

Short report on the IOS stream In/Equality Lunch Meeting

On Friday 16 April, we had a very fruitful (unfortunately fully online) meeting with the Stream In/Equality. Almost 30 people attended to hear representatives of the EDI (Dean of Diversity Janneke Plantenga), the hub Gender & Diversity (Rosemarie Buikema) and the UGlobe Decolonization group (Ozan Ozavci) discuss the issue of creating a more diverse work culture and staff at Utrecht University.

Kathrin Thiele opened the meeting with a short background of the event. She reminded the audience that this was the fourth of a series of meetings on decolonizing research on inequality, inclusiveness and institutions. The first was introductory, the second and third were more conceptual, where speakers from a wide range of disciplines introduced their theoretical and conceptual approach of their respective fields. Now, we thought it would be time to scrutinize the workings of our own institution and work environment, Utrecht University.

We started with brief introductions by the 3 speakers, and the issues regarding this theme they grappled with.

Janneke Plantenga explained that the policies of the recently established EDI are working in 5 different dimensions: gender, disability (2 dimensions for which the most concrete steps have so far been taken); LGBT (more “symbolic”); age (not the EDI’s main concern) and, the biggest issue: cultural, ethnic and/or religious background. In the context of the “Barometer Culturele Diversiteit” (CBS) a lot of criticism has been voiced by employees who do have concerns about diversity, but do not wish to be boxed into binary categories as “western” vs “non-western”. However, there are legal privacy issues with obtaining more refined data. Janneke understands all these legal, practical and ideological concerns, but

highlights that as policy makers, it is also important to collect data/information on the (self)identity of people, in order to make changes.

Ozan Ozavci recently published a blog in DUB, where he, rather polemically, questioned the diversity of Western academia and especially Utrecht University. There were a few quite fierce responses on the Dutch (translated) version of the blog. Building on the contents of this blog, and from his experience as a non-Dutch, Turkish-born scholar at UU, active in the UGlobe Decolonization group, there are a few points Ozan wanted to make:

- Silence about racism/hidden racist dynamics is as big a problem as the actual racism itself
- We talk a lot about diversity, but still do quite little
- Not only gender, but also (self-identified) ethnicity should become an issue for affirmative action, to be included into promotion evaluations and teaching.

Rosemarie Buikema identified the problem that there are many initiatives within UU, but that there is a lot of fragmentation, which in itself is a form of silencing. At the Hub Gender and Diversity the principle is that you want to transform an institution, you should work simultaneously at three levels, otherwise change will be incidental instead of structural:

1. *The level of the institution* (Starting with the need for recognition that we indeed have a tradition of inequality. Adding people with different backgrounds to the table is just the beginning of a more fundamental process of change, not the end goal)
2. *The empirical level* (Enable access in practice)

3. *The symbolic level* (What is the meaning and consequence of more inclusivity in the institution, not only in terms of staff composition, but also in terms of new forms of knowledge production and transfer)

Examples of what the hub tries to achieve:

- Exchange between academic knowledge on issues of gender and diversity and political decision-making. E.g. critically assessing the installation of a national Discrimination Officer
- Join forces within the UU à create a platform/centre of excellence where our initiatives can be institutionally united, embedded and visible

Based on the input of the network, Kathrin and Elise had beforehand identified 3 clusters of comments/suggestions by the members by email: 1) **transparency** of the UU (in terms of organization, procedures, hiring and promotion practices etc.); 2) **accessibility** (e.g. issue of language, national grants schemes, informal networks etc.); 3) **education** (both in terms of curricula and student population composition). We aimed to structure the discussion along the lines of these three themes, but during the interesting debate, where many telling examples were raised of what can be improved in our institution, it occurred that there was not sufficient time to really get into the issue of education. As both the Stream and the Decolonization Group already have plans in that direction, we decided to postpone education for a later meeting.

As closing-off, we collected ideas on how to join forces and proceed. Some ideas that came up are:

- Put all our activities and endeavours on 1 central website

- Make meetings amongst the different institutional bodies engaged in 'diversity/inclusion/equality' more regular
- Try bottom-up approaches. E.g. have a Strategic Plan for Diversity and Inclusion, but how about distribute the plans BEFORE it's decided upon and discuss its contents for ideas with our institutional initiatives, and learn from there how to further improve diversity and inclusion at UU

Outcome: We would like to continue with a practice of meeting with representatives of the different bodies present here today, and come up with a plan for further meaningful investment in the issue of diversity and inclusion and most of all: help to take actions.