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Description of the funded research project
1st Call for H.F.R.I. Research Projects to Support Faculty Members & Researchers and Procure High-Value Research Equipment

Title of the research project:
(Mis)representing social inequality: diversity, identities and politics in a comparative context

Principal Investigator:
Tilemachos Iatridis

Reader-friendly title:
DIVIDE-IN

Scientific Area:
Social sciences

Institution and Country:
University of Crete

Host Institution:
University of Crete

Collaborating Institution(s):
University of Cyprus

Budget: 141.048 €

Duration: 36 months

Research Project Synopsis

DIVIDE-IN is about certain underexplored aspects of *diversity*, one of the most powerful and influential concepts today. It focuses on the social representations, uses in public sphere, and effects of the *diversity* concept, in a social and political psychology perspective. The objectives of the project correspond to three broad sets of research questions:

(a) *Social representations of diversity*: what meanings are assigned to the term 'diversity', and which social categories and groups do those meanings refer to? What understandings of societal relations and of the social world today do the meanings and constructions of diversity relate to?

(b) *Identities and politics*: which social identities does discourse about diversity mobilize, and what objectives are strategically pursued by those identity processes in different socio-political contexts? How has political discourse on diversity been shaped over time and which broader political projects is it embedded in?

(c) *Effects on social inequality:* Which effects do individualistic discourses about diversity have on representations of social inequality in today's world, and which social psychological processes underline those effects?

These objectives will be pursued within a comparative approach taking into account:

- *who* speaks of diversity and *whom* people speak about: Different social groups may variously represent and use the *diversity* concept, and this variance may further depend on the group in question.

- *where* and *when* diversity talk takes place: Different socio-political contexts reflect on different public 'agendas' on diversity issues, e.g. what people may construct as diversity relevant and what may be said regarding certain target groups, at different times. Concern with 'where' involves comparisons between Greece and Cyprus, two countries with challenging similarities and differences as regards their public agendas on diversity issues. Concern with 'when' focuses on how those agendas evolved and were crystallized in political discourse over the past 20 years.

Project originality

Though a relatively recent term in public discourse, *diversity* has not attracted much attention as a research subject. Social psychologists have mostly focused on policy-making within an intergroup perspective and produced rich data on models for managing diversity (e.g. multiculturalism, colour-blindness). DIVIDE-IN puts together a grassroots approach on diversity discourse (what is meant by 'diversity'? what social categories are associated with diversity labels? to what ends? how have they come to be diffused and which broader understandings of the social world do they subscribe to?) and a focus on the actual *effects* of certain ideas associated with diversity which have not systematically attracted attention at an empirical level.

DIVIDE-IN uses mixed research methods (qualitative and quantitative methods and analyses; naturalistic and experimental research designs) and data sources (interviews with lay people, activists and members of political groups; official parliamentary records; data from Twitter; questionnaires; unobtrusive observation). Other novel aspects in DIVIDE-IN are:

- the comparative approach; the focus on Greece and Cyprus avoids the regression of likely differences between the two national contexts to differences in culture, and directs attention to how public agendas on diversity have historically been shaped resulting in both analogies and differences.

 - the historical approach; emphasis is placed on how public agendas emerge and evolve in time, which safeguards the project from one-sidedly emphasizing the importance of cross-sectional identity construction processes.

- the data from Twitter; analysing Twitter data extends the literature on an increasingly important site of lay debate which is still relatively under-researched.

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Expected results & Research Project Impact

DIVIDE-IN extends the literature on cutting-edge issues in social and political psychology, for each of the three research questions sets.

(a) Studying the social representations of diversity fills an important gap in the literature. Astoundingly what is meant by the broad term 'diversity', an issue with rich theoretical implications, has hardly been studied.

(b) Seeing the social representations of diversity as inextricably linked to identity processes and political projects, DIVIDE-IN extends recent research on the interplay of similarity-difference and inclusion-exclusion, as for instance the literature on lay representations of prejudice and discrimination, and representations of citizenship.

(c) As regards the effects of the various meanings of diversity on representations of social inequality, DIVIDE-IN will test and extend recent work suggesting controversial effects of certain individualistic ideas about diversity, which challenge an uncritically positive account of the 'diversity' concept.

Social impact

The three research question sets call for a timely empirical test of the meanings of diversity in the fight against discrimination, exclusion and inequality. This is a critical test in the course of effectively countering the rise of authoritarian discourse today, with a direct impact on all stakeholders involved in an agenda against inequality and discrimination: activists, NGOs and political parties, agencies and educational authorities in charge of anti-discrimination / anti-racist interventions. We may know much (and certainly need more) about the arguments and tactics advanced by opponents of equality and minority rights, but it is time we understood and critically evaluated the assumptions of those positioning themselves on the other side, for the sake of an effective perspective against inequalities and discrimination.

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The importance of this funding

Funding of DIVIDE-IN by H.F.R.I. means support for blue sky research on an important and timely issue without a rush to produce directly applicable results. This leaves room to developing a critical perspective and producing innovative and eventually useful outcomes.

What is more, funding by H.F.R.I. lends support to Greek faculty members in order to carry out their research plans, and offers a valuable opportunity to post-doctoral researchers and PhD students.

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