

Hard Times, Less Compassion? Distinct Perspectives Towards Distinct Minorities in the Portuguese Organizational Context

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Abstract Several approaches to manage diversity were developed in the U.S. and then disseminated to Europe. Their origin can be drawn in a timeline, but not their end. Research is still needed on the way organizations combine them towards distinct minority groups, particularly in less explored national contexts. The present qualitative study examines how minorities are evaluated and dealt with by large organizations operating in Portugal. The results reveal that distinct minorities are being approached distinctively and that this significantly stems from the country's current hard financial conditions and ensuing social challenges, as well as from the colonialist Portuguese past. The study particularly contributes by exposing diversity as a social construct that can assume as many facets as the minority identity groups present in a specific space and time.

Introduction

Recent studies revealed that affiliates from foreign origin are contributing to introduce the diversity rhetoric in Portugal [1], although sometimes with trivial practical impact [2]. Efforts to translate that discourse to the Portuguese context were also reported, consisting mostly of its combination with the more traditional equality/nondiscrimination principles and/or the integration of the subject in the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) field [2]. The case of women as a political minority and their struggle to reconcile increasingly demanding jobs with the domestic and familiar responsibilities has been especially analyzed by Portuguese academics [3–5]. However, insufficient attention has been paid to the way distinct minority groups are being evaluated and dealt with in the current context of scarce resources and job opportunities in Portugal. This is a particularly relevant scenario to develop a study of this nature since at the same time that (a) it is expected to

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exacerbate identity attributes and thus fuel prejudice and discrimination [6], (b) a diverse workforce that fosters innovation and competently deals with diverse markets [7] seems vital.

Hence, the present study addresses the following research questions: How do organizations operating in Portugal evaluate the presence of specific minority groups? What organizational policies and practices are being developed and applied to specific minority groups? How do they reflect the distinct diversity approaches originated in the US, such as defined on Dass & Parker's [8] typology? Aiming to get an overview of the subject, a content analysis was made of the 24 corporate websites (out of the group of the 500 largest companies operating in Portugal) that presented diversity related contents in Portuguese language. Subsequently, an exploratory research was conducted on six of those companies, which relied on interviews with both managerial and nonmanagerial members and on the analysis of relevant corporate documents. The results highlight that *diversity* is not a monolithic concept. Instead, distinct identity groups can be evaluated and dealt with in specific ways in the same organization and at the same time. In particular, organizations may, consciously or not, avoid, tolerate, or appreciate the presence of distinct identity groups. The study also contributes by revealing that both the colonialist Portuguese past and the current financial crisis in Portugal have an impact on how minorities are being perceived and managed at the workplace.

Conceptual Background

Minorities and Other Related Concepts

The term *minorities* usually refers to groups of people that, in a particular social context, mainly national, are less common or do not characterize the majority of the population (i.e. *the dominant group*), but *the others* [6, 9]. Some minority identity attributes are related to the notion of disadvantage, like psychical and mental disabilities and chronic diseases [10]. Other human particularities, such as specific ethnicities and religions, may also be associated with character or competency flaws, as well as seen of less legitimacy in a given social/national context [11]. Hence, social and organizational prejudice (negative feelings) and discrimination (detrimental behaviors) are common outcomes for minority groups [6]. Despite their numeric representation, women constitute a political minority, since they are frequently considered of inferior status than men [12] and underrepresented in high-paying jobs and top management functions [13].

Several scholars proposed classifying the vast set of identity attributes mostly by discerning the more visible human traits from the less visible or intrinsic ones [14–17]. The more visible differences include biologic features such as gender, skin colour, age group, and notorious physical disabilities. The opposing side of the catalogue presents less detectable features (e.g. nationality of origin, ethnicity,

sexual orientation, and chronic disease), which individuals may opt to pass or camouflage when perceiving less tolerant societies and/or organizations [14, 18]. *Difference* is thus conceived as a social construct bind to space and time. Change is always possible, as exemplified by the increasing social acceptance towards minority lifestyles in big urban centres. But renewed intolerance towards *the outsider* can also occur, such as expected in societies facing severe financial conditions and few job opportunities [6].

Main Approaches to Deal with Workforce Diversity

The remarkable human heterogeneity that weaves the U.S. social fabric early impelled this country to find effective ways to deal with diversity at both social and organizational levels. The European countries have been significantly influenced by most of such proposals, which encompass particular views towards minorities. In the early twentieth century, the U.S. *melting-pot* ambition implied that minorities were accepted as long as they renounced to their cultural identity. By the 1950's–60's, the increasing proportion of ethnic minorities and their refusal and/or inability to blend in led the established majority to perceive them as a threat to the status quo [19]. The assimilation ideal was then replaced by what Dass and Parker [8] refer as the *resistance perspective* since this approach denies or avoids the difference, which also characterized the European post-colonial period.

Originated in 1964, the U.S. Equal Opportunities legislation recognizes the social groups that were historically discriminated against and demands organizations to adopt individual merit as the unique criterion for human resource decisions [20]. This legal approach is deemed fundamental to circumvent biased decisions [21], but falls short by ignoring the structural disadvantages of minorities. Moreover, it allows organizations to limit the presence of certain minority groups by claiming (apparent) meritocracy reasons, such as non-appropriate education or work inexperience. Equality/non-discrimination principles and laws integrate the national constitutions of the European countries, as well as the European Community legislation [22].

The recognition that the equality legislation was not sufficient to overcome the effects of past discrimination fueled the development of the U.S. Affirmative Action policies in the same decade [23]. Accordingly, organizations should promote the presence of historically disadvantaged groups, such as women and ethnic minorities. This approach was modestly implemented across Europe and its coercive character is usually dismissed. Member states are recommended to design training programmes to overcome the structural and educational barriers faced by ethnic minorities and older people, as well as to promote the integration of people with physical disabilities. Dass and Parker [8] classify the Equal Opportunities and the Affirmative Action policies as *Discrimination and Fairness* type of approaches, which are particularly characterized by conceiving differences as the cause of problems and, as a result, by demanding minorities' assimilation into the established culture.

The 1980's context of growing global competition assisted to the development of a strategic and voluntary approach that perceives differences as *creating opportunities*, such as defined by Dass and Parker [8]. In special, ethnic minorities are believed to help organizations respond to the needs of customers from the same cultural backgrounds [24]. Moreover, the exhibition of a diverse workforce is deemed to improve the organizational image among stakeholders who increasingly monitor companies' ethics and social responsibility initiatives [29]. Dass and Parker [8] evaluate this perspective as *legitimizing the access* of minorities to better jobs, but other authors criticize it on the grounds of its *essentialist nature* [16]—i.e. minorities are seen as serving particular business interests, but the individual's unique vocation and skills may well be ignored. The discourse that minorities bring important business advantages is frequently considered to be at odds with the traditional European values of equality and meritocracy [25].

The U.S. diversity management model, or multicultural approach, conceives diversity as a broader concept by including all human differences, and not just the ones traditionally protected by the legislation. According to Dass and Parker [8], it also assumes that individuals from distinct identity groups share similarities and that both difference and sameness must be managed in the interest of long-term *learning and effectiveness*. A diverse workforce is seen as offering the organization a wide spectrum of critical analyzes and innovative ideas [7]. Opponents claim, though, that the assumption that everybody is unique masks the structural disadvantages of specific minority groups [26]. The U.S. Diversity Management discourse seems to have conquered agenda among the E.C. politics. The European Commission website, link Tackling Discrimination, reads “The *Business Case for Diversity* shows that diversity management—whereby employers recognize, value and include women and men of different ages, abilities, ethnic origin, religion or sexual orientation—makes good business sense” [27]. However, investigations indicate that European companies usually translate the diversity model by mixing it with the more traditional equality rhetoric and social responsibility goals [28–31], thus revealing some resistance to embracing it.

Managing the Portuguese Social Diversity

From the fifteenth century to the last third of the twentieth century, Portugal carried out a significant colonialist venture. Native individuals from the several Portuguese colonies (e.g. Angola, Mozambique, and Brazil) were seen and treated as intellectually and morally inferior [32], an approach that persisted after the slavery period. Consequently, these minorities were typically confined to the less rewarding functions, usually more physically demanding, and expected to observe the Portuguese cultural patterns. With the end of the dictatorial regime in 1974 and consequent loss of the last colonies in Africa, more than half a million of the Portuguese people that had settled there came to mainland Portugal. This massive influx of people put extra pressure on a country that was the poorest nation in

Europe at the time [17], with extremely vulnerable finances and limited job and house markets. At least one decade was needed until these individuals were considered properly integrated into the established Portuguese society and seen as regular citizens. The integration into the E.C. in 1986 offered social, political, and economic stability to Portugal, attracting immigrants, mainly from the old African colonies and Brazil, as well as the Eastern Europe. The Portuguese policies of moderate tax and low salaries appealed to international investors and companies [33, 34], which contributed both to introduce foreign management knowledge in Portugal and increase its social diversity through the presence of expatriates.

However, the twenty-first century brought particularly tough challenges to Portugal. A number of local organizations closed or downsized and several international companies relocated their facilities to more attractive economies [35]. High unemployment rates and fiscal pressures, accompanied by a persistent contraction on social protection, culminated in a social crisis. Hard financial sacrifices are now being imposed to most of the population, in a remarkably different situation from two decades ago, when more people enjoyed a medium class existence. Not surprisingly, the 2014 OECD report indicated that the Portuguese people revealed one of the lowest levels of job satisfaction among member countries. Concurrently, social and workforce diversity in Portugal is still increasing. In a country where one income hardly supports a family, more women and older people demand huge participation and opportunities at work. The once omnipresent control of the Catholic Church over the Portuguese society does not seem so relevant nowadays and the definition of *proper* behaviors and lifestyles admits a wider spectrum, particularly in the major cities. On the other hand, the significant number of immigrants in Portugal originated noteworthy religious diversity, especially in the urban area of Greater Lisbon [36]. Moreover, great changes in the Portuguese legislation, namely the ones legalizing abortion and the marriage and adoption of children by same-sex couples are expected to nourish a more openly diverse society and contribute to diminish the reported negative feelings and discomfort of Portuguese people towards homosexuality [37].

In line with the increasing social diversity in Portugal, affiliates from foreign MNCs are contributing to introduce the U.S. diversity rhetoric into the Portuguese organizational landscape [1], although more progressive diversity policies and practices are still dismissed [2]. Yet, much less is known regarding how organizations (and their distinct actors) in Portugal evaluate, portray, and deal with specific minority groups in a context that combines increasing social heterogeneity and diversity rhetoric with scarce resources and job opportunities.

Methods

Previous research has found that only 54 websites from the 500 largest companies operating in Portugal (either from national or foreign origin/ownership control) displayed workplace diversity related contents [1]. Stage 1 of the current study

analyzes how the 24 corporate websites of that group that display such contents in Portuguese language portray and declare to manage distinct minority identity groups. Table 1 identifies these companies' main features, 11 of them being from national origin/ownership control and 13 from foreign origin/ownership control. Websites only presented in foreign language were dismissed on the assumption that they do not specifically address the Portuguese national context (but probably a global/international audience). It is worth noticing that a previous comparison was made between each of the 24 websites in Portuguese language and its corresponding English version (whenever the latter existed). Most of the native companies display similar equality/diversity contents in their local and international versions, but companies from foreign origin frequently reveal less developed and/or progressive contents in their Portuguese websites. This result adds to the conviction that the websites' contents in Portuguese language are the ones that address this specific national context, thus offering a more accurate picture on how distinct minority groups are perceived and dealt with in the corresponding company in Portugal.

Table 1 Main features of the 24 companies whose websites were analyzed

Designation	Sector of activity	URL in 2010
Companies from national origin/ownership control (also referred as <i>native companies</i>)		
CIRES—Companhia Industrial de Resinas Sintéticas, S.A.	Chemistry industry	www.cires.pt
Companhia Portuguesa de Hipermercados, S.A.	Food distribution	www.auchan.pt
Cooprofar—Cooperativa dos Proprietários de Farmácia, C.R.L.	Pharmacy distribution	www.cooprofar.pt
EDP Distribuição—Energia Lisboa (LVT)	Electricity distribution	www.edp.pt
Lactogal—Produtos Alimentares, S.A.	Agro-industry	www.lactogal.pt
Novadelta—Comércio e Indústria de Cafés, S.A.	Agro-industry	www.delta-cafes.pt
Petregal Lisboa (LVT)	Fuel distribution	www.galpenenergia.com
Recheio—Cash & Carry, S.A.	Food distribution	www.jeronimo-martins.pt
Salvador Caetano—Indústrias Metalúrgicas e Veículos Transporte, S.A.	Metallurgy industry	www.gruposalvadorcaetano.pt
Sumol—Gestão de Marcas, S.A.	Beverage industry	www.sumolis.pt
Unicer—Distribuição de Bebidas, S.A.	Beverage industry	www.unicer.pt
Companies from foreign origin/ownership control (also referred as <i>foreign companies</i>)		
BP Portugal Porto Salvo (LVT) (U.K.)	Fuel distribution	www.bp.pt
Companhia IBM Portuguesa, S.A. (U.S.)	IT services	www-5.ibm.com/pt
Eurest Portugal—Sociedade Europeia de Restaurantes, Lda. (U.K.)	Restaurant and catering industry	www.eurest.pt

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

Designation	Sector of activity	URL in 2010
Glaxosmithkline—Produtos Farmacêuticos, Lda. (U.K.)	Pharmaceutical industry	www.gsk.pt
Gespost—Gestão e Administração de Postos de Abastecimento, Lda. (Spain)	Fuel distribution	www.repsolypf.com
Mapfre—Seguros Gerais, S.A. (Spain)	Insurances	www.mapfre.pt
MSFT—Software para Microcomputadores, Lda. (U.K.)	Business software & services	www.microsoft.com/Portugal
Robert Bosch, Unipessoal, Lda. (Germany)	Automotive and industrial technology	www.bosch.pt
Siemens, S.A. (Germany)	Electrical and electronics industry	www.siemens.pt
Sociedade Portuguesa do Ar Líquido Arliquido, Lda. (France)	Chemistry industry	www.airliquide.pt
Tabaqueira, S.A. (U.S.)	Agro-industry	www.philipmorrisinternational.com/PT
Vodafone Portugal—Comunicações Pessoais, S.A. (U.K.)	Telecommunications services	www.vodafone.pt
Xerox Portugal—equipamentos de Escritório, Lda. (U.S.)	Electrical and electronics distribution	www.xerox.com

All 24 companies were invited to participate in stage 2 of the study, which aimed to further investigate the corresponding diversity perspectives and practices, but only six agreed to. Fictional names are used to protect their anonymity. N1 and N2 are *Native* (N) companies, while F3, F4, F5, and F6 are affiliates from *Foreign* (F) multinational corporations. A total of 44 members of these companies were interviewed, including the Human Resources directors, managers from distinct levels and areas, and collaborators with nonmanagerial positions (workers). The sample reveals diverse in gender (18 men, 26 women) and age (from 22 to 60). Most of the individuals were native Portuguese and five were foreigners from Angola, Mexico, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe. Interviews lasted 40–180 min and 43 of them were audio-recorded with previous consent. Individuals shared their perceptions on how their organizations access and manage specific minority groups, and some added personal experiences. Corporate documents from the six companies (e.g. websites, ethical codes, mission and values statements, corporate magazines) were examined in pursuit of references to diversity and, particularly, minority groups. The companies’ demographics were also considered. NVivo 8 supported the analysis of both interviews and the documents considering the analytical categories and subcategories described on Table 2.

Table 2 Analytical categories and subcategories

Analytical categories	Subcategories
Generic impressions towards equality and diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevance of a diverse workforce • Relevance of diversity initiatives • Workplace discrimination and prejudice
Diversity dimensions/minorities represented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender and parenthood • Nationality of origin/ethnicity • Age • Disability • Look and appearance • Religion and political ideology • Sexual/affective orientation
Jobs occupied by members of specific minority groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Function • Hierarchical level • Associated responsibilities and rewards
Benefits associated with the presence of specific minority groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced performance • More creativity and potential to innovate • Improved decision-making processes • Better response to diverse/international markets • Enhanced corporate image and reputation • Response to institutional expectations • Better work environment • Increased flexibility • Occupation of less interesting and rewarding functions • Employees with less negotiation power
Disadvantages associated with the presence of specific minority groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration problems • Performance problems • Interpersonal conflicts
Policies and practices directed to specific minority groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of the implemented policies and practices (e.g. minorities' recruitment, integration, training and career development, diversity training, diversity councils, work-life balance initiatives) • Corresponding motivations, aims and impact • Perception of corresponding relevance/adequacy
Organizational prejudice/discrimination towards specific minority groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manifestations • Consequences

Dass and Parker's [8] typology of the several diversity perspectives (described on Section "Main Approaches to Deal with Workforce Diversity") was developed considering the U.S. context. However, it seems to be an appropriate tool to assist in the interpretation and categorization of the current study's results given that most of those diversity perspectives were also identified in the European context. Moreover, the coexistence of several approaches is a possibility since this study aims to investigate the views and practices of companies from varied national origins regarding distinct minority groups. The use of these authors' comprehensive typology is thus expected to be of particularly assistance to such analysis.

Distinct Minorities, Distinct Perspectives

Most of the corporate websites from national companies specify the identity attributes they conceive as particularly susceptible to suffer from prejudice and discrimination, as exemplified next:

Equal conditions for all applicants are guaranteed in the HR recruitment processes, regardless of race, nationality, gender, religion, colour, marital status, social class, and political and sexual orientation.

Websites from companies from foreign origin/ownership control usually conceive diversity as a more inclusive concept that can bring advantages to the business. This is particularly noticeable in the case of companies from U.S. and U.K. origin. The next example is illustrative:

The company nurtures its cultural roots and interprets diversity as a value and condition for success. Openness and tolerance build a work environment that fosters each member's creativity, innovation and dynamism.

The next sections of this chapter analyze how distinct minority groups are portrayed in the 24 analyzed websites, as well as evaluated and dealt with by the six companies participating in stage 2 of the study.

Gender

Whenever the websites' diversity discourse refers specific identity attributes, gender is always addressed. However, while native companies tend to merely assure the existence of equal opportunities between men and women, several foreign companies express their commitment to promote gender balance. The next quotes are illustrative:

The same selection conditions are guaranteed for all candidates, regardless of gender, race or religion.

We are working to increase the presence of women on the board of directors. To achieve it, we are improving our promotion and recruitment practices and rethinking our assessment methods.

N1 managers positively evaluated a gender balanced workforce, considering that "it provides a healthier work environment" (Portuguese male middle manager). However, this view has not stimulated concrete initiatives on the part of this company, such as work-life balance measures. Parenthood, for instance, is faced as a private matter that only concerns the individual, as a female middle manager with a baby explained:

Children are time and energy sponges and sometimes it is hard to keep the former work standards [before parenthood]. But if you are truly committed, somehow you will work it out.

N2 managers declared to value “women’s soft skills, like interpersonal ones” (Portuguese female top manager) as well as the contribution of female workers to “a healthier work environment in the assembly lines” (Portuguese female line manager). This company has developed substantial work-life balance initiatives (e.g. the 67 free hours/year policy for child care) that, according to the HR director (Portuguese male) aim to “alleviate the collaborators’ family and household responsibilities, particularly women’s, but also to promote women’s career development”.

F3 reveals a remarkable proportion of women (85%) in the production units, as well as their significant presence in administrative functions. However, men clearly dominate this company’s management positions. No formal work-life balance policies and practices were ever defined, but some schedule flexibility is permitted in the administrative and management functions. In contrast, the HR director (Portuguese female) explained that such measures “are impossible to implement in the production units, since work is organized in teams and has to follow a strict schedule” (Portuguese female HR director).

F4 website proclaims that “[F4] promotes and supports a diverse workforce”, but this discourse did not prevent this organization from revealing significant gender imbalance: only 25% of the workforce is female and merely 22% of the management positions are occupied by women. Acknowledging this problem, the company presents gender balance as its major diversity goal and is willing to hire and promote more women. A generous set of work-life balance initiatives (e.g. flexible work schedule and a number of convenience services such as babysitting and takeaway) was also developed to help reduce gender imbalance, as concluded by the HR director (Portuguese female): “To promote the presence of women is our main diversity goal. (...) Our extensive list of work-life balance measures assists in this goal”.

Women are well represented in F5’s management, administrative and R&D functions. However, their access is denied when it comes to operational functions, a policy that is explained and perpetuated by the long lasting lack of feminine dressing rooms. Male workers naturalize gender segregation: “Everybody knows that some functions are for men, particularly if they are physically demanding” (Portuguese male worker). Apparently, the North-American HQs did not stimulate the affiliate to address this problem or to develop work-life balance practices.

At F6, the predominance of women in assembly line posts and men at the engineering functions is argued to result from “the profiles recurrently exhibited by the corresponding applicants, not from any organizational policy or practice” (Portuguese female HR director). Moreover, the interviewed managers contemplate that great gender balance on management positions is particularly promoted by the company’s significant work-life balance initiatives (e.g. the free summer activities for the collaborators’ children). However, this topic does not seem to be captivating great attention among workers, who are more particularly concerned with job stability. The next quote exposes this perspective: “Frankly, I don’t care for gender equality. What I care most about is keeping my job. I don’t feel very demanding nowadays” (F6, Portuguese female assembly line worker).

Nationality of Origin/Ethnicity

In the websites from both national and foreign companies, pictures representing collaborators and clients/consumers usually reveal men and women with the kind of appearance that people from Portuguese origin associate with themselves (particularly, brown hair and medium-light skin colour). On the other hand, pictures of people from ethnic minorities tend to figure on the CSR sections/links. The few foreign individuals employed in N1 are from Brazil, Eastern Europe, and African ex-colonies. Managers considered them as “neither an obstacle nor a benefit to the company” (Portuguese female HR director). They occupy less demanding and rewarding operational functions, particularly in the assembly lines, and their presence has not stimulated any specific socialization and integration measures. Moreover, Portuguese native workers revealed little sympathy for the difficulties faced by ethnic minorities, considering that “this is a time of great difficulties for everybody, not just for [ethnic] minorities!” (Portuguese female worker).

N2 facilities in Morocco employ a significant number of native people in both operational and management functions. They are perceived as contributing to the company’s international aims since “better than us [the standard ‘Portuguese workers’], they know the culture, needs and tastes of clients from the same culture” (Portuguese male middle manager). However, this business case argument, often deemed as “essentialist” [16], has not pervaded the official N2 discourse, since “the Portuguese audience would find it odd” (Portuguese male top manager). In the Portuguese facilities, some foreign individuals from more developed European countries (e.g. England and Denmark) integrate management and R&D functions. However, immigrants from Africa and Eastern Europe are confined to assembly line posts, a situation that the HRM Director (Portuguese male) justifies with “the corresponding inferior education and type of work experience”.

F3 employs a remarkable mix of people from 17 less developed countries in their production units, mainly from Eastern Europe and ex-African colonies. Managers assess their presence as being an asset to the company, given their minor status, ambition, and negotiation power: “These people are grateful for the opportunities they have found here, so they are more willing to make sacrifices than Portuguese employees, such as working extra hours and on weekends” (Portuguese male line manager). Also in this company, the few foreigners occupying management functions are from more developed countries, such as the UK. Some Portuguese native workers considered that the development of policies and practices promoting the presence of ethnic minorities was inappropriate or even unfair, since “They [ethnic minorities] are absorbing the few available jobs and that’s not fair!” (F3 Portuguese male worker).

F4 has a significant number of collaborators from foreign origin, such as Belgian, Mexican, Angolan, and Cape Verdean. The presence of these individuals is valued and promoted since they are perceived as “offering cultural and linguistic skills that help the company in better communicating and fulfilling the needs of

diverse clients” (Portuguese female HR director). Two dark-skinned collaborators from African origin described experiences of discrimination and prejudice in the Portuguese society, but categorically denied similar treatment at F4.

At F5, there is one Belgian top manager and one British R&D employee, but the few employed Brazilian and East European individuals occupy less demanding and rewarding functions at the production lines. A Portuguese male middle manager clearly associates the individual’s country of origin with the opportunities found in this company:

We [at the affiliate] are not unlike the Portuguese society and culture. So, we support all these defeating segregation and racism principles, but when confronted with a real situation, our attitude may be quite different. For instance, we may dismiss a candidate from an ethnic minority arguing that he/she does not have the proper education or experience, but, in fact, we’re camouflaging prejudice and stereotypes. (...) A non-white person who comes from a less developed country (such as an old African colony) is more accepted in a lower level task, no doubt. A French, English or German person easily integrates a top position because our mindset associates them with higher knowledge and competence.

F6 employs a significant number of foreign individuals (mostly technicians from Japan, Ireland, England and Germany), since the “company values their singular skills and experiences” (Portuguese female HR director). The organization promotes their smooth integration in both the company and the Portuguese society (e.g. helping them to find suitable houses and schools for their children). Curiously, though, there are no individuals from Africa, Brazil, and/or Eastern Europe, which represent the major part of the Portuguese immigration pool.

Age

Websites from national companies usually display pictures of younger male and female adults, while the pictures presented by foreign companies’ websites tend to reveal higher age diversity for both genders. At N1, age diversity was positively evaluated by managers, who find that “it’s important to mix the dynamic youth with the responsibility and wisdom of the elder ones” (Portuguese male line manager). On the contrary, the preference for a younger workforce was detected in both N2 and F3, where negative serotypes prevail:

It’s a matter of fact that older people are more resistant to change and less willing to embrace challenges. (N2, Portuguese male HR director)

Older people lack the strength and dynamism to deal with the hard work in the production units. (F3, Portuguese male manager)

Managers from F4, F5, and F6 did not reveal a preference towards either younger applicants/workers or more experienced ones, and no contradictory evidence was found in these companies’ demographics.

Disability

Among the analyzed 24 websites, only one from a native company and three from foreign companies have specific diversity/equality sections. In such cases, pictures representing collaborators with notorious physical disabilities (mostly in wheelchairs) are displayed. N1's non-discrimination discourse, presented in both the website and the lobby's chart values, alludes to the condition of disability. Despite this rhetoric, no individual with this condition works at N1 as managers consider that "it would be too complicate to hire someone with severe disabilities, such as a person in a wheelchair" (Portuguese male middle manager). This opinion and practice seems unjustified both in terms of architectural barriers (since the new facilities have elevators and ramps) and the available functions (for instance, the administrative functions and call centre posts available could be occupied by people with disabilities).

N2 managers depict the integration of people with disabilities as a relevant social responsibility aim. However, individuals with this profile are kept apart from external stakeholders, as a top manager (Portuguese female) explained: "Let's be honest, clients and visitors don't want to come face to face with workers with disabilities. Other functions, where they are not so exposed, and don't feel so observed, are better for them".

F3 managers presented the demanding coordination and speed skills required by operational functions as major impediments to the presence of people with physical disabilities. The absence of this identity group in administrative functions was associated with the notorious access problems in the offices (mainly the lack of ramps and large elevators), which are located in an old building. Nevertheless, the company employs some individuals with light mental disorders in functions that do not involve direct client contact, describing such measure "as part of the company's social responsibility commitment" (Portuguese female HR director).

Blind individuals and wheelchair users collaborate with F4 through telecommuting arrangements because this policy "reduces our expenses with appropriate equipment and space" (Portuguese female HR director). However, since these individuals are kept apart from colleagues and clients, they may have fewer career opportunities [38].

Access ramps were recently installed in F5 to accommodate a worker who became paraplegic after a car accident. Apart from this reactive measure, no formal policies and/or practices concerning people with disabilities were adopted.

F6 employs a number of ear-impaired women in assembly line functions because "they reveal more concentration and are thus less prone to making mistakes" (Portuguese female HR manager). In contrast, people with mobility handicaps are excluded since "the assembly line functions demand high coordination and speed skills" (Portuguese male line manager).

Appearance

Websites from both national and foreign companies usually display pictures of men and women that, according to the traditional beauty patterns, can be considered attractive. In three of the analyzed companies, appearance does seem to matter. Less common looks are not free from judgment at N1, as revealed by a Portuguese male manager: “There is a delivery guy with a funny multicoloured hair and people get suspicious. But, after all, he proved competent”.

N2 managers consider less usual appearances (e.g. piercings, tattoos, and peculiar haircuts) as inappropriate for employees dealing with clients because “they do not seem so trustworthy, they don’t reflect the company’s image” (Portuguese male middle manager). Also in this company, women who want to succeed are expected to renounce their femininity and adopt a more conservative or even masculine look:

Women who want to succeed here must adjust to a male business world. [...] If you come to a board meeting wearing something revealing, your ideas won’t be taken seriously. (Portuguese female top manager)

At F3, less attractive men and women are placed in functions that involve no contact with clients, such as cleaning. In this respect, a top manager (Portuguese male) asserted: “Let’s face it: people don’t want to be assisted by someone who looks very unattractive or sick!”

Managers from the remaining companies (F4, F5, and F6) did not disclose any particular position regarding physical appearance, seemingly neither valuing nor depreciating diversity at this level.

Religion and Political Ideology

Most of the 24 analyzed websites (i.e. regardless of the companies’ nationality of origin) declare that employees are not evaluated on the basis of their religion. Conversely, managers from all of the six further investigated companies considered wiser to keep religion and political ideology private in order “to avoid conflicts, particularly among workers who are less educated and open to difference” (N2, Portuguese female middle manager).

Sexual/Affective Orientation

The websites of companies from foreign origin frequently include sexual orientation among the list of identity attributes that must be protected against discrimination, while this is less frequent on native companies’ websites. Individuals from most of

the companies participating in stage 2 of the study (N1, N2, F3, F5) vehemently expressed the idea that homosexuality must not be revealed at the workplace:

That thing [homosexuality] should be kept private. (N1, Portuguese male worker).

I don't care if a collaborator is homosexual and, especially, I don't want to know. In some cases, you know, ignorance is a bliss. (F3, Portuguese male manager)

However, the same individuals did not consider inappropriate behavior when heterosexual people disclose private matters at work, such as wedding plans, because "these are normal" (N2, Portuguese male middle manager). Moreover, some individuals denied the existence of homosexual collaborators in their company. This result (unlikely to be correct in such companies employing a large workforce) suggests that collaborators who have this sexual/affective identity may be concealing it and, consequently, experiencing anxiety at the workplace [14].

Discussion

Gender emerges as the most frequently mentioned identity attribute on the diversity contents of the 24 corporate websites. Websites from native companies usually declare the organizational commitment to guarantee equal opportunities between men and women, while several websites from foreign companies present gender balance as a relevant goal. Work-life balance initiatives are deemed useful to promote the presence of women at the several hierarchical levels, including management positions, by half of the companies participating in stage 2 of the study. Gender segregation is still a reality in some of the sample companies and this situation is perceived not so much as a problem but rather as something "natural", i.e. associated with tradition and/or physical complexion. Both the persistent gender segregation and the assumption that work-life balance initiatives are mostly developed because women need them reinforce this group's minor status [39].

Websites from both national and foreign companies usually represent collaborators and clients/consumers through pictures of men and women with a complexion that is easily associated to Portuguese native people. Seemingly, these companies devalue the fact that a more diverse population characterizes the contemporary Portugal. Moreover, this option may risk communicating that individuals from national origin are privileged candidates, as well as deemed more significant buyers. On the other hand, pictures of people from ethnic minorities tend to figure on the CSR sections/links, thus suggesting that companies regard them as disadvantaged groups that must be protected for ethic reasons, rather than as a valuable workforce or client pool.

The foreign nationality of origin is faced differently depending on the specific country of origin. Members from more developed countries, such as the US, Germany and the UK, are appraised as possessing more sophisticated know-how and, thus, as significantly contributing to the organizational competitiveness.

In contrast, individuals from Brazil, Angola and Mozambique (which were former Portuguese colonies), as well as from Eastern Europe, are generally found in less intellectually demanding functions. These results suggest ethnic stereotypes and ethnocentric attitudes that echo both the Portuguese colonial past and the world’s geopolitical division [40]. As argued by Mighty [9], the individual’s geographic origin influences the place s/he occupies at work.

Common age stereotypes in the Western societies [41] seem to prevail and influence people’s management decisions in a couple of the analyzed organizations, curiously one native company and an affiliate from foreign origin. Even more usual is managers’ perception that the demanding requirements of operational functions are among the major factors preventing the employment of people with disabilities in the correspondent companies. This argument suggests that these individuals are associated with functions that are less intellectually demanding, as if their physical condition implied cognitive problems as well. Moreover, some managers considered wiser to keep individuals from this identity group (as well as less attractive workers) in functions that do not involve contact with external stakeholders. Findings also suggest that these individuals tend to be perceived and dealt with as targets of CSR actions rather than valued by their specific talents. Both practices preclude the full integration of people with psychical disabilities and limit their career opportunities.

Religion and political affiliation are considered controversial subjects that should be silenced at the workplace. Moreover, although it is considered normal and expected that heterosexual employees reveal private life details, homosexuality is perceived as a private issue that should not be disclosed, a view that conceives homosexuality as a deviant behavior.

Drawn on Dass and Parker’s [8] typology, Table 3 summarizes the way the companies participating on the study are evaluating and dealing with distinct identity groups.

Table 3 Organizational approaches towards specific identity groups in the analyzed companies

According to Dass and Parker’s [8] typology	Main results	Minority identity groups/attributes and corresponding organizations
<i>Resistance Perspective</i> (Diversity as threat)	<i>Rejection/avoidance</i> Workplace discrimination. Limited employment opportunities. Organizations do not benefit from minorities’ talents and skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ageing individuals (N2, F3) • Unusual/unattractive looks (N2, F3) • Mobility disability and health problems (N1, F6)
	<i>Denial/nonissue</i> Differences must be silenced/concealed. Minorities may experience anxiety and reveal lower performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minority sexual orientations (N1, N2, F3, F5) • Religion and political affiliation (N1, N2, F3, F4, F5, F6)

(continued)

Table 3 (continued)

According to Dass and Parker’s [8] typology	Main results	Minority identity groups/attributes and corresponding organizations
<i>Discrimination and Fairness Perspective</i> (Differences cause problems)	<i>Accommodation/Controlled access</i> Limited opportunities and access to specific functions. Minorities may be perceived as targets of CSR actions but are not valued by their talent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender segregation (F3, F5) • Physical disability and health problems (N2, F3, F4, F5, F6) • Unusual/unattractive looks (N2, F3) • Immigrants from less developed countries (N1, N2, F3, F5)
<i>Access and Legitimacy Perspective</i> (Differences create opportunities)	<i>Appreciation</i> The presence of minorities is valued but not enough to compel organizations to actively promote it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender diversity (N1) • Age diversity (N1) • Immigrants from more developed countries (N2, F3, F5)
	<i>Promotion</i> Minorities are viewed as possessing specific talents/skills due to their identity groups. Their presence is promoted in specific functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender diversity (N2, F4, F6) • Immigrants from specific nationalities of origin (N2, F4, F6) • Physical disability—the case of ear-impaired women (F6)
<i>Learning Perspective</i> (Differences and similarities offer opportunities and bear costs)	<i>Full access</i> Minorities are evaluated on the basis of their particular talents/skills (regardless of identity attributes)	Discourse found among some websites of companies from foreign ownership/control but not among the analyzed companies

Final Considerations

This study particularly contributes by exposing diversity as a social construct that can reflect as many facets as the minority identity groups present in a specific space and time. Most of the diversity approaches described on Dass and Parker’s [8] typology were, indeed, found coexisting in the Portuguese organizational context, some of them revealing more than one form. Companies that either reject/avoid the presence of certain minorities (e.g. ageing individuals) or deny the existence of some (less visible) identity attributes among their workforce (e.g. homosexuality) can be considered as adopting the *Resistance Perspective*. Attributes such as physical disability, less common looks, and ethnicity were tolerated but perceived as bringing potential problems to some companies. This evaluation features in the *Discrimination and Fairness Perspective*, which is mainly characterized by

confining such minorities to specific jobs and functions, as well as demanding their unilateral adaptation to the organizational culture. The *Access and Legitimacy Perspective*, which implies that differences are perceived as generating specific benefits, was seldom observed in the sampled companies and, when identified, it was mostly circumvented to gender balance and foreign nationality (particularly when referring to more developed countries). Moreover, this approach was found as assuming either a more active form if the organization really develops policies and practices to promote such diversity, or a passive one if the organization merely appreciates the (accidentally) existing diversity. The *Learning Perspective*, which conveys a wider conception of difference and the pursuit of multiple objectives derived from diversity, was detected in the website contents of some affiliates from foreign origin, but was virtually absent from the interviews conducted on the analyzed companies.

This study also exposes diversity as a concept that is socially (re)interpreted and (re)negotiated over time. In concrete, although compassion, solidarity and support are communal values traditionally attributed to the Portuguese society [42], the persistent economic difficulties faced by this country seem to be thwarting the sympathy towards the specific challenges faced by ethnic minorities, since native people evaluate their own situation as equally tough. This is particularly evident when it comes to foreign individuals from less developed countries, such as the former Portuguese colonies in Africa, who are perceived as absorbing job opportunities but failing to contribute with valuable talent. Moreover, most managers considered wise to avoid religious and ideological comments at the workplace, an opinion that may be intensified by the current climate of tensions in Europe. Also significant is the fact that the affiliate from foreign origin with more global activity (F4) distinguishes itself by its appreciation of diversity, particularly in terms of cultural background and gender. Such result demonstrates the impact that complying with distinct institutional contexts may produce in terms of diversity perspectives and practices.

Longitudinal studies that analyze the corporate websites' contents, and particularly the six sample companies, may expose the impact of more current changes, such as the integration of Syrian refugees into Portuguese workplaces and the recently elected left-wing government along with its corresponding social and work policies. On the other hand, similar studies focusing on small and medium-sized enterprises constitute a significant avenue of research since they are still dominant in the Portuguese organizational context. Given that the current study reveals that the same identity group can be perceived differently in distinct organizations operating in the same national context (e.g. avoidance of elder employees vs. appreciation of age diversity), it is expected that such variety of responses would be amplified if companies of different sizes were included. Studies comparing companies from more traditional versus more high-tech activity sectors are also expected to offer stimulating results and discussions, as well as to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the way minority identity groups are evaluated and managed in the Portuguese organizational context.

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