analyzed and debated about inclusive institutions in the past. In a relatively confined definition, institutions would be beneficial for society as a whole once they become more inclusive, because these create more wealth for societies at large. For sure, Prak argued, it is important to also look at how this wealth is distributed and whether it is equally accessible to all members of society. In this respect, institutions may be both inclusive and exclusive, with both “good” and “bad” effects. Also, institutions change over time, and so does their impact. Prak gave concrete examples from his own work on guilds and civic organizations in the pre-1800 era.

The debate that followed showed that the discussion is not at all finished.

Apparently, different disciplines have quite different takes on definitions of what institutions are, and also on how one defines inclusiveness. We did seem to agree that we should indeed pay more attention to issues such as *transformations* and also that power, and power relations, ought to be brought into the debate. There were people from other disciplines than the presenters’ in the room (such as Law), who brought other interesting insights to the discussion.