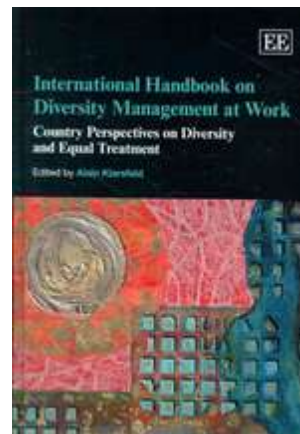


Klarsfeld Alain, (ed.) *International Handbook on Diversity Management at Work: Country Perspectives on Diversity and Equal Treatment*

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Reviewed by Dr. George Simons at www.diversophy.com

This handbook offers perspectives on 16 different countries worldwide concerning two issues, equal opportunity legislation and diversity practice. More specifically the editor's focus is to examine these issues to discern whether diversity management itself retains or has departed from its roots in such legislation. Additionally, the editor asks his authors to examine whether there is empirical research in support of legislation and practice and, if a legal framework is absent, is there public debate about diversity issues and what does it entail.



The book aims to clarify the constraints and the action framework for creating public policies around diversity as well as to indicate the current state of and desired directions that both research and public discourse should take in both analyzing and supporting this framework or, as Klarsfeld prefers to call it, "typology." The countries discussed include: Austria, Belgium Canada, France, Germany, India, Italy, The Netherlands, Pakistan, Singapore, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland Turkey, the UK and the USA.

The upfront list of contributors is nicely written, as each contributor is listed not only by professional status, but his or her expertise and interests are illustrated by sample listings of current work. The author list is substantially diverse for this undertaking with quite a few writers coming from Northern Europe and Germanophone countries. Unlike many research compendia, Klarsfeld's introduction gives not just thematic mention of each chapter, but also a generous summary of the work of the contributors in the sections that follow, making the reviewer's job in this respect almost redundant.

This leaves me with the opportunity to discuss what stands out in the treatment. Noteworthy, in general, is the role of history in the discussion of the development of diversity concerns and efforts in each country. For example the first chapter explores the contrasting situations of Turkey and Pakistan in regard to gender equality and educational and work opportunities. Both Islamic in religious orientation, one state became constitutionally secular while the other was founded for the purpose of being a Muslim homeland. Both have substantial gains in gender equality as well as endemic blockages. One can imagine, however, that the current state of economics and politics may create substantial hindrances in the case of Pakistan.

India is, of course, like eating an elephant, where to start? The authors have focused on the public sector employment reservations system of affirmative action as their staging ground in an environment where caste and class, urban and rural, as well as religious divides and poverty are too big to swallow with any single process of inclusion. Singapore on the other hand seems almost small enough to overlook but there are worthy lessons there as well. The Chapter's subtitle, "Equality, harmony and fair employment" is the theme of this city-state's efforts as well as a tribute to the efforts at building a diverse and integrated nation. This has proceeded well and is a strong ongoing civic project in the place of segregation which marked British rule and the ensuing struggle for identity when it came to an end.

South Africa's history imprints its diversity efforts with unique challenges. Born of conflicts between colonial powers and populations as well as poor treatment of indigenous peoples and stamped by the bitter experience of apartheid, managing diversity had been the perennial challenge in the shaping of the Union. This is long before the issues associated with contemporary diversity could be employed and modified to suit the purposes of today's multilingual, multiracial democracy. This chapter reviews the history of the area. It documents the goals and legislative practices in search of equity and diversity management in the Republic. It puts a particular focus on "designated groups" of historically disadvantaged people. Both ownership and shareholding as well as employment and education are important issues here. One can characterize the situation as progress but with a continuing uphill struggle as questions are being raised about Affirmative Action and its effectiveness on the legislative level. Perhaps the greatest challenges however lie in developing a mindset and safe psychological framework where integration and the national identity formation are in fact in their infancy and scars of the past run deep..

From this reviewer's perspective, a distinguishing strength of this handbook is the consistent presence in many of the chapters of this relatively rich historical embeddedness that helps make sense of the trajectory of each national diversity story and concerns. All too frequently the focus on equality and data in publications about diversity work and the relativism found in cultural comparisons in interculturalists literature tend to deflect historical detail if not actively avoid it. The use of summary tables at the end of chapters enables the reader to review the current status of diversity legislation, discourse and organizational efforts in each country. This reader discovered that looking at each summary table before beginning the chapter was a boon to intelligent reading and retention of critical facts. This is a very well disciplined anthology. At one point I felt it would have made better sense to have organized the book regionally, i.e., Europe, Asia, North America, etc., as the chapters seemed to flow haphazardly in this regard. In retrospect, however, it seems that the order in which the information was offered kept it in better focus and avoided contaminating comparisons.

Klarsfeld is a coauthor of the chapter on France, which is a somewhat intriguing case, with its principles of equality and integration coming in conflict with the day-to-day experience of discrimination and inequity. Republican France is a latecomer to the European diversity debate as it has had a different mental model of citizenship with a deliberate disregard of difference. This challenges its ability to see and address many issues as well as to visualize remedies that work within its framework. One is forced to ask if there some sense of the inability to digest difference beneath the current politics connected to the current steps being taken to expel the Roma?

I was a bit disappointed with the Chapter on Germany which, though well written, reflected an obsession with gender equality, with only scant mention of ethnic integration, and seemed to ignore entirely the phenomenon of *die Wende* and its impact on diversity. As in many things German, one can feel the passion for *Ordnung* in the mastering of the diversity situation. Gender, however, remains focal in much of the EU in which is reflected in the German and Italian discussions here. Immigration and intra-European mobility seemingly prefer to lurk in the shadows, only recently bursting out in the Netherlands. Here debates on gender relations and sexual orientation are common as well but it is hard to get consensus on legal steps to support a real diversity agenda. Sweden's focus on integration has been longstanding and functional but attitudinal change toward racism and discrimination has not penetrated either corporate or public attitudes, witness again current political trends. Diversity theory and practice in Switzerland despite the historical pluralistic and multilingual nature of the state and the more recently growing numbers of immigrants, is in fact minimal and has largely been generated on the basis of the penetration of German and US corporate models.

One wonders whether to include the UK in the same paragraph with the rest of Europe. The Channel separates more than land masses, and the visible heritage of empire and Commonwealth on the streets of Britain is a phenomenon in its own right. Further, one must admit that perhaps the English language accessibility of diversity resources from the US scene have overly structured the debate along the lines of US discourse and models. At the same time, however, questions are being raised about whether British social initiatives should follow in the boilerplate steps of affirmative action and equal opportunity, inclusion and talent management, for example, or penetrate more deeply into rectifying histories of discrimination and addressing prejudice. In other words, there is a debate between those supporting a pragmatic business case methodology and those arguing for an ethical standards approach. However, in the UK's legal context compliance is still the chief motivator of organizational diversity decisions, while the diversity language of the private and public sectors show different priorities.

This is not surprisingly similar to the variants of diversity discourse in the USA whose treatment is in the chapter following on the UK one. The authors offer an extensive chronological documentation of the development of diversity legislation created in response to social movement. This begins in the 19th century and culminates in the Civil Rights movement of the second half of the 20th and it explains a lot, particularly to the non-USian reader, of the issues and language that have dominated diversity thinking. I think the editor has made an excellent choice in placing this as the last chapter in the book rather than the first, so as not to let what is already a seemingly hegemonic influence overly color the reading of the other national experiences that are explored and discussed, particularly as the book is in English and is inevitably stamped with the diversity vocabulary and, dare I say, "syntax" of the US experiment in pluralism.

Recognizing that the experience of and discourse around diversity worldwide has learned and borrowed much from the extent of pioneering legal and commercial practice in the USA in recent years, this handbook sets into perspective how peculiar the US is in terms of how its population was created ethnically, how its abolitionist and civil rights struggles emerged, and how its particular form of feminism have set the agenda for its diversity work.

There is the temptation for US diversity executives and practitioners to assume a hegemonic role in diversity worldwide through the globalization of commercial practice with little sense of the historical roots and the social and ethnic contexts of diversity challenges elsewhere. This makes this handbook approach and its contextual presentations extremely useful, indeed a vademecum, for managers and practitioners from the USA who undertake to establish diversity policy and practice in their corporate and organizational affiliates and partner organizations abroad. It is an introduction not only to relevant national tendencies, but in many cases the diversity issues are determined regionally within countries and differing urban and rural conditions may be important factors in shaping diversity policy. One also senses attention to useful detail for the reader, e.g., a table of the names of Belgian Institutions engaged in diversity is offered in English, French and Flemish.

Summary evaluation: Up-to-date, useful, well documented and understandably written; a model hopefully for similar explorations.