



# The Framing of Diversity Statements in European Universities: The Role of Imprinting and Institutional Legacy

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**Abstract** We analyze the role of institutional founding conditions and institutional legacy for universities' self-representation in terms of diversity. Based on 374 universities located in the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, and Poland, we can differentiate between a more idealistic understanding (logic of inclusion and equality) and a more market-oriented understanding (market logic) of diversity. Our findings show that the founding phase has no significant effect on the likelihood of a university focusing on a market-oriented understanding of diversity—however, we observe an imprinting effect with respect to the adoption of a diversity statement in general and an equity-oriented statement. Moreover, our findings show that there is a socialistic heritage for universities in Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries that is at work and still influences universities' understandings of diversity today.

**Keywords** Imprinting theory · Institutional legacy · Diversity statements · Higher education · Universities · Cross-country approach

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## Introduction

Universities are faced with an increasing number of diverging expectations from their institutional environment regarding their functions and goals (Gumport 2019; Krücken and Meier 2006; Olsen 2007). On the one hand, universities are one of the oldest institutions in the world, embedded in an institutional logic<sup>1</sup> of academic professionalism, democratization, and regulation with clear missions for education and research. On the other hand, they are increasingly challenged by a market institutional logic that centers on professionalization in line with new public management attempts (Engwall 2007; Ramirez 2020). Such a shift to a market institutional logic is particularly relevant for European higher education institutions which were traditionally located between the state and academic professions but due to the increasing relevance of standardized goals and entrepreneurial orientation towards reaching these goals turned into organizational actors (Baltaru and Soysal 2018)—that is, “an integrated, goal-oriented entity that is deliberately choosing its own actions and that can thus be held responsible for what it does” (Krücken 2011: 4).

Given the increasing prominence of the market institutional logic in higher education during the last decades, it is not surprising that universities have started to adopt standardized structures and practices to signal alignment to this logic (Christensen et al. 2020). In this sense, concepts such as total quality management (Vazzana et al. 1997) or performance management (O Shea and O Hara 2020) became increasingly popular in universities. Despite a growing number of studies that address the adoption of such concepts and practices in universities (Fay and Zavattaro 2016), the question of factors that influence the adoption and help to explain differences in the likelihood of adoption among universities has received considerably less attention. Moreover, work in this area generally focuses on a specific country and usually lacks large-scale cross-national comparisons (for exceptions, see Christensen et al. 2020; Delmestri et al. 2015)—which are, however, essential to better understand how global institutional expectations are translated and adopted in local contexts (Christensen et al. 2020; Delmestri et al. 2015; Drori, et al. 2023; Mizrahi-Shtelman and Drori 2021).

One concept that has diffused globally during recent decades while being heavily influenced by local meanings and understandings is diversity (Kelly and Dobbin 1998). Diversity has a long-standing tradition in higher education (Baltaru 2020) and a global spread of a logic of inclusion and equality is frequently observed (Ramirez and Kwak 2015; Ramirez and Wotipka 2001). Universities are thereby communicating more and more explicitly their activities and views on diversity in diversity statements (Wilson et al. 2012). Such diversity statements signal to their institutional environment that they actively address aspects of diversity and—in emphasizing efficiency and performance effects of diversity—communicate a market-oriented

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<sup>1</sup> This study follows Thornton and Ocasio's (1999: 804) definition with respect to institutional logics as “the socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality.”

understanding of diversity. In this way, market-oriented diversity statements enable universities to frame their diversity beliefs and arguments in a way that signals conformity to a market institutional logic that ensures access to resources and legitimacy given a current high level of societal acceptance of this logic.

Our study focuses on the role of institutional founding conditions and institutional legacy on the likelihood of a university to adopt a market-oriented diversity statement. First, we consider the founding phase of universities in the context of imprinting theory (Stinchcombe 1965), which has been shown in previous studies to be central to the likelihood of organizations adopting structures and practices (Marquis and Tilcsik 2013; Simsek et al. 2015). Thereby, we propose that universities founded in more recent phases of higher education—that is, at a time when new public management attempts and a market-oriented institutional logic were already widely accepted in higher education—are more likely to have market-oriented diversity statements than universities founded in earlier phases (Oertel 2018). Second, we assume that institutional legacies determined by national business systems have a lasting effect on the adoption of practices in organizations (Greve and Rao 2014; Rao and Greve 2018). Although higher education is becoming increasingly international, national systems of higher education still have their own unique characteristics which have evolved over time (Christensen et al. 2020; Delmestri et al. 2015). These differences are likely to be reflected in the adoption of structures and practices by universities. As a result, a university's country of origin is likely to influence its adoption of a market-oriented diversity statement.

This study's contribution is twofold: First, we use a cross-country approach to offer insight into factors that affect the adoption of concepts and practices in higher education in general and market-oriented diversity statements in particular (Kwak et al. 2019). Although prior research in this realm has largely neglected large-scale cross-country comparisons, they are of great relevance to improving scholars' understanding how such concepts diffuse and national business systems and institutional legacies affect adoption rates (Greve and Rao 2014; Rao and Greve 2018). Second, despite the great importance of history for higher education institutions (Ramirez and Christensen 2013; Townley 1997) imprinting and institutional legacies have received only scant attention in this context yet (Oertel 2018; Oertel and Söll 2017; Zapp et al. 2021). Consequently, we add to prior research on higher education by testing central arguments of imprinting theory and the institutional legacy approach (Greve and Rao 2014; Marquis and Tilcsik 2013; Rao and Greve 2018; Simsek et al. 2015; Stinchcombe 1965).

Empirically, our study is based on 374 universities located in Czech Republic, Germany, France, Hungary, Italy, and Poland. Data regarding the universities were collected using the ETER database (Baltaru and Soysal 2018; Seeber et al. 2020). With respect to diversity statements, we focused on universities' self-representations on their websites. Applying a web-scraping tool, we collected a text corpus of about 2.7 million pages which we analyzed applying qualitative and quantitative text analysis methods to determine how universities communicate diversity.

The results of our study show that only 40% of the universities have a diversity statement. 27% of the universities frame their statement based on a market understanding of diversity. Regarding an imprinting effect, our study shows that the

institutional founding context has no influence on the adoption of a market-oriented diversity statement, but on the adoption of a diversity statement in general and an equity-oriented diversity statement. Findings show that universities founded in the early stages of higher education are more likely to adopt a diversity statement as well as an equity-oriented diversity statement. Since these findings would not necessarily have been expected, we discuss them in detail at the end of our study. Regarding the influence of institutional legacies, our results show that universities in CEE countries are not only less likely to adopt a diversity statement in general, but also less likely to adopt a market-oriented diversity statement as well as an equity-oriented diversity statement. Combined with the findings that the control variables reputation and share of international students have a significant positive effect on the likelihood of adopting a market-oriented diversity statement, we discuss these findings in light of factors influencing universities' structures and practices and especially with respect to the adoption and implementation of diversity concepts at universities.

## Theory and Hypotheses

### *The Business Case for Diversity in Higher Education*

Research on diversity has a long-standing history dating back to the 1970s (Nkomo 1992). The business case for diversity emerged in the US in the 1980s and revolutionized the understanding of the meaning of differences in organizations (Süß and Kleiner 2008). For diversity management, organizations no longer considered differences in the context of equal opportunities, but from the perspective of efficiency and the intention to improve performance by actively managing diversity (Dobbin and Kalev 2013; Kelly and Dobbin 1998).

Based on diversity management, a diverse workforce is expected to improve the knowledge and innovation capacity of an organization, thereby enhancing its performance (Dobbin and Kalev 2013; Kelly and Dobbin 1998). The term “diversity” encompasses various definitions and conceptualizations that cover both more visible demographic aspects (for example, gender, age, or ethnicity) and less obvious categories, such as education or work experience (Litvin 1997; Olsen and Martins 2012).

With regard to the growing importance of new public management in higher education (Ferlie et al. 2008) and the global pressure to manage diversity actively, diversity in general and diversity management in particular have become increasingly important for universities (Baltaru 2020; Kwak et al. 2019). While a logic of inclusion and equality has a long tradition in higher education (Baltaru 2020), its framing in terms of diversity management can be explained by an increasing managerialization of universities (Gumport 2019). The explicit presentation of diversity and the focus on performance aspects of diversity can thus be attributed to a university's orientation towards a market logic—that is, diversity is no longer considered in terms of moral and legal foundations, but with regard to how diversity can enhance efficiency (Richard 2000; Süß and Kleiner 2008).

However, research on the implementation of diversity management in higher education shows that there are large differences between universities (Baltaru 2020; Kwak et al. 2019; Oertel 2018; Timmers et al. 2010). Responses to the significance of inclusion affect various areas, for example, diversifying the student body or recruitment of staff and lecturers (Kwak, et al. 2019) and the structuring of curricula and research activities (Zhang et al. 2016). In addition, universities integrate diversity into their policies and mission statements, thus making the meaning and significance of diversity visible for their environment (Elwick 2020; Timmers et al. 2010). Similarly, universities can achieve visibility of their diversity efforts by establishing specific positions and departments, such as diversity managers or vice presidents for diversity management (Kwak et al. 2019; Oertel 2018). While the effectiveness of such measures has already been investigated (Elwick 2020), it remains largely unobserved which factors influence the likelihood that a university frames diversity in line with a managerial understanding.

Our study will add to prior research on the adoption of diversity practices and management in universities by focusing on the adoption and content of diversity statements. In this regard, we differentiate between two possible ways universities can communicate diversity to their institutional environment. First, universities may present diversity statements in a traditional and moralistic way (logic of inclusion and equality). Second, universities may frame diversity in line with a more market-oriented understanding (market-oriented logic), deliberately using the term “diversity” and combining it with business and management terms.

### *The Role of Institutional Founding Conditions and Institutional Legacy for the Adoption of Market-Oriented Diversity Statements*

Imprinting theory states that founding conditions influence organizations and their structures and that this influence has a long-lasting effect (Marquis and Tilcsik 2013; Stinchcombe 1965). Consequently, differences in the structures and behaviors of organizations can be determined by their membership to a specific founding phase (Marquis and Tilcsik 2013; Simsek et al. 2015).

Although imprinting is well established in organizational and management research (for an overview, see Marquis and Tilcsik 2013; Simsek et al. 2015), the theory has so far—despite a wide range of findings on the general importance of history for universities and their structures and practices (Christensen et al. 2020; Ramirez and Christensen 2013; Townley 1997)—found only relatively rare application in higher education research (Oertel 2018; Oertel and Söll 2017; Zapp et al. 2021). However, imprinting can be of great relevance in this context, especially with regard to the adoption of practices and constructs that are in line with specific institutional logics.

In our study, we follow the basic idea of imprinting and assume that universities founded in more recent phases of European higher education, when new public management attempts and a market institutional logic were primarily relevant, are more likely to have market-oriented diversity statements than universities founded in earlier phases. In this context, the Bologna reforms which

were launched in 1999 have played an important role, as they aimed at homogenizing higher education in Europe and at the same time emphasized issues of comparability and efficiency in higher education, leading to an increasing adoption of management concepts such as quality management tools (Keeling 2006) or mission statements (Seeber et al. 2019). Following this line of reasoning, we hypothesize:

**Hypothesis 1** Universities founded in earlier phases of higher education are less likely to use market-oriented diversity statements in their self-representation than universities founded in more recent phases of higher education.

However, it is not only the founding phase of a university that is of relevance for institutional founding conditions but also its national or local context. This national and local context is determined by institutional legacies, that is, organizational structures created at one time in an institutional field which are reproduced over time due to, for example, organizations that act as role models and legal systems that act as carriers (Greve and Rao 2014). In this regard, institutional legacies may span large periods of time and operate as a mirror of the institutional past as they are characterized by self-reinforcing cycles carried from one organizational cohort to the next (Greve and Rao 2014; Rao and Greve 2018). In contrast to imprinting (Marquis and Tilcsik 2013; Simsek et al. 2015; Stinchcombe 1965), institutional legacies subsequently do not refer to the institutional founding conditions of the focal organization but account for the history of the regional or local business system, which in turn affects all organizations located there.

Following the argument of institutional legacy, it is not surprising that despite an increasing globalization of higher education and the growing importance of the US university model (Baltaru and Soysal 2018; Christensen et al. 2020; Meyer et al. 2006; Ramirez 2020), large differences exist between the higher education systems across countries (Christensen et al. 2020; Delmestri et al. 2015). Delmestri et al. (2015), for example, show in their study on emblems and logos of 821 universities in 20 countries that the type of visual expression varies between universities in different countries. It became obvious that universities in Western countries in particular rely on abstract and logo-like ways of self-representation that enable a decontextualization of the university identity and lead to a stronger global formalization of the institution of university. Discussing the observed differences, Delmestri et al. (2015) provide two theoretical considerations: First, they argue based on a world society approach (Krücken and Meier 2006), that these differences can be explained by different rates of expansion of a globally spreading market institutional logic into different countries. Second, they argue that institutional logics prevailing in the countries (Thornton et al. 2012) have an effect on whether and how quickly a market logic can prevail and thus influence the actions of universities.

We follow the line of argumentation by Delmestri et al. (2015) in our study with regard to the adoption of market-oriented diversity statements by

universities. Accounting for these two lines of argument, we assume differences between universities based on their country of origin. Specifically, we propose that universities in Western European countries are more likely to frame diversity as a business case than universities located in CEE countries. Consequently, our second hypothesis is as follows:

**Hypothesis 2** Universities in CEE countries are less likely to use market-oriented diversity statements in their self-representation than Western European universities.

## Data and Methods

### *Data Collection*

Our study is based on a sample of all universities ( $N=394$ ) in the three largest Western European countries and the three largest Eastern European countries of the EU (measured by GDP) in 2016—that is, Czech Republic, Germany, France, Hungary<sup>2</sup>, Italy and Poland. Data on the universities were collected from the ETER database (ETER project 2020). To ensure comparability of the type of institution included in our study, we only considered institutions that have the right to award doctorates.<sup>3</sup> Based on this data set, we then collected the contents of the universities' websites<sup>4</sup>. Websites are an appropriate source of data in this context because they are one of the most comprehensive sources of information on the self-representation of organizations (Powell et al. 2016). Consequently, this data source enables a more detailed assessment of diversity communication than other data sources or documents. Regarding data collection and processing, we focused on text content using a web-scraping tool explicitly developed for large-scale data collection in line with this research project. Next, we carried out several steps of pre-processing to clean and prepare the collected textual data for further analysis. Therefore, we excluded PDF from our corpus because we recognized that this file format is often used to publish third-party content. Moreover, we excluded curricula information as diversity frequently is a topic in teaching. Furthermore, we removed any information such as privacy policies or contact details that most universities provide online, which, however, does not carry information relevant to our study. Finally, we removed whitespace and numerical data and transferred the remaining textual data to lower case to carry out further steps of analysis. The total text corpus of the survey comprises 2.7 million pages (single space text).

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<sup>2</sup> Romania has a larger GDP than Hungary but had to be excluded from the study due to a very high number of missing values.

<sup>3</sup> In more detail, we removed one institution that represented a dependency of a superordinate university and added one institution that was not categorized as a university, though it had the right to award doctorates. Thus, the initial sample size did not change due to our assessment of the institutions listed in the ETER database.

<sup>4</sup> For reasons of comparability, we only focused on the English web pages of the universities.

Finally, we had to exclude 17 institutions from our sample due to extremely high numbers of missing values in control variables that we were also not able to collect via the websites of the universities. Furthermore, three institutions had websites that were not suitable for our method of data collection yielding our final sample of 374 universities.

### *Content Analysis*

The goal of our content analysis was to determine whether the universities' self-representations contain market-oriented diversity statements. Therefore, we followed three general steps. First, we developed dictionaries that allow us to a) detect text passages related to diversity in the sense of this study, that is, diversity statements, and b) to distinguish market-oriented statements from equality and inclusion-oriented statements. For this purpose, we randomly selected a sample of ten universities from each country in our dataset and collected all text passages containing the term "diversity". Thereby, each passage includes up to 50 words before and after the occurrence of the term "diversity". For these sixty universities, this search resulted in a sample of 5,483 text passages.

Since "diversity" as a word can, of course, be used in various ways which are not necessarily related to diversity statements, we read these passages and qualitatively evaluated whether the passages reflected an understanding of diversity in the sense of this paper or whether diversity was used in other contexts<sup>5</sup>—for example, passages may refer to biodiversity and environmental issues with respect to particular departments in the natural sciences. Such text passages were excluded from our further analysis, and we ended with 397 diversity text passages.

We then searched these 397 text passages for recurring words that were relevant to diversity. Overall, 209 terms were identified in this context. Additionally, to depict a more general understanding of diversity and its meaning to a broader audience within our dictionary, we identified striking keywords from Wikipedia articles related to diversity. This process yielded 37 additional terms. Revising the complete list of 246 term related to diversity statements, we reduced the dictionary to 145 terms as many were included twice (e.g., in singular and plural).

Finally, in reading the 397 text passages it became obvious that some passages used a more market-oriented language representing diversity rather as a management tool while other passages rather highlight the equity case of diversity. For example, some passages highlighted aspects such as efficiency and the relevance of diversity for increasing attractiveness to future students, while there were also statements that emphasized inclusion and more moral aspects of diversity. To account for these differences and enable a classification of market-oriented statements in comparison to equality and inclusion-oriented statements, we divided our collection of terms into two dictionaries (Table 1). The equity dictionary contains terms directly related to diversity or whose co-occurrence indicates that a statement addresses diversity. The

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<sup>5</sup> This process was supported by three student research assistants, whom we trained for this purpose.



**Table 1** Dictionaries

Equity dictionary	accessibility, affirmative action, age, ageism, aggression, ambition, assimilation, awareness, awareness raising, barrier-free, beliefs, chronic diseases, colorful, commitment, community, cosmopolitanism, denigrate, deviance, differences, disability, disadvantaged groups, disciplinary, disciplinary boundaries, discrimination, diverse teams, diversity, dividing lines, employee voice, equal, equal conditions, ethics cultivation, ethnic, ethnic penalty, interethnic relations, exclusion, fair, family-friendly, family service, female, feminisation, foreign/foreigner, freedom, gender, geographical, handicap, harassment, heterogeneous, human rights, immigration, impairments, inclusion/inclusive, inequality, institutional change, integration, integrity professionalism, mainstream, marginalized, mental health, migrant, minority, mobbing, official languages, openness, opportunity, personality, perspectives, physical abilities, physical health, policy, prejudice, professional profiles, protect, quota, race, rainbow flag, recruiting process, religion, respect, responsibility, rich, self-efficacy, self-empowerment, sexual orientation, social advancement, social influence, social mobility, social pressure, social structure, societal change, solidarity, stereotypes, stigma, students situations, sustainability, territory, tolerance/tolerant, intolerable behavior, trans, unity, values, victims, wheelchair, woman, work-family conflict, xenophobia, culture, cultural heritage, cultural rights, cross-cultural segmentation, cultural understanding, international, national origin, antiviolence
Market dictionary	audit, business conditions, challenge, collaborative, competitiveness, economic efficiency, economic growth, economic process, employment, entrepreneurship, generation y, global environment, global growth, goal, hr excellence, human resource, inhouse training, innovation, leadership, marketing, mission, organizational design, partnerships, personal effectiveness, productivity, strategy, talent, team composition, tools, turnover, vision

market dictionary, in turn, contains terms that clearly have an economic reference but appear in the context of the business case for diversity. The terms from both dictionaries were then transformed into regular expressions based on their word stems as an input for the subsequent analyses.

Second, based on our equity dictionary, we retrieved diversity statements from the self-representations of all universities in our sample. Because words are context-dependent and a single word from our dictionary can be used in very different contexts on the website, a passage had to contain a minimum number of terms from our equity dictionary in close sequence to qualify as a diversity statement. To capture such statements and to ensure reliability of our results, we defined a threshold of ten terms that need to co-occur within a moving window of 50 words. Consequently, a diversity statement consists of at least 10 terms from our equity dictionary while these are each separated by no more than 50 words between them. Thereby, note that a diversity statement can include the term “diversity” explicitly, but it does not have to. Beyond explicit statements, this approach allows us to include statements in our analysis that clearly refer to diversity because they contain terms that are commonly used in the context of diversity but do so implicitly. Furthermore, to prove robustness of our approach, we tested several alternative thresholds regarding word co-occurrences. However, slight deviations (e.g., at least 9 or 11 terms) did not significantly change our findings, and larger deviations resulted in definitions of a diversity statement that were too broad or too narrow.

Third, based on this selection of diversity statements, we distinguished market-oriented from equity and inclusion-oriented statements based on their composition. Thereby, we define a market-oriented diversity statement as one in which diversity explicitly appears as a term and at least one word from our market dictionary, because this indicates an understanding of explicitly managing diversity. We define an equity statement as a diversity statement that can be both implicit and explicit regarding the mentioning of “diversity” but does not contain any term from our market dictionary.

## *Variables*

### *Dependent Variable*

Based on the text analyses introduced above, we differentiate between universities that have adopted a *market-oriented diversity statement* (“1”) and those that have not (“0”). To get a basic idea of how diversity statements are spread and what factors influence the adoption of diversity statements in general, we defined a second dependent variable which we then will use alongside our descriptive statistics as a kind of preliminary analysis before the actual hypothesis tests. For this additional analysis, we use the dependent variable *diversity statement*, which also has the value “1” if a university has a diversity statement and the value “0” otherwise. To further observe which factors drive the adoption of an *equity-oriented diversity statement*, we included another variable that takes the value “1” if a university has adopted this type of diversity statement and “0” otherwise.

### *Independent Variables*

Universities’ imprinting is measured by the founding phase of a university. We distinguished five founding cohorts that indicated whether a university was founded before the end of the Franco-German War (*founded before 1871*), before the end of World War II (*founded between 1871 and 1945*), during the Cold War (*founded between 1946 and 1989*), before the launch of the Bologna reforms (*founded between 1990 and 1998*) and after the Bologna process had started (*founded 1999 onwards*). Because it is not always clear when a university was founded (some universities have developed from ancestor organizations, merged, or closed and reopened), we initially rely on the ETER data, which were coded by nation experts, and checked them for plausibility based on the university web page and Wikipedia. With respect to institutional legacies, we distinguish between universities located in *CEE countries* and those located in Western European countries.

### *Control Variables*

To improve robustness of our findings, we included several control variables that may affect the adoption of a market-oriented diversity statement by a university. First, we included the number of students as a proxy for the organizational size.

Given the high standard deviation of this variable, we included its logarithm in our regression models. Second, we control for the *share of women students* as well as the *share of international students*, as organizations often react to an increasing diversity of their members by implementing diversity management programs (Pitts et al. 2010). Third, while we have excluded curricula from our analysis, qualitative proofs of our findings show that course descriptions on faculty homepages are still included in our data. To account for a potential bias caused by this data issue, we included the *ratio of students in social sciences, journalism, and information* as a control variable. Social sciences are particularly relevant in this context because, compared to engineering, for example, courses on topics of diversity are more likely to occur. Fourth, besides social sciences, diversity and diversity management topics are relevant in the context of teaching, especially in faculties of business, administration, and law. To control for this issue, we also include the *ratio of students in business, administration, and law* as a control variable. This control variable is also important because universities' attempts toward professionalization and the spread of a market logic in higher education are largely affected by the increasing number of business schools and business departments (Engwall 2008). Fifth, while traditional universities are still funded and controlled by a state, there is also a growing market for *private universities*, which also differ in their management and communication; therefore, we expect they are more likely to adopt management concepts and to use diversity following the business case. Sixth, since the *reputation* of a university is a signal of past success that attracts promising young researchers (Engwall 2008), we included a dummy variable that accounts for whether a university is listed in the Shanghai Ranking. Seventh, even though universities in Europe are often funded by the state, competition for students, third-party funding, and international cooperation, for example, are becoming increasingly important. Therefore, we control for *regional competition* by the number of other higher education institutions located within a radius of 50 km around the university in question.

Given our binary dependent variable, we applied logistic regression models to test our hypotheses and the supposed effects of our model variables. To account for potential problems of multicollinearity, we calculated the VIF for all our models. The highest value was 2.49, indicating that multicollinearity is not an issue of concern (Baum 2006).

## Results

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of this study and Table 3 displays a contingency analysis. Tables 4, 5 and 6 show the results of our regression analyses. Our hypotheses focus on the adoption of a market-oriented statement as a specific type of diversity statement, however, we find it beneficial to provide insight on additional variables. First, it is important to initially consider whether a university has adopted a diversity statement at all. Therefore—as a kind of preliminary analysis before testing our hypotheses—we added the variable *diversity statement* which indicates whether a university has adopted a diversity statement regardless of its specific orientation. Second, to enable a differentiated analysis for both

types of diversity statements, we included the variable *equity-oriented diversity statement* that indicates whether a university has adopted such a statement or not. As our descriptive statistics in Table 2 show, 40% of the universities in our sample have a diversity statement published on their website at all. 27% have adopted a market-oriented statement (~69% of the universities with a diversity statement) and 32% have adopted an equity-oriented statement (~80% of the universities with diversity statement). Moreover, Table 3 displays statement adoption by region and shows that more than half of the Western European universities and only around 17% of CEE universities have adopted a diversity statement in general. Likewise, both statement types are more prevalent among Western European universities. Similar shares of Western European universities have a market-oriented (~40%) and an equity-oriented diversity statement (~43%), however, distributions for CEE universities differ more clearly with 8% and 15% for market-oriented and equity-oriented diversity statements, respectively.

Table 4 shows the results of the regression models in which we included diversity statement as an independent variable. Model 1 serves as a baseline model and includes only the control variables. Model 2 adds our variables related to imprinting and institutional legacies. Results show that being founded in the two earliest founding phases exerts positive significant effects on a university's likelihood of adopting a diversity statement. Being founded in a CEE country, in turn, has a negative highly significant impact. Also, the share of international students, university reputation and the number of students seem to be positive predictors of statement adoption in general. The coefficients for reputation and number of students, however, are only significant in Model 1.

Table 5 shows the results of our regression models regarding our hypotheses on the adoption of a market-oriented diversity statement. Model 1 is the baseline model. Model 2 includes founding phases to assess the effect of imprinting. Results, contrary to our expectation, show positive coefficients which are, however, not significant. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 does not find support. Model 3 includes the effect of institutional legacy by accounting for the universities' country of origin. Results show that universities in CEE countries are significantly less likely to adopt a market-oriented diversity statement than universities in Western European countries. Consequently, Hypothesis 2 finds support. Model 4 finally represents our full model and results remain robust.<sup>6</sup> Regarding control variables, we see that the share of international students and the reputation of a university exert a strong positive impact on the adoption of a market-oriented statement. Beyond the observed independent variables, international visibility thus seems to be an important driver of the adoption of market-oriented diversity statements.

Given the similar findings on the adoption of diversity statements in general and market-oriented diversity statements, we also examined drivers of the adoption equity-oriented diversity statements as a robustness check. We find this analysis valuable because it allows us to disentangle determinants of equity and market

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<sup>6</sup> We also performed a robustness check to ensure the stability of our results which revealed that our main findings remain stable when the reference category is changed or when interaction terms were used.

**Table 2** Descriptive statistics and correlation matrix

	Mean	SD	Min	Max	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
(1) Diversity statement	0.40	0.49	0	1.00	1.00								
(2) Market-oriented diversity statement	0.27	0.45	0	1.00	0.76	1.00							
(3) Equity-oriented diversity statement	0.32	0.47	0	1.00	0.84	0.51	1.00						
(4) Number of students	15105.60	15246.73	100	105483.00	0.22	0.19	0.27	1.00					
(5) Share of women students	0.54	0.15	0	0.93	-0.06	-0.05	-0.02	-0.06	1.00				
(6) Share of international students	0.1	0.12	0	0.86	0.19	0.21	0.12	-0.07	-0.12	1.00			
(7) Ratio of students in social sciences, journalism, and information	0.11	0.16	0	1.00	0.05	0.01	0.11	0.01	0.26	0.19	1.00		
(8) Ratio of students in business, administration, and law	0.21	0.22	0	1.00	0.01	0.07	-0.10	-0.01	-0.17	0.21	-0.04	1.00	
(9) Private university	0.16	0.36	0	1.00	-0.05	-0.02	-0.09	-0.32	0.02	0.30	0.34	0.27	1.00
(10) Reputation	0.16	0.36	0	1.00	0.27	0.32	0.27	0.59	-0.06	0.04	0.00	-0.07	-0.17
(11) Regional competition	18.46	20.01	1	116.00	-0.03	-0.04	-0.04	0.01	0.00	0.19	0.10	0.12	0.13
(12) Founded before 1871	0.21	0.41	0	1.00	0.23	0.19	0.26	0.34	0.01	0.03	-0.04	-0.07	-0.19
(13) Founded between 1871 and 1945	0.16	0.36	0	1.00	0.02	-0.07	0.04	-0.02	0.09	-0.07	-0.10	-0.10	-0.07
(14) Founded between 1946 and 1989	0.37	0.48	0	1.00	-0.13	-0.05	-0.15	-0.07	-0.11	-0.09	-0.09	-0.01	-0.18
(15) Founded between 1990 and 1998	0.11	0.31	0	1.00	-0.04	-0.06	-0.05	-0.15	0.08	0.02	0.10	0.11	0.25
(16) Founded 1999 onwards	0.16	0.36	0	1.00	-0.07	-0.03	-0.08	-0.15	-0.03	0.14	0.18	0.10	0.30
(17) CEE country	0.40	0.49	0	1.00	-0.37	-0.35	-0.30	-0.29	0.14	-0.20	-0.10	-0.20	-0.01

N=374.00

Table 2 (continued)

	Mean	SD	Min	Max	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)	(17)
(10) Reputation	0.16	0.36	0	1.00	1.00							
(11) Regional competition	18.46	20.01	1	116.00	0.01	1.00						
(12) Founded before 1871	0.21	0.41	0	1.00	0.40	-0.10	1.00					
(13) Founded between 1871 and 1945	0.16	0.36	0	1.00	-0.06	0.00	-0.22	1.00				
(14) Founded between 1946 and 1989	0.37	0.48	0	1.00	-0.16	0.08	-0.39	-0.33	1.00			
(15) Founded between 1990 and 1998	0.11	0.31	0	1.00	-0.10	0.05	-0.18	-0.15	-0.27	1.00		
(16) Founded 1999 onwards	0.16	0.36	0	1.00	-0.08	-0.03	-0.22	-0.19	-0.33	-0.15	1.00	
(17) CEE country	0.40	0.49	0	1.00	-0.31	0.06	-0.18	0.23	-0.03	0.06	-0.05	1.00

N=374.00

**Table 3** Statement adoption by region

	Diversity statement				Market-oriented diversity statement				Equity-oriented diversity statement				Total
	0		1		0		1		0		1		
Western country	102	45.54%	122	54.46%	134	59.82%	90	40.18%	128	57.14%	96	42.86%	224
CEE country	124	82.67%	26	17.33%	138	92.00%	12	8.00%	128	85.33%	22	14.67%	150
Total	226	60.43%	148	39.57%	272	72.73%	102	27.27%	256	68.45%	118	31.55%	374

orientation. To this end, we adapted our research model and included a dependent variable that indicated whether a university has adopted an equity-oriented diversity statement or not. Table 6 presents the results of our regression. Model 1 shows the baseline model and Model 2 includes our variables related to imprinting and institutional legacies. Results reveal that the adoption of an equity-oriented diversity statement is positively and significantly associated with the two earliest founding phases.

**Table 4** The role of imprinting and institutional legacy on the likelihood of adopting a diversity statement

	(1)		(2)	
	Diversity statement		Diversity statement	
Number of students [ln]	0.20*	(0.10)	0.12	(0.10)
Share of women students	-0.41	(0.82)	-0.47	(0.93)
Share of international students	4.13***	(1.07)	3.10**	(0.98)
Ratio of students in social sciences, journalism, and information	0.56	(0.79)	0.50	(0.85)
Ratio of students in business, administration, and law	-0.08	(0.58)	-0.60	(0.66)
Private university	-0.21	(0.41)	-0.10	(0.44)
Reputation	1.16***	(0.35)	0.48	(0.38)
Regional competition	-0.01	(0.01)	-0.00	(0.01)
Founded before 1871			1.00*	(0.46)
Founded between 1871 and 1945			1.28*	(0.52)
Founded between 1946 and 1989			0.07	(0.42)
Founded between 1990 and 1998			0.54	(0.50)
CEE country			-1.69***	(0.30)
Constant	-2.54*	(1.01)	-1.50	(1.06)
<i>N</i>	374.00		374.00	
Pseudo <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.10		0.18	
Wald $\chi^2$	43.45		76.29	

Robust standard errors in parentheses. Reference categories: Founded 1999 onwards; Founded in Western European countries.

†  $p < 0.10$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**Table 5** The role of imprinting and institutional legacy on the likelihood of adopting a market-oriented diversity statement

	(1)		(2)		(3)		(4)	
	Market-oriented diversity statement		Market-oriented diversity statement		Market-oriented diversity statement		Market-oriented diversity statement	
Number of students [ln]	0.18	(0.12)	0.16	(0.12)	0.11	(0.12)	0.09	(0.13)
Share of women students	0.44	(0.88)	0.52	(0.87)	1.27	(1.02)	1.17	(1.01)
Share of international students	4.64***	(1.13)	4.61***	(1.14)	4.09***	(1.17)	4.02***	(1.17)
Ratio of students in social sciences, journalism, and information	-0.43	(0.86)	-0.40	(0.87)	-0.84	(0.83)	-0.74	(0.84)
Ratio of students in business, administration, and law	0.74	(0.63)	0.75	(0.64)	0.22	(0.67)	0.24	(0.68)
Private university	-0.08	(0.50)	0.09	(0.52)	0.02	(0.46)	0.13	(0.49)
Reputation	1.51***	(0.36)	1.45***	(0.38)	1.15**	(0.36)	1.10**	(0.38)
Regional competition	-0.01 <sup>†</sup>	(0.01)	-0.01 <sup>†</sup>	(0.01)	-0.01	(0.01)	-0.01	(0.01)
Founded before 1871			0.46	(0.49)			0.46	(0.50)
Founded between 1871 and 1945			0.04	(0.52)			0.34	(0.58)
Founded between 1946 and 1989			0.35	(0.45)			0.30	(0.47)
Founded between 1990 and 1998			-0.09	(0.57)			0.10	(0.54)
CEE country					-1.64***	(0.35)	-1.64***	(0.35)
Constant	-3.54**	(1.26)	-3.70**	(1.27)	-2.74*	(1.37)	-2.81*	(1.36)
<i>N</i>	374.00		374.00		374.00		374.00	
Pseudo <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.13		0.13		0.19		0.19	
Wald $\chi^2$	52.53		53.74		59.19		66.07	

Robust standard errors in parentheses. Reference categories: Founded 1999 onwards; Founded in Western European countries.

<sup>†</sup>  $p < 0.10$ , \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

Universities located in CEE countries, by contrast, are significantly less likely to adopt such statements. Regarding our control variables, we see that the number of students and the share of international students seem to be positive predictors of equity-oriented diversity statements as well as the ratio of students in social sciences, journalism, and information. The ratio of students in business, administration, and law, in turn, negatively impacts the adoption of equity-oriented diversity statements. Also, the effect of reputation is positive and significant in Model 1 but diminishes in Model 2.

Comparing the effects of our variables on the adoption of both statement types, we find that being located in a CEE country is a significant negative predictor of



**Table 6** The role of imprinting and institutional legacy on the likelihood of adopting an equity-oriented diversity statement

	(1)		(2)	
	Equity-oriented diversity statement		Equity-oriented diversity statement	
Number of students [ln]	0.40***	(0.12)	0.33**	(0.12)
Share of women students	-0.40	(0.92)	-0.59	(1.01)
Share of international students	3.71***	(1.09)	2.84**	(1.07)
Ratio of students in social sciences, journalism, and information	1.63*	(0.82)	1.64 <sup>†</sup>	(0.84)
Ratio of students in business, administration, and law	-1.51*	(0.77)	-1.83*	(0.78)
Private university	-0.23	(0.49)	-0.08	(0.51)
Reputation	0.75*	(0.34)	0.07	(0.38)
Regional competition	-0.01	(0.01)	-0.00	(0.01)
Founded before 1871			1.04*	(0.48)
Founded between 1871 and 1945			1.22*	(0.53)
Founded between 1946 and 1989			-0.12	(0.47)
Founded between 1990 and 1998			0.40	(0.53)
CEE country			-1.45***	(0.31)
Constant	-4.44***	(1.22)	-3.52**	(1.28)
<i>N</i>	374.00		374.00	
Pseudo <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.12		0.19	
Wald $\chi^2$	48.14		69.08	

Robust standard errors in parentheses. Reference categories: Founded 1999 onwards; Founded in Western European countries.

<sup>†</sup> $p < 0.10$ , \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

both statement types. Also, the number of students and the share of international students are significantly and positively affiliated with both types, however, the first seems more impactful regarding equity-oriented diversity statements and the latter appears more relevant in terms of market-oriented diversity statements. Notably, as described above, the impact of the founding phases on the adoption of each type of statement differs greatly. Moreover, a focus of the university on social sciences favors equity-oriented statements while a business-profile favors market-oriented diversity statements. Finally, also reputation seems to be a strong predictor of market-oriented diversity statements, however, this effect is not as evident for equity-oriented statements.

## Discussion

The global spread of a market institutional logic and the increasing professionalization are central to many studies in the sociology of higher education (Christensen et al. 2020; Delmestri et al. 2015; Engwall 2007; Gumpert 2019; Ramirez 2020). We contribute to this stream of research by analyzing how imprinting and institutional legacy influence the way universities translate a market logic into their local contexts based on their framing of diversity statements. Given the importance of inclusion and equality in higher education (Baltaru 2020), the increasing managerialization of universities (Baltaru and Soysal 2018), and large differences regarding higher education across national business systems (Christensen et al. 2020; Delmestri et al. 2015), the example of diversity statements presents an appropriate case for research that considers the interplay between the global and the local spheres and their influence on the behavior of organizations.

Findings on the role of the institutional founding context, however, are mixed. We do not find support for our imprinting hypothesis regarding the adoption of a market-oriented diversity statement. However, our supplementary analysis shows an imprinting effect for equity-oriented diversity statements. Here, our findings show that, contrary to our expectation regarding market-oriented statements, the earlier founding phases are of importance. This finding, however, aligns with global patterns of higher education growth. The number of students enrolled in higher education systems worldwide increased dramatically from the 1960s onwards (Meyer and Schofer 2007). Increasing access to higher education is often related to an evolving human rights agenda (Baltaru 2019). Especially those universities that were already established at that time may have perceived this phase as a sensitive period in the sense of the imprinting theory (Marquis and Tilcsik 2013)—that is, the development toward increasing access to higher education combined with an evolving human rights agenda has in a certain way reshaped existing imprints of these universities. Consequently, universities founded in earlier phases of European higher education are more likely to adopt an equity-oriented diversity statement than universities founded in later phases. This effect to a certain degree also reflects in the results regarding adoption of a diversity statement in general as most universities with a diversity statement have an equity-oriented statement. In this respect, our study shows that imprinting influences the adoption of the specific type of diversity statement. This effect, however, might be less pronounced for market-oriented diversity statements than for equity-oriented diversity statements because the logic for equality and inclusion is much more established in the sphere of higher education than the comparatively new market logic.

Building on the concept of institutional legacies and considering the specific regional context, we show that universities founded in CEE countries are less likely to adopt diversity statements in general as well as both types of statements. Hence, we find support for our hypothesis that CEE universities are less likely to frame these statements based on a market-oriented logic. If one adds the insights on imprinting, these findings regarding institutional legacies can be explained by considering that due to the phase of socialism in the CEE countries and the political

isolation towards the Western world, the diversity movement spreading in the US and then in Western Europe did not immediately reach universities in CEE countries to the same extent. In this respect, in CEE countries receptor sites, that is, intermediaries between world society and national entities that are required to translate prevailing global blueprints to the given context (Frank et al. 2000), are not as potent given the regions historic background. Consequently, CEE countries are less reflective of global blueprints which is also mirrored in the rise of anti-globalization tendencies in the region. Therefore, general diversity statements are more likely to be found in Western European universities than in universities from CEE countries. The same applies to the diffusion and adoption of market-oriented diversity statements, which was further constrained by the earlier political orientation of the CEE countries: A market logic could only spread in universities in CEE countries after 1990 and therefore market-oriented diversity statements are more likely to be found in Western European universities. Similarly, equity-oriented diversity statements are less likely to be found in CEE universities, however, as our frequency analysis reveals, they are more common than market-oriented statements. This could be reflective of the egalitarianism during Soviet rule (Kornai 1992) which might still be affecting universities today.

Beyond these insights, our findings also reveal another interesting pattern that illustrates the impact of internationalization in higher education. Specifically, we find that the share of international students and the university's reputation as measured by the listing in the Shanghai Ranking were strong positive predictors of the adoption of a diversity statement in general and a market-oriented diversity statement. A similar pattern became visible regarding equity-oriented diversity statements, however, the effect of university reputation was not as prominent here. At the same time, the number of students overall seems more impactful for these statements than for market-oriented ones. Given these findings, one could argue that market-oriented diversity statements are crafted for an international audience as the international visibility of universities that are listed in the Shanghai ranking or have an international student body is much larger. In contrast to this, equity-oriented diversity statements might be targeted to a local audience considering the impact of the size of the student body as a whole, which in most cases consists of a higher proportion of local students. In this respect, universities' diversity statements serve for balancing expectations of their local and global audiences.

Our findings have implications for research on higher education and the application of the institutional legacy approach in this context. Specifically, we find in our study an effect of institutional legacy regarding the regional context in which a university was founded. Institutional legacies are of great relevance in this context since past experiences of a society act as kind of institutional heritage and are crucial for contemporary interpretations and the behavior of organizations (Greve and Rao 2014; Rao and Greve 2018). After 1990, the higher education systems of the CEE countries were not only confronted with an increasing market orientation, but in the context of the former socialistic systems they are also characterized by a profound social change, which included internal university changes such as the return of university autonomy and academic freedom (Boyadjieva 2017). Although concepts were adopted from foreign higher education systems, their translation reflects the

self-reinforcing interpretations of local economies (Greve and Rao 2014; Rao and Greve 2018). While some newly founded universities were able and to a large extent willing to challenge the old socialistic institutions of uniformity by communicating their willingness and the structural implementation of diversity (Boyadjieva 2007), our study shows, however, that there are still differences compared to universities in Western European countries with respect to the adoption of diversity.

Like most empirical studies, our study has several limitations that we will discuss with respect to opportunities for future research. First, our paper could be misinterpreted to mean that universities in CEE countries attach less importance to diversity than universities in Western European countries. However, this is by no means the message of our paper. Similar to other adoption studies, the communication directed to the institutional environment and the adoption of certain structures or practices cannot be compared to the actual behavior of an organization. In our study, for example, we do not consider which specific diversity measures are implemented in universities and in which way. It could therefore be possible that CEE universities implement far more diversity initiatives than Western European universities but report less on them on their websites. Future studies should therefore start at this point and investigate how universities implement diversity and which measures they actually use. Second, we included only passages provided in the English language in our analysis and did not distinguish whether the analyzed universities had an international website at all. The focal university might be well aware of the issue of diversity and provide a comprehensive statement in the individual national language, whereas its website does not contain any English passages. This may cause some bias in the outcomes of our model and will require adaptation by determining the content of the websites beforehand. Third, a more detailed differentiation in terms of the approach to diversity could represent a major source of additional insight for future research. For example, so far, we have not considered deviances in how many different market keywords might appear in a statement, which again would allow for a more nuanced classification of the detected statements.

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**Declarations**

**Competing interests** The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest/competing interests to report.

**Data availability** Data on the university characteristics are openly available from the ETER project (<https://www.eter-project.com/#/home>). Considering the currently applicable German copyright law, the distribution of the full dataset generated by means of web-scraping and text analysis is not permitted.

**Code availability** Data collection was carried out by means of the OpenWebScraper (<https://github.com/MaxPensel/OpenWebScraper>). Quantitative text analysis was carried out using Python. Regression analysis was conducted in Stata 15. Code applied for quantitative text analysis and regression analysis is available on reasonable request from the corresponding author.

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