



# Concepts of Diversity in the Time of Sigismund of Luxembourg (1368–1437): Introductory Remarks and Conceptual Approaches\*

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On January 20, 1438, a memorial service for Sigismund of Luxembourg was held in the cathedral of Ragusa (now Dubrovnik). Sigismund, who had been king and emperor of many realms, had died a few weeks earlier, and in many regions of Europe, he was commemorated with church services, the ringing of bells, and solemn speeches.<sup>1</sup> Ragusa was no exception: here, in front of an exclusive audience, the Italian scholar Philip Diversi (†1452) spoke in memory of the deceased.<sup>2</sup> Philip first referred to his unworthiness and then outlined Sigismund's connection to Ragusa before moving on to the emperor's greatest achievement: Sigismund's commitment to unity in the Church, evident in his efforts against the Ottomans and Hussites. Whole countries, including "Italy, Germany, Spain, Gaul, England, all the transalpine regions, all peoples and nations" even the very "earth and all the seas [...], the rivers, mountains, valleys, and finally all elements"<sup>3</sup> had born witness to Sigismund's achievements. The

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\* We would like to thank our anonymous reviewers for their remarks, which helped clarify our argumentation.

1 Jörg, "Trauerfeierlichkeiten Kaiser Sigismund." On rituals in Ragusa, cf. Janeković Römer, "Public rituals," 7–43.

2 On Philip Diversi and his speeches, see the studies by Janeković Römer, "The orations of Philip Diversi," 43–79; Janeković Römer, "Newly Discovered Autograph," 67–117; Janeković Römer, "Laudes civitatum," 275–89.

3 Janeković Römer, "Oratio in funere Sigismundi imperatoris," 52–83, here 59–60: *Attestatur demum Italia, Germania, Hispania, Galia, Anglia, omnes provincie transalpinae, omnes regiones, omnes gentes ac nationes. Testantur terre et omnia maria, testantur flumina, montes, valles, et omnia denique elementa longos crebros continuos ipsius comeatus, incredibiles labores, maxima capitis pericula rectissima consilia, singularissimos modos, divinam sollicitudinem, prudentiam apertam, et admirabilem industriam quae tam sollicite, constanter, intimide, sapienter, diligenter, clare, benignissime et astute egit, exercuit, passus est, subiit, adhibuit [...]. in opus adduxit atque demonstravit cum ea loca, illas oras, remotissimas regiones, et ipsum universum orbem, reges, duces, principes et populos christicolos preter sui regalem dignitatem discurreret et*

emperor had traveled to all “places, coasts, the most remote regions and the whole world, as well as to kings, leaders, princes, and Christian peoples”<sup>4</sup> with tireless commitment and prudence. If this picture of imperial omnipresence did not convince the members of Philip’s audience, they should compare their own deeds with those of Sigismund. They would then clearly see that their achievements hardly bore any comparison with his, “neither with regard to the variety of regions, nor the effort to travel all over the world, nor the speed of their execution, the dexterity of warfare, the number or size of battles, or the conclusion of peace and alliances.”<sup>5</sup> Thus all the peoples of all the many languages of Europe should commemorate the great emperor’s passing.

Similarly, almost four years earlier, Isidore of Kiev (†1462) had commented on Sigismund’s praiseworthy character and accomplishments. Isidore had traveled to the Council of Basel as a delegate of the Byzantine Emperor John VIII Palaiologos to negotiate the union of the Latin and Greek churches.<sup>6</sup> En route, he stopped at the Imperial Diet in Ulm, where he held a panegyric speech and managed to persuade Sigismund of the importance of future cooperation. Isidore also praised Sigismund’s commitment to the unity of Christendom throughout Europe (only logical in view of his efforts to bring about Church union). Sigismund, Isidore insisted, was well equipped to do this. He was, after all, fluent in Latin, German, Hungarian, Czech, and Italian.<sup>7</sup> In addition, Isidore claimed, Sigismund had shown a sense of justice and foresight. He had stayed awake “through whole nights in concern for the state [... and had taken care] with foresight of peoples, cities and people, and everything that concerned them!”

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*circiret et conveniret unde summo christianorum consensu, eius sanctissimis exortationibus initum convocatum, congregatum atque confectum est, illud splendidissimum, sanctissimum divinissimumque Constantiense concilium in quo cum bona fere infinita acta fuerint unum maximum totius christianitatis saluberimum culmen completum exitit.*

4 Janeković Römer, “Oratio in funere Sigismundi imperatoris,” 52–83, here 60: *In opus adduxit atque demonstravit cum ea loca, illas oras, remotissimas regiones, et ipsum universum orbem, reges, duces, principes et populos christicolos preter sui regalem dignitatem discurreret et circiret et conveniret unde summo christianorum consensu, eius sanctissimis exortationibus initum convocatum, congregatum atque confectum est, illud splendidissimum, sanctissimum divinissimumque Constantiense concilium in quo cum bona fere infinita acta fuerint unum maximum totius christianitatis saluberimum culmen completum exitit.*

5 Janeković Römer, “Oratio in funere Sigismundi imperatoris,” 52–83, here 62: *Si enim ante oculos ponere libuerit omnes a nostris imperatoribus omnes ab ex terris gentibus potentissimisque populis omnes a regibus clarissimis res tractatas voluerimusque cum suis comparare palam videbimus nec diversitate regionum nec orbis circiendi solitudine nec perficiendi celeritate nec bellorum studio nec preliorum numero aut magnitudine nec pacis aut concordiarum confectione posse conferri.*

6 On the political and religious context, see Kolditz, *Johannes VIII*.

7 Schlottheuber, “Bedeutung von Sprachen Luxemburgerherrscher”; Deuschländer, “Höfische Erziehung und dynastisches Denken.”

Isidore also noted that if the emperor's presence was necessary somewhere, "then [he did] not allow [himself] any rest, without thinking even in the least about postponement or rest for the body. As if on wings, [he seemed] to fly here and [was] always on the move [...]."<sup>8</sup> Isidore expressed his astonishment at the emperor's devotion and accomplishments with an exclamation rich with pathos: "Who has as much power and rulership and who commands as many vast peoples [...] as you, Your Majesty?"<sup>9</sup>

### *Ruling Diverse Realms and Territories: The Case of Sigismund of Luxembourg*

Sigismund of Luxembourg (1368–1437) not only ruled over an impressive array of territories but also reigned for a long period of time. From the perspective of diversity, Sigismund of Luxembourg's reign represents a fortunate but also challenging case study. Fortunate because immensely rich and varied sources have survived from Sigismund's long reign in Hungary, the Holy Roman Empire, and Bohemia. These sources provide detailed insights into the significance and roles of categories of difference, social affiliations, group identities, and negotiation processes. The two examples introduced above only give a small glimpse of these kinds of bonds and processes. Challenging, however, because Sigismund was confronted with very different cultural and political conditions in each of his kingdoms. The reality of a personal union across several kingdoms therefore consisted less of a centrally organized power structure and more of different spheres of influence with their own structures and methods of exerting influence. The rule of Sigismund as a cosmopolitan figure who governed vast territories led to a multiplication and differentiation of monarchical centers.<sup>10</sup> Resilient alliances, effective communicative strategies, and a considerable degree

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8 Hunger and Wurm, "Isidoros von Kiev," with the critical edition of the speech at 154–63 and a German translation at 164–73. We refer to the last part of passage no. 6, in the German translation p. 170: "ganze Nächte in Sorge um den Staat [...] und kümmerst] Dich vorausschauend um Völker, Städte und Menschen und alles, was diese betrifft [...]! Wenn aber irgendwo Deine persönliche Anwesenheit nötig ist, dann gönnst Du Dir keine Ruhe, ohne auch nur im mindesten an Aufschub oder Erholung für den Körper zu denken. Wie auf Schwingen scheinst Du bald hierhin, bald dorthin zu fliegen [und] bist immer in Bewegung [...]."

9 Hunger and Wurm, "Isidoros von Kiev" (as note 8), 171: "Wer hat schon so viel Macht und Herrschergewalt und wer gebietet über so viele riesige Völker [...] wie Du, Majestät?"

10 We refrain from providing a comprehensive description of the current state of research and merely refer to a few particularly influential studies: Hruza and Kaar, *Kaiser Sigismund*; Takács, *Sigismundus Rex et Imperator*; Pauly and Reinert, *Sigismundus von Luxemburg*; Hoensch, *Kaiser Sigismund*.

of everyday political pragmatism were constitutive for the period of Sigismund's rule. Depending on the situation and the local balance of power, Sigismund, his allies, and his opponents alike had to renegotiate or reconfirm interests, power relations, and coalitions in different regions, depending on the temporal, spatial, and social contexts.

The territories ruled by Sigismund and the neighboring regions significantly influenced by him served as the framework and the focal points of case studies for the international and interdisciplinary conference “DIVERSITAS (Sigis)MUNDI – Politische, soziale, religiöse und kulturelle Vielfalt in der Zeit Sigismunds von Luxemburg (1368–1437)” [DIVERSITAS (Sigis-)MUNDI. Political, social, religious, and cultural diversity in the time of Sigismund of Luxembourg (1368–1437)], which took place in Munich in February 2023.<sup>11</sup> The conference aimed to reveal dynamics, conflicts, regional peculiarities, and the significance of various affiliations in the time of Sigismund of Luxembourg by focusing on a range of case studies. In addition to questions of political history, issues involving social and economic history, migration history, gender history, religious history, object and art history, personal history, and spatial history were considered. Presentations and joint debates were dedicated to the question of how religious, cultural, and linguistic diversity influenced local practices of rule and governance. Furthermore, we considered the extent to which categories of difference (such as religion, social status, gender, and ethnicity) established politically relevant group constellations. We also discussed whether specific practices and semantics were developed to cope with diversity. Finally, we considered the ways in which the various categories of difference overlapped or reinforced one another.

In order to provide a forum for discussion of these questions, the conference focused on the period of Sigismund of Luxembourg (1368–1437). But more importantly, it considered the meanings and applicability of diversity as an analytical term for Medieval Studies. The conference panels were structured around four fields: political, social, religious, and cultural diversity. These fields enabled the participants to focus on a variety of types of diversity, e.g. religious practices, concepts of the unity both of the Church and of empires. Other issues were discussed, including multilingualism, the roles of learned men and women, multiple cities, and propaganda and conflicts.

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11 For a conference report and summary, see Willert, “Tagungsbericht.”

This special issue of the *Hungarian Historical Review* presents selected case studies from the 2023 conference. Instead of providing a summary of the papers or retracing the four conference sessions, our introduction focuses on the various possible meanings of the term diversity, methodological approaches to the study of diversity, and the relevance or applicability of these approaches to the field of Medieval Studies.<sup>12</sup> We discuss ways in which we can study political, social, religious, and cultural differences in the Middle Ages through the prism of diversity and the terminological and methodological challenges this presents.

*Modern and Historic Meanings of “Diversity”: Approaching a Challenging Term and Its Usages in Medieval Studies*

The term diversity can be understood in a variety of ways, as current debates concerning social/gender/class equality and sociological discussions about social orders aptly demonstrate.<sup>13</sup> In historical research, however, there seems to be no fixed definition. For this reason, the conference concept used a broad understanding of this term, defining diversity simply as any potential system of differentiation.<sup>14</sup> Some conference papers noted that diversity is not merely an analytical term, as one does indeed find the Latin term *diversitas* in numerous medieval sources.<sup>15</sup> However, more than once it became clear that this term does not translate to a modern concept of diversity, especially not to diversity as “celebration of difference.”<sup>16</sup> This first impression, if perhaps vague, is confirmed by the definition of *diversitas* provided by the Oxford Latin Dictionary:

dīuersitās, -ātis *f.*

1. A state of being apart, separateness, distance.
2. The condition or fact of being different, diversity, difference; difference of method.
- 3a. Difference of opinion, disagreement (between).
- 3b. a contradictory state, inconsistency.<sup>17</sup>

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12 Our text merges the introduction to the conference (J. Burkhardt) and the summary (P. Schweitzer-Martin).

13 For an introduction to various methodological approaches, see Vertovec, *Routledge International Handbook*; Krell, *Diversity Studies*.

14 On difference as an analytical category, see Ruby, “Security makes a difference”; Hirschauer, “Un/Doing Differences?”

15 See, for example, the quotation from Philip Diversi’s speech in note 5 above.

16 Berend, “Medieval diversity.”

17 Glare, *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, 617.

These observations lead us to two questions. First, is it misleading to use the term diversity in studies on the Middle Ages despite the fact that it may well have meant something else in the sources? Second, is diversity a useful neutral and methodologically convincing term?<sup>18</sup> Numerous papers of this special issue highlight that the term could have an ambiguous or even negative nuance in the Middle Ages.<sup>19</sup> Does that mean we should draw distinctions between positive and negative connotations of diversity in historical research?

To provide some idea of how these two questions can be handled, we should first discuss conceptual and terminological aspects regarding diversity. Today, the concept of diversity is of growing importance and finds itself at the center of political and social debates (e.g. political/religious/social/ethnic/gender diversity, diversity management in work environment, biodiversity, etc.).<sup>20</sup> For the most part, the term is used to refer to issues of race, class, and gender, but it is not limited to these aspects.<sup>21</sup> The Merriam-Webster Dictionary provides recent examples on the web for each dictionary entry.<sup>22</sup> These examples suggest that American newspapers and magazines tend to use the term diversity together with the word inclusion, so the term indeed leans towards aspects of race, class, and gender.<sup>23</sup>

This certainly is not the way Sigismund of Luxembourg or his contemporaries (the case study for this special issue) would have understood diversity. However, recent trends and debates have clearly reflected on academic research and on study programs taught at history departments and other university institutes.<sup>24</sup>

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18 Klymenko, “Religious Diversity”; Müller, “Alterity and Self-Understanding”; Reinle, “Diversity and Divergence”.

19 E.g. Schneidmüller, “Unitas and Diversitas”.

20 Gaupp, “Epistemologies of Diversity”; Vertovec, *Superdiversity*, 125–39; Mounk, *The Great Experiment*.

21 Brauner, “Recht und Diversität,” 9–84, especially 9–16.

22 “In an era where there is so much focus on equity, diversity, and inclusion, Chybowski felt that bringing Chong to UConn would provide invaluable input, with his life’s work focused on exploring and dismantling history, geography, race, and culture.” Melanie Savage, *Hartford Courant*, February 2, 2023. “Rihanna has also made philanthropy part of her mission by championing diversity and inclusion through all of her brands and pledging \$15 million towards climate justice through her Clara Lionel Foundation.” Cameron Jenkins, *Good Housekeeping*, February 2, 2023. “The Black History Month promotion comes as part of AMC’s work with groups like their in-house African American Experience Council, which is working to promote diversity and inclusion within AMC’s ranks and offerings.” Tim Chan, *Rolling Stone*, January 30, 2023. Merriam-Webster, “Diversity.” February 2, 2023.

23 And as the example of Rihanna, a popular artist, shows, diversity can involve huge amounts of money. Taylor, “Fenty Beauty’s Diversity-based Business Model.”

24 Various German universities offer special programs on “Diversity studies” (apart from regular MA/BA study programs). See, for example, the initiatives in Bamberg (<https://www.uni-bamberg.de/diversity/>)

In January 2023, for example, the History Department at the University of Münster advertised a permanent position (open to historians of all historical periods) as lecturer with a focus on diversity.<sup>25</sup> They were seeking someone who could teach “in the field of ‘diversity’ (including culture, religion, ideology, ethnic or social origin, gender, age, disability),” understood as “a social phenomenon as well as a key concept and field of research in historical studies.”<sup>26</sup> According to this text, the department’s concept of diversity is quite broad. Compared to the focus fields of our conference, it additionally comprises ideology, ethnic origin, gender, age, and disability.<sup>27</sup> Overall, this advertisement testifies to a growing academic interest in this field, independent of specific periods, as much as it shows how extensive and vague the very concept of diversity is.

Drawing on this example, we pondered the extent to which the term is relevant (or increasingly relevant) to the field of Medieval Studies in particular. Without claiming completeness, we tried to establish a first impression based on findings generated by searches in the bibliographical databases RI-Opac (Regesta Imperii-Opac) and IMB (International Medieval Bibliography). According to our statistical analysis, the term diversity (or “Diversität” in German) has only come into use for publications by medievalists since the late 1990s. If one counts all entries using the term “Diversität” or “diversity” in the title of a book or article without, however, counting titles that were indexed with the term diversity, the number of results is limited: about 90 in the IMB and about 30 in the RI-Opac. Compared to many other key words of medieval studies, these are fairly low numbers. As is so often the case, there are various explanations. Mostly, this topic has a lot to do with labels. There has been considerable research and scholarship on social and religious difference in the Middle Ages, but often this scholarship is part of studies focused mostly on other topics and therefore does not show in

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diversity-in-lehre-und-studium/diversity-themen-in-der-lehre/), Munich (<https://www.lmu.de/de/die-lmu/-arbeiten-an-der-lmu/zusaetzliche-angebote/diversity/index.html>), Bonn (<https://www.gleichstellung.uni-bonn.de/de/universitaetskultur/gender-diversityvorlesungsverzeichnis>) or Heidelberg (<https://www.uni-heidelberg.de/diversity/genderlehre.html>).

25 Universität Münster, *Lehrkraft für besondere Aufgaben*, January 18, 2023.

26 “Lehrfähigkeit im Bereich Diversität (u.a. Kultur, Religion, Weltanschauung, ethnische oder soziale Herkunft, Geschlecht, Alter, Behinderung) als gesellschaftliches Phänomen sowie als geschichtswissenschaftliches Schlüsselkonzept und Forschungsfeld.” Quote from the advertisement as in note 25.

27 Some of these aspects are also touched upon by the papers in this special issue. Gender, age, and disability are not at the core of the case studies, but they are discussed to a certain degree. But these aspects certainly have been studied and are studied for the Middle Ages. See, for example Neumann, *Old Age before Modernity*; McDonagh et al., *Intellectual Disability*; McNabb, *Medieval Disability Sourcebook*; Nolte et al., *Disability history der Vormoderne*.

the databases if one considers only the titles of publications. Examples include studies focused on the crusaders or on pluri-religious cultural contact zones.<sup>28</sup>

What, however, do authors mean when they use the label diversity for their publications? Diversity is often used as a synonym for “variety” or “plurality,” and vice versa.<sup>29</sup> These terms are not quite the same in English and German, but they have clear overlaps. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary describes diversity as “the condition of having or being composed of differing elements (especially the inclusion of people of different races, cultures, etc. in a group or organization).”<sup>30</sup> Plurality is defined as “a) the state of being plural, b) the state of being numerous, c) a large number or quantity,”<sup>31</sup> while variety is “the quality or state of having different forms or types.”<sup>32</sup> While we cannot discuss the manifold studies on plurality in the Middle Ages here,<sup>33</sup> we would like to suggest the use of diversity as an analytical tool for Medieval Studies. This is not a political agenda that seeks to highlight or promote diversity in history. Rather, compared to terms such as plurality and variety, diversity as a concept seems to offer the clearest focus on individuals and groups, and this makes it an attractive concept for the study of social groups and their structures and forms of identity.

### *Diversity as an Analytical Tool for Medieval Studies? Conceptual and Terminological Suggestions*

Accordingly, the levels of meaning and areas of application of this term vary considerably. Diversity is often used to describe very different areas, ideas, and social practices. Cultural scientist Margit E. Kaufmann even characterizes diversity as a “tense dispositive of the *Zeitgeist*.”<sup>34</sup> According to Kaufmann, the widespread use of the term diversity can be understood as a reaction to tensions within Western societies. Cultural anthropologist Steven Vertovec even states that our time is not necessarily “characterized by a higher degree of social

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28 See, for example: Echevarría et al., *Religious Plurality*; Baumann et al., *Religion – Migration – Integration*.

29 On this methodological problem, see Strack and Knödler, “Einleitung,” 8–16 and (for a diachrone perspective) Wiese, “Religiöse Positionierung.”

30 Merriam-Webster, “Diversity.”

31 Merriam-Webster, “Plurality.”

32 Merriam-Webster, “Variety.”

33 See, for example, Ehrich and Oberste, *Pluralität – Konkurrenz – Konflikt*, and Borgolte, “Mittelalterwissenschaft.”

34 Kaufmann, “Mind the Gaps.”

difference than earlier times, but [...] discourses about diversity are ubiquitous in the contemporary era.”<sup>35</sup>

From a historical perspective, on the other hand, Thomas Bauer, professor of Islamic and Arabic Studies, recently noted a significant loss of diversity and ambiguity in modern times under the catchphrase of the “disambiguation of the world” (“Vereindeutigung der Welt”). Bauer suspects that this development is a trait of modernity, which is characterized by a trend toward the annihilation of diversity and the rejection of ambiguity. In contrast, Bauer attests to the exemplary character (from the perspective of diversity) of pre-modern societies, because they were “tolerant of ambiguity” (“ambiguitätstolerant”) and thus well versed in modes of dealing with social, cultural, and religious differences. In contrast to countries in Africa, the Near East, or Asia, which he contends offer examples of “real multiculturalism” (“wirkliche Multikulturalität”), Bauer considers pre-modern Europe monocultural due to the homogenizing effect of Christianity: “In the pre-modern era, no continent was as religiously and culturally uniform as Europe.”<sup>36</sup>

A medieval monarch like Sigismund of Luxembourg or his contemporary observers like Philip Diversi and Isidore of Kiev would probably have been surprised by this assessment. After all, Sigismund ruled and influenced large parts of Europe. Sigismund was always confronted with diverse day-to-day political disputes, different groups, differing concepts of belonging, and a differentiation of participatory structures, whether these differences were consequences of the “Great Western Schism,” the war against the Hussites, debates concerning the power of disposition in his kingdoms, efforts to unify Christendom, or defense measures against the Ottomans.

But do we need the concept of diversity for research on Sigismund and his time? Does the study of historical constellations through the prism of diversity really yield new or different findings? Or is diversity just a buzzword synonymous with variety, plurality, or multiculturalism? And does the term, which is used today primarily in reference to race, class, and gender, possibly direct our gaze away from forms of alterity in medieval societies? The aim of this special issue is not to impose modern notions of diversity on medieval societies. Nevertheless,

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35 “Wir leben im Zeitalter der Diversität. Das heißt nicht unbedingt, dass die Gegenwart durch ein höheres Maß an sozialen Unterschieden gekennzeichnet ist als frühere Zeiten, sondern dass Diskurse über Diversität in der heutigen Zeit allgegenwärtig sind.” Vertovec, *Diversität*, 21. See also Vertovec, *Superdiversity*.

36 “In der Vormoderne war kein Kontinent religiös und auch kulturell so einheitlich wie Europa.” Bauer, *Die Vereindeutigung der Welt*, 10.

it seems that a term that is primarily used with political and social connotations and implications has great potential for academic discussions, less as an empirical than as an analytical category.

At the heart of diversity lie “different conceptions of social difference.” It is thus a relational concept which highlights differences in terms of social categories and can be applied to relational structures within a social space. Consequently, as Steven Vertovec suggests, an important basic assumption is “the recognition of social difference,”<sup>37</sup> regardless of which aspects are brought into focus. This is also where Moritz Florin, Victoria Gutsche, and Natalie Krentz started in 2018 when they made the first systematic attempt to make diversity applicable to historical case studies. They understand diversity as a “system of differentiations”<sup>38</sup> that could be pronounced and asserted differently depending on historical constellations. First, a broad reservoir of categories of difference is to be assumed (e.g. religion, language, gender, social position, etc.), which can become visible and effective in different ways. Then, we must ask for forms of dealing with these social differences. In addition to the marking of otherness, the resulting options for perception and action are crucial. These include both observable positioning by means of clothing, symbolic external presentation, and use of language or religious practice and discursive positioning within a social hierarchy.<sup>39</sup>

Depending on the context, differentiated categories can lead to social inequalities, disparate distribution of resources, and different opportunities for participation. They can but do not necessarily have to contribute to the consolidation of social hierarchies. At the same time, the categories that are used to define and legitimize differences are variable in terms of their content or use, and thus the practices and semantics of differentiation are similarly variable. Categories of difference can be used to legitimize or negate claims to resources or to create new normative orders.<sup>40</sup>

Diversity as a historical category of analysis thus does not serve as a means of tracing static forms of inclusion or exclusion.<sup>41</sup> Rather, according to our hypothesis, it can further more nuanced contextualization of political, social,

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37 “Verschiedene Vorstellungen von sozialer Differenz” and “die Anerkennung sozialer Differenz”: Vertovec, *Diversität*, quotes 21 and 23.

38 “System von Differenzierungen”: Florin et al., *Diversity – Gender – Intersektionalität*, 9.

39 See also Hirschauer, “Telling People Apart.”

40 Burkhardt, “Frictions and Fictions.”

41 There are various profound studies on mechanisms of inclusion/exclusion in the Middle Ages. We refer only to some works, without any claim of exhaustiveness: Goetz and Wood, *Otherness*; Folin

cultural, and religious differences and hierarchies historically in their relevance to processes of social negotiation and also reveal semantic or narrative changes in the ways in which these differences were reified, challenged, or exploited.<sup>42</sup> Whether “plurality” (“Vielfalt”) is an adequate synonym for diversity or whether, as in recent migration research, terms such as “multiplicity” (“Vielheit”)<sup>43</sup> or alternatives are more appropriate remains a matter for discussion.

The papers in this special issue consider which sources reveal information about social differences and hierarchies. They thereby show that a variety of sources and phenomena can provide knowledge about forms of social differentiation. One can easily state that it is possible to study diversity in the Middle Ages and that this study of diversity is fruitful. However, not everything we can study has to be studied or has the same importance. Without any doubt, the concept of diversity offers new perspectives on social groups and phenomena that have not been given the attention they deserve. At the same time, we need to discuss whether and how the modern concept of diversity is applicable to the Middle Ages. The easy answer would be yes, it is applicable, but we have to be cautious and precise. It is important to understand the study of diversity not solely as analysis of markers of difference, such as race, class, and gender, but also as the study of concepts, definitions, and uses of variety, understanding contemporary assessments of such variety and its social functions and contexts.

Baring this in mind and based on the papers of the conference and the articles in this special issue, we would like to highlight four aspects that struck us as good reference points to show why it is important to focus on diversity as a concept. First, when applying the concept of diversity, many case studies also found notions of unity and uniformity. These concepts are certainly essential to any understanding of groups and societies, and thus they are of great importance to the field of medieval studies. In some cases, unity and uniformity seem to be opposed to social differentiations. In other cases, these differentiations can be part of unity. Thus, as an analytical tool, diversity can further a more nuanced understanding of how various forms of unity were understood and how they functioned.<sup>44</sup>

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and Musarra, *Cultures and Practices*; Tolan, *Expulsion and Diaspora*; Eisenbeiß and Saurma-Jeltsch, *Images of Otherness*; Reichlin, “Ästhetik der Inklusion”; Borgolte and Dücker et al., *Integration und Desintegration*.

42 Louthan et al., *Diversity and Dissent*.

43 Terkessidis, “Komplexität und Vielheit.”

44 See, for example, Murray, “From Jerusalem to Mexico”, and Sère, *L'invention de l'Église*.

Second, differences and hierarchies typically can be found in processes of inclusion and exclusion used by self-fashioning social groups. This becomes visible in the cases of numerous religious groups and subgroups but also in uses of language (understood broadly also as discursive styles), forms of symbolic expression, and communication strategies.<sup>45</sup> At the same time, the papers discuss how social groups were imagined, for instance in the case of individual cities, knights, the nobility, and possibly even heretics.<sup>46</sup> If we analyze these constellations through the prism of diversity (within a realm or outside it), we can arrive at a richer grasp of how these groups were constructed and how they functioned.<sup>47</sup>

Third, we can ask whether positive and negative conceptions of diversity can be handled analytically the same way. Negative and positive connotations of diversity certainly are closely linked to processes of inclusion and exclusion and can even be used as tools in these processes. As a term, diversity has a number of meanings, ranging from separateness and the condition of being different to a difference of opinion. And scenarios of diversity are conceived in multiple ways. If possible, in our analysis we should make clear how diversity was assessed at the time in its specific context to preclude misconceptions by modern readers.<sup>48</sup>

And last, what role do differences and imaginations play in learning and imitating in art and scholarship, in connecting people, and in establishing opportunities for cultural exchange? Contact zones (understood both spatially and socially) seem to be especially fruitful for these questions.<sup>49</sup> These contact zones can include regions such as the Adriatic or the Mediterranean,<sup>50</sup> assemblies such as councils or parliaments,<sup>51</sup> and cities and even courts.<sup>52</sup> We can study both the intellectual works and artifacts produced in these milieus and contact zones and we can focus on individual people and their motives and interests.

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45 On new forms of communication and publishing in the Late Middle Ages, see Schweitzer-Martin, *Kooperation und Innovation*; Brockstieger and Schweitzer-Martin, *Between Manuscript and Print*.

46 Pleszczyński et al., *Imagined communities*; Stouraitis, *War and Collective Identities*; Hovden et al., *Meanings of Community*.

47 Burkhardt, “Argumentative Uses”; see Hübner, “Impossible Propaganda” and Adde, “League of Lords.”

48 On the question of medieval “alterity,” see Jaspert, “The Mediterranean Other”; Srodecki, “Antemurale-based Frontier Identities,” and the discussions in Braun, *Wie anders war das Mittelalter*.

49 See, for example, Mersch and Ritzerfeld, *Lateinisch-griechisch-arabische Begegnungen*.

50 Jaspert and Kodlitz, *Entre mers – Outre-mer*; Jaspert, “Iberian Frontiers Revisited”; Ehrich and Oberste, *Städtische Räume*.

51 Burkhardt, “Assemblies Holy Roman Empire.”

52 See, for example, Opacic, *Prague and Bobemia*; Schlothuber and Seibert, *Böhmen und das Deutsche Reich*.

These four spotlights highlight only some aspects and debates of this special issue. In many cases, the focus on diversity puts social groups, social practices, social discourses, and forms of identity building or interactions with these forms of identity into focus. This seems to be a promising way of broadening our perspective on the period of Sigismund of Luxembourg beyond the emperor and the nobility surrounding him. Analyzing modes of differentiation in the Middle Ages thus means applying the analytical category of diversity, which furthers a more nuanced understanding of social groups, their practices, and how they interacted with and conceived of one another.

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