DEVELOPING A CONCEPTUAL AND ETHICAL FRAMEWORK OF DIVERSITY

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D 9.1 Ethical Framework of Diversity

- diversity from an ethical perspective
- why diversity matters
- diversity concept in WeNet
- modelling diversity after social practices
- points to consider/recommendations
Diversity: a normative concept

“Diversity can mean the quality or fact of actively including a range of people and things. This is the sense in which for instance anti-discrimination law and affirmative action policies use the term diversity. The term diversity is closely linked to the concepts pluralism and multiculturalism.”
Diversity understanding in different fields

Natural sciences, biology, medicine:

• Diversity traditionally seen in terms of defection, genetic inferiority (e.g. due to illness), in social sciences also deviation from the norm seen as pathological, irrational, problematic, in need of treatment

Political sciences, international relations:

• Diversity in terms of pluralism of nation states, cultures, value systems and a challenge for international cooperation
• Diversity as identity groups, but even here perceived need to homogenize groups for success in identity politics

Business and management:

• Diverse individuals as assets for team, to be empowered to the level of leadership
Diversity understanding in WeNet

I. Diversity as positive and of instrumental value
   - exploit diversity in everyday life because makes us better
   - for successful European future

II. Diversity as a source of anxiety and potentially threatening
   - exposure to diversity (online) scares individuals, has social implications

III. Diversity as in need of control and alignment
   - for individuals to benefit from diversity, we need to mediate diversity and reduce its complexity
Questions derived from our understanding of diversity

“For what outcome or for whom” should we leverage diversity? What is the goal of leveraging diversity and improving online social interaction? What assumptions about development, progress, and human well-being come with the rationale that diversity should be used to improve online social interaction?

If we believe that diversity causes anxiety in humans, what exactly is this anxiety or fear about? It seems vital to know this in order to address the fear and adequately mediate exposure to diversity. Also, what are appropriate methods and criteria for aligning diversity? What are implications for users’ social interaction?
Modelling diversity as social practices

✓ flexible, dynamic, focus on social interaction and interrelation of society members

– focus on “normal“ behavior, problems of structural inequality in (re)production of practices, no reflection on morality of social practices
Social practices and deviating behavior

social practices = “patterns how certain mundane practices are typically and habitually performed in (a considerable part of) a society” (Holtz 2013)

social practices consist of a) meaning, b) material, and c) competences
e.g. „running“, page 30 of D9.1
Social practices and structural inequality

Social practices are social constructs, they are “coded” to certain ideas, values, attributes

→ race and gender bias

e.g. working = only contract-based work, no reproductive or care work

e.g. “working”, p. 35 of D 9.1
Implications of modelling diversity as social practices

- Social practices that deviate from the norm (e.g. running barefoot) will fall through the cracks
- Social practices are not recognized as such due to the coded nature of social practices and societal bias (e.g. working) → certain already marginalized individuals will fall through the cracks

- Look at the dataset and questionnaire, discuss levels of granularity, ask students in pre-pilots for plurality of their social practices
- Look at the machine learning algorithms and make sure that they account for non-standard behavior
Recommendations

We should reflect our own understanding of diversity, being aware of the normative implications of the concept, and make our assumptions about diversity explicit/transparent.

We should discuss and decide (and make explicit/transparent) what kind of diversity we want to leverage and how much we regulate diversity in the online platform.

We should use the social practices approach with caution, given that the approach largely reflects “normal” behavior and marginalizes alternative practices.

We should prevent data and algorithmic bias by accounting for practices that deviate from the norm and are thus truly diverse.

We should constantly reflect and review the design of the data gathering tools (e.g. questionnaire) as well as the algorithmic models working with data on social practices.
Thank you! Any feedback?
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