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Recognizing diversity in Czech classrooms: Teachers' perceptions and (un)certainty

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Abstract

This study examines Czech elementary and secondary school teachers' perceptions of classroom diversity, focusing on visible and concealable student differences, including those related to sexual orientation and gender identity (LGBT+). Based on survey data from 701 class teachers across diverse regions, we explore how urbanicity, measured by municipality size, is associated with educators' recognition of and (un)certainty about various identities. Teachers in larger municipalities, particularly Prague, reported greater perceived diversity and lower uncertainty in recognizing LGBT+ students, partially supporting the cosmopolitan thesis, which associates exposure to difference with increased openness. However, we distinguish cosmopolitanism as a cultural disposition from urbanicity as a demographic indicator, emphasizing that they should not be conflated. Unexpectedly, institutional support for managing diversity in the classroom did not vary systematically with municipality size, suggesting that local leadership and training are more influential than demographic context. While urban teachers tended to view diversity more positively, those in smaller municipalities expressed greater uncertainty, especially regarding less recognizable identities, such as sexual orientation, gender diversity, and religion. These findings highlight the roles of concealability, stigma, and cultural norms in shaping recognition of diversity. We argue that inclusive education requires not only policy change but also cultural and institutional transformation.

Keywords: Inclusive education, classroom diversity, stigma, LGBT+, teacher perceptions, Czech schools

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1. Introduction

Educational inclusion has become a central principle of contemporary schooling, aiming to ensure that all students can participate and succeed regardless of their individual characteristics. Over the past three decades, many education systems have expanded their understanding of inclusion beyond students with special educational needs (SENs) to encompass a broader range of diversities (Ainscow & Miles, 2008; Florian, 2008). Yet teachers continue to face uncertainty about which differences require attention and how to address them in everyday practice.

Czech inclusion policies have focused mainly on formally recognized categories such as disability, socioeconomic disadvantage, or linguistic difference (Michalík et al., 2022). However, these frameworks overlook forms of diversity that are socially sensitive or invisible – such as sexual orientation, gender identity, or mental health status. Because these attributes can be concealed and are often stigmatized, little is known about whether teachers perceive them at all or how they interpret them relative to more visible differences.

While international studies have examined how stigma, concealability, and teacher beliefs shape inclusion (e.g., Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009; Copur-Gencturk et al., 2023; Farrelly et al., 2022), research in Central and Eastern Europe still centers

on structural inequalities, particularly ethnicity or socioeconomic status (Čada, 2015; Straková et al., 2021). Empirical evidence about teachers' subjective perceptions of less visible or contested identities remains scarce.

This article addresses this gap by analyzing how class teachers in Czech elementary and secondary schools perceive student diversity. Using a unique dataset, we examine which differences are recognized or overlooked and how teachers' (un)certainty about presence of diverse students in their classes reflects broader social visibility and stigma. The study thus illuminates how inclusion is negotiated not only through policy but through educators' everyday understandings of who is 'different'.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Shifting conceptions of inclusion and diversity in Czech schools

Inclusion and diversity in education have undergone significant transformations over the past few decades, reflecting broader societal and educational shifts. Originally, inclusion strategies emerged to address the limitations of integration models for students with special educational needs (SEN) (Florian, 2008; Hájková & Strnadová, 2010; Pivarč, 2020). Over time, however, its scope has widened in response to documents such as the Salamanca Statement (1994), broadening the focus of inclusive education to

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encompass cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and other forms of diversity (Hloušková et al., 2015). As a result, inclusion is now viewed as an ideal that ensures all students, regardless of differences, have equitable access to learning opportunities and reach learning outcomes (Ainscow & Miles, 2008).

In practice, inclusion requires educators to recognize and respond to a wide range of student characteristics, including disabilities, socioeconomic disadvantage, linguistic differences, and exceptional talent. Increasingly, somewhat less visible or recognizable attributes such as non-heterosexual orientations, non-cisgender identities, and psychological conditions demand attention in inclusive education. Clearly, students' diversity encompasses multiple types of attributes that differ in how easily they can be observed from the outside, how easily they can be concealed, and the degree of stigma associated with them. Some of these attributes may be more easily recognizable, like ethnicity or physical disability (Hays, 1996; 2016), while others (such as low socioeconomic background, non-heteronormative orientation, non-cisnormative identity, or psychological conditions) may be more difficult to register or detect in any given context without active sharing by the person. This difficulty is indeed tied to various forms of stigmatized identities, where some are related to conspicuous cues that may be more easily recognizable and more difficult to conceal, in contrast to others that may be inconspicuous and prone to societal taboos (Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009). Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that cultural context and societal understandings of what is 'normative' and what is 'non-normative' vary across time and space (Pitoňák, 2019). Hence, a wide spectrum of human diversity may fall outside normative social categories and face more pronounced risks of prejudice, stigmatization, and discrimination in some contexts than in others (Smith et al., 2023).

Stigmatization may occur on the basis of a broad range of student attributes, including those formally recognized and protected within educational institutions (e.g., disability status, linguistic minority, socioeconomic disadvantage). Yet the presence of institutional protections does not guarantee equitable treatment: even when educators are able to identify marginalized identities and express sensitivity to their presence, such recognition does not necessarily translate into nondiscriminatory or supportive behaviors (Smith et al., 2023). Educators' capacity to act in responsive, bias-sensitive ways may be impeded by gaps in knowledge and competencies, by the influence of implicit stereotypes and prejudices, or by the absence of pedagogical discourse that foregrounds inclusive response strategies (Copur-Gencturk et al., 2023). Therefore, it is crucial not only to recognize diverse student attributes, but to understand how they are perceived, negotiated, and responded to across different sociocultural and geographical contexts. Such understanding is central to creating equitable and supportive school environments (Farrelly et al., 2022).

As noted by Quinn and Chaudoir (2009), individuals recognize and navigate different aspects of identity based on how these are perceived within specific cultural and institutional settings. In schools, educators often interpret diversity through a combination of broader cultural stereotypes and the specific pedagogical norms outlined by curricular documents and institutional practices. This interaction shapes their sensitivity to different student attributes, not only reflecting societal biases but also the norms and expectations embedded in educational environments (Smith et al., 2023). Likewise, students form their own sense of what diversity attributes are significant, influenced both by personal identity development and the distinct social climate of the school. As a result, identity expressions in school may diverge from those factors outside of it, depending on how safe or supported students feel in revealing certain characteristics. Recognizing how these patterns emerge in educational settings is critical for developing inclusive school cultures that respond equitably to the full range of student diversity (Farrelly et al., 2022).

Czech teachers, as shown in both international studies (Hippe et al., 2016) and national research (Straková et al., 2021), often perceive student learning outcomes as largely predetermined by socioeconomic and personal background factors rather than as outcomes that can be significantly shaped through targeted pedagogical interventions. In this context, it is essential to deepen our understanding of teachers' beliefs about the diverse sources of disadvantages and differences that influence school learning, particularly since only some of these are formally recognized under the official category of special educational needs (SEN). The Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MŠMT) defines students with SENs in terms of the specificity of the learning process caused by individual conditions and functioning. It works with a relatively broad list, encompassing students with physical disabilities, psychological or neurodiverse conditions (e.g., ADHD, autism), socioeconomic disadvantages, linguistic differences, and giftedness (i.e., talent). While these classifications provide valuable insights into visible or formally documented attributes, they fail to capture characteristics deemed socially sensitive or those that may be more concealed, which might also impact specific aspects of school learning. This gap underscores the need for more sensitive and nuanced approaches to understanding diversity in classrooms.

Data on various student characteristics in the Czech Republic are drawn from multiple resources, including school administrative records, reports from Special Pedagogical Centers (SPC) and Pedagogical and Psychological Counseling Centers (PPP), and aggregated data managed by MŠMT. The recent Atlas of the Education of Students with Special Educational Needs in the Czech Republic (Michalík et al., 2022) is likely the best available geographical synthesis of these inputs, incorporating historical and regional datasets, geographic analyses, and supplementary demographic data to map disparities and trends in the education of SEN. These data sources offer robust insights into specific characteristics, including disabilities, socioeconomic status, and linguistic differences. However, those characteristics that may be less visible/noticeable or more stigmatized, such as religious affiliation, sexual orientation, and gender identity, are not covered by the official definition of SEN and are thus underreported or entirely absent either due to privacy concerns, societal stigma, and methodological challenges (Pitoňák, 2021; Seidl et al., 2012).

2.2 Intersectionality of stigma and concealability: educational implications

The concept of intersectionality, originally developed by Crenshaw (1989) to describe the overlapping systems of oppression affecting Black women, has since been widely applied to analyze how multiple social categories, such as race, gender, class, migration status, and others, interact to shape individuals' experiences in various contexts, including education (Varsik & Goročovskij, 2023). Intersecting factors, such as ethnicity, language proficiency, and socioeconomic status, have been established as key subjects of research on classroom diversity also in the Czech Republic (Jarkovská et al., 2018). For instance, Romani students often face compounded stigma based on their ethnicity and economic marginalization (Čada, 2015), while students of Vietnamese descent may achieve high academic performance, yet they remain othered due to visible bodily differences (Freidingerová & Nováková, 2021). Here we may reflect upon a normative colloquial concept of 'white Czechness', which further privileges ethnic Bohemians, Moravians, Silesians, and sometimes Slovaks as native, conflating nationality and ethnicity in ways that obscure the experiences of minority groups. Hence, although foreign students accounted for 7% of the student population in 2022/2023, their experiences of inclusion often depend on others' perceptions shaped by visible differences, language proficiency, and regional norms (Jarkovská et al., 2018).

While ethnicity and socioeconomic status often dominate discussions of diversity, educators must navigate a broader constellation of differences, including mental health issues, exceptional talent, and often more inconspicuous identities like sexual orientation and gender diversity. Goffman's (1963) theory of stigma highlights how societal devaluation of specific attributes can marginalize individuals. Today, we recognize that stigma is multidimensional and intersectional; however, it is primarily the factor related to the concealability of stigmatized status that makes it a particularly salient concept in researching classroom diversity and inclusion. According to Jones (1984), concealability refers to whether identity can be hidden from others. And it is precisely this factor of concealability that was found to significantly affect students with mental health problems, LGBTQ+ identities, or neurodiverse traits (Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009; Smart & Wegner, 1999).

The social identity theory highlights how individuals navigate multiple, intersecting aspects of their identity within the broader social and cultural context (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). For sexual and/or gender minority (SGM) students, these intersecting identities often amplify their vulnerability, as the stigmatization of one aspect of their identity can shape and compound their overall experiences of exclusion or marginalization. Although the potential for identity to be concealed may allow students to conceal their differences and help prevent or mitigate bullying or discrimination, it may also lead to heightened stress and isolation (Pachankis, 2007). Similarly, unaware or uncertain of these concealed identities, educators may inadvertently fail to provide the necessary support, further exacerbating students' challenges (Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009). In turn, this uncertainty factor may complicate teachers' ability to address diversity effectively, especially when their implicit biases may go unexamined in the absence of explicit confirmation about a student's identity (Galano et al., 2024). Some teachers may feel ill-equipped to offer the necessary support, whether this involves facilitating a student's coming out, addressing gender incongruence, or referring them for mental health services (Hinshaw & Stier, 2008; Jussim & Harber, 2005).

In contrast, when a student's perceived identity is both visible and socially devalued, such as low socioeconomic status, physical disability, or minority ethnicity, teachers often become acutely aware of the difference, potentially overlooking others who possess more easily concealed and/or stigmatized identities (Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009). Yet, as we mentioned already, the ability of educators to notice marginalized identities does not in itself guarantee sensitive engagement, as their responses may be limited either by insufficient competencies or by the persistence of stereotypes and prejudices that remain unchallenged within pedagogical discourse (Copur-Gencturk et al., 2023; Smith et al., 2023).

Amid these complexities, the teacher's role in shaping inclusive classrooms cannot be overstated. Individuals bring their experiences, biases, and assumptions into their professional practice (Gay, 2002; Milner, 2010). Under stress or cognitive overload and in the lack of institutional support, educators might rely on stereotypes, especially concerning students from visibly marginalized groups. Self-fulfilling prophecies arise when lowered expectations cause students to underperform, confirming teachers' biases (Jussim & Harber, 2005), which might contribute to a high level of minority stress among marginalized students (Pachankis, 2007). Conversely, with supportive training and reflexive practices, teachers can foster environments that reduce stigma, value diversity, and cultivate each student's potential (Gay, 2018; Kunter et al., 2013).

2.3 Political and geographic contexts

Abovementioned factors, however, need to be further contextualized within broader geographical, political, and social contexts, which may also contribute to shaping how diversity is perceived and managed in schools. A recent example may be

the Ukrainian minority, which expanded substantially following the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. The presence or diversity of Ukrainian students is often noticed only when they lack proficiency in the Czech language, illustrating the interplay of ethnicity and language in shaping perceptions (Janská & Bernard, 2018; Leontiyeva, 2016; Lintner et al., 2023). Yet, as mentioned earlier, despite perfect Czech proficiency of students with Vietnamese descent (who often constitute the third most ethnically othered minority in the Czech Republic), their visible bodily differences may 'contrast' against the normative backdrop of 'white Czechness', perpetuating their othering and social challenges (Hüwelmeier, 2015; Svobodová & Janská, 2016).

Also, psychological and neurological diversity, including ADHD, autism spectrum disorder, dyslexia, and trauma, gives rise to multiple challenges. Most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly exacerbated mental health challenges among young people (Ma et al., 2021; Winkler et al., 2020). While the etiology of these issues is complex and partially linked to socioeconomic status or access to care, the legacy of segregational institutionalization and former educational policies continues to distort the distribution of students with disabilities or SENs (Michálek et al., 2022). These policies often require students to commute to schools far from their homes, reinforcing disparities in regions where resources and inclusive options are unequally distributed (Štech & Smetáčková, 2023).

In the case of sexual and gender minority (i.e., LGBTQ+) students, several recent legislative efforts in Europe, such as Russia's 2013 law restricting LGBTQ+ discussions in schools and similar measures in Hungary, Poland, and Bulgaria, warrant more attention as they not only censor certain forms of human differences but also contribute to their politicization and (re) stigmatization (Korolczuk, 2020; Rédei, 2024; Tolkachev & Vasileva, 2019). While the Czech Republic has not enacted comparable policies, debates about gender and sexuality in education remain contentious (Jarkovská, 2020). In this respect, in contrast to diversities rooted in ethnic or socioeconomic factors with specific regional demographics, no evidence would suggest that the odds of being born sexual or gender minority is anyhow location-specific (similarly, as we understand that the locality does not influence the sex of a newborn). Research on the prevalence of sexual and gender minority identities suggests that while self-reported identification rates vary due to social acceptance and cultural norms, there is no evidence to indicate that the actual likelihood of being born LGBTQ+ differs across geographic location (Pachankis et al., 2021). Nevertheless, geographic and societal factors undoubtedly influence the chances of sexual and gender minority peoples' chances to be visible and to seek recognition. Indeed, long tradition of research in geographies of sexualities established that urban centers have become bastions of acceptance (Brown, 2014), while rural or peripheral localities often failed to provide the necessary levels of acceptance to allow LGBTQ+ people to assume their identities or live openly (Pitoňák & Macháčková, 2023). Consequently, LGBTQ+ people often decide to migrate to urban areas during young adulthood or adolescence, seeking broader acceptance or participating in available community organizations, which further skew the perceived population distributions of LGBTQ+ individuals in those regions (Pachankis et al., 2021). However, despite these narratives may hold true in some contexts, it is not our intention to uncritically perpetuate teleological rural-urban relocation discourses or narratives about rural 'coming-out' (Gorman-Murray, 2007) and rather contribute to a more sensitive understanding of this seemingly simplistic binary, especially in a country like the Czech Republic. In addition, as relocation is rarely an option for primary and secondary school students who remain reliant on family support, there is no reason to assume that urbanized regions 'give rise' to more sexual and gender minority students compared to less urbanized or more

peripheral areas. What may differ, however, is the extent to which schools in these varied contexts function as either supportive or hostile environments.

Schools thus become pivotal sites for either fostering inclusion or perpetuating stigma (Kosciw et al., 2009). Consequently, schools in various localities play a crucial role in providing inclusive environments where these students can safely explore their identities. Due to the complex workings of stigma and societal norms, teachers themselves might be unaware of students struggling with questions about their sexual orientation or gender identity because these attributes can be concealed (Galano et al., 2024). While non-dominant identities in ethnicity or disability are often more visible, or the available policies have advanced with their recognition, sexual and gender minorities may opt to hide who they are due to fear of negative repercussions (Smart & Wegner, 1999). This concealability can compound stigma-related minority stress, lead to mental health disparities (Pachankis, 2007; Pitoňák, 2020), and reduce the likelihood that schools will implement concrete support strategies (Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009).

Indeed, neither of these processes is exclusive to sexual and gender minorities, whereas we are also mindful that all these differences may also intersect with those that are more recognized or visible. The communist-era legacy and the heightened homogeneity of Czech society have left traces of intolerance toward various minoritized groups, be they ethnic (e.g., Romani communities) or religious (Čada, 2015; Hurrell et al., 2016). Therefore, rural areas may be remarkably homogenous (or perceived as such), further intensifying the perception of 'otherness' and amplifying the exclusion and stigmatization of those who do not fit local norms. In highly conformist settings, deviations from the perceived norm can result in negative biases and disparate treatment. By contrast, more cosmopolitan or multicultural locales often embrace these differences as assets (Banks & Banks, 2004; Katz-Gerro et al., 2024). Cosmopolitanism, in this context, refers not merely to geographical, urban or demographic diversity, but to a cultivated orientation characterized by an intellectual and ethical openness toward cultural differences. As Ulf Hannerz (2005) conceptualized it, cosmopolitanism entails both an aesthetic and reflexive engagement with cultural otherness. As a willingness to explore and learn from diverse ways of life and, potentially, as a political commitment to solidarity and justice that transcends national or normative boundaries. Contemporary scholarship further refines this view. Katz-Gerro et al. (2024) define cosmopolitanism as an 'ethos of cultural openness' and sensitivity to cultural diversity, often developed through increased global mobility, media exposure, and intercultural contact. Similarly, Szerszynski and Urry (2006) emphasize cosmopolitanism as a disposition of 'reflexive tolerance' and moral responsibility to distant others. This resonates with Beck and Grande's (2010) conception of cosmopolitan realism, which urges institutions, including schools, to respond to global diversity with inclusive and ethical engagement.

In educational terms, then, cosmopolitanism underpins an orientation where difference is neither ignored nor tokenized, but rather approached with curiosity, respect, and critical self-awareness. In this light, educators in cosmopolitan locales may be more inclined to recognize diversity not as a challenge to normative coherence but as a resource for collective learning and democratic citizenship. However, as the example of second- and third-generation Vietnamese students in Czech urban centers illustrates (Freidingerová & Nováková, 2021), even culturally diverse settings are not immune to practices of exclusion and stereotyping. Cosmopolitanism, therefore, should not be idealized as an automatically inclusive condition; rather, it must be enacted through intentional pedagogical and institutional practices that cultivate sustained intercultural understanding and solidarity.

These regional and institutional variations may ultimately reflect broader societal norms that define what is viewed as acceptable, normal, stigmatized or dull, shaping whether or how diversity is recognized in schools.

3. Methods and data

3.1 Aims

This study examines how class teachers in Czech elementary and secondary schools perceive diversity within their classrooms, with particular focus on less visible and often more stigmatized identities, such as sexual orientation and gender diversity. Recognizing that societal and cultural norms shape perceptions of difference, the study employs a framework that encompasses student identities and statuses that may be deemed 'different', including those that are highly more readily recognizable or even institutionalized in the official status (e.g., exceptionally talented students, students with different native tongue or students with disabilities) and those that may more difficult to recognize (e.g., due to high concealability or stigma). While demographic statistics provide a practical starting point, they often fail to capture the nuances of stigma, concealability, and uncertainty that influence daily school interactions. By exploring educators' subjective perceptions, this study aims to illuminate critical gaps in inclusive education policies and inform strategies for fostering equity and support for all students.

A key focus is on sexual and gender minority (i.e., LGBT+) students, examining how their inclusion compares with other types of diversity. This emphasis reflects our interest in understanding the uncertainty about diverse identities and how teachers' subjective perceptions, shaped by stigma, social norms, and local context, affect whether and how these identities are recognized in school environments.

To capture this diversity, we defined the following categories. Some of these characteristics align with formal categories used in school statistics (such as those that define a student with SEN); others are visibly present, though unrelated to academic learning; and some may be entirely omitted, yet still crucial to the student's experience and well-being in school. In addition to sexual orientation and gender identity, which were at the core of our research focus, we included diversity attributes that vary across multiple dimensions including visibility (ranging from more easily observable to those disclosed only through personal sharing), stigmatization (from positively perceived to negatively stereotyped), and institutionalization (from officially recognized statuses to informally acknowledged or ignored characteristics). In the survey, we asked class teachers whether they perceive any students in their classes as 'significantly different from others' in any of the following ways:

- a. different native tongue;
- b. exceptional talent;
- c. ethnicity;
- d. socioeconomic status (significantly low);
- e. disability or disadvantage;
- f. psychological problems and neurodiversity (e.g., behavioral disorders, ADHD, PAS);
- g. minority sexual orientation (LGB+);
- h. religion (e.g., actively practicing);
- i. gender identity (non-binary, transgender);
- j. institutional care (children's home, educational institution, and diagnostic institute).

For each category, class teachers were asked if they perceived any students in their classes as significantly different in that regard. The response options 'definitely yes', 'I think so', 'I'm not sure', and

‘definitely not’ reflect varying degrees of certainty or uncertainty. Indeed, these perceptions are inherently subjective, shaped by individual biases and factors related to specific identities. As will be presented in our analysis, we distinguished between ‘LGBT+ diversity’ and ‘non-LGBT+ general diversity’, where the former group related to students with minority sexual orientation and/or minority gender identity and the latter to all other differences.

We acknowledge that our data represents the perceptions of class teachers rather than objective demographic information. Each student's identity is multifaceted and context-dependent. By exploring these perceptions, we aim to clarify how educators identify and respond to diverse students and how these processes may enhance or impede inclusive and equitable educational practices in different geographical contexts.

3.2 Hypotheses

Based on our discussion in the introductory sections, we hypothesize that the proportion of students with sexual (LGB+) and gender (trans, non-binary+) diversities perceived by teachers will be related to the degree of urbanization. Specifically, we hypothesize that teachers will observe more sexual and gender diversity and be more certain about perceiving them in more urbanized areas due to increased social contact and sensitivity toward diversity, especially in more cosmopolitan environments such as the metropolis of Prague (Hypothesis 1). This will be the case despite our underlying assumption that the proportion of non-heterosexual or gender-diverse students at schools is even regardless of diversity in urbanicity, because there is no evidence to suggest otherwise.

In line with the first hypothesis, we also hypothesize that teachers' perceptions of support in managing diversity in their classroom will positively relate to the size of the municipality. In other words, we expect that teachers in more urbanized areas will be more likely to perceive themselves as having sufficient support to manage diversity in their classrooms (Hypothesis 2).

Finally, we hypothesize that the municipality size will relate to teachers' perception of diversity being beneficial to the students in their classroom. We assume that teachers in more urbanized and cosmopolitan areas will be more likely to view classroom diversity as beneficial (Hypothesis 3).

3.3 Data

To test the hypotheses, we utilized data from a survey conducted among teachers between October 2023 and May 2024. To reach our participants, we utilized several channels. First, the questionnaire was distributed to all schools in the Czech Republic, with a request that school management forward it to the class teachers of the relevant grades. However, if principals deemed the topic unimportant, they may not have shared the email, and some teachers may have chosen not to respond. Our original response rate may only be estimated, as we did not have a method to track the non-response rate in our initial contact with all Czech schools. We also circulated the questionnaire through teacher professional groups, though this approach required multiple steps, and the research team had no control over whether the invitation was consistently forwarded. Lastly, we contacted individual teachers with whom the research team and partner organizations had previously collaborated, particularly on issues related to student diversity, respect for LGBT+ individuals, and fostering a positive classroom climate. This channel effectively reached teachers with a heightened sensitivity to the study's focus. Our primary motivation for this strategy was to sample not only those schools that may be favorable towards LGBT+ diversity (and hence would potentially proactively self-sample themselves) but also to schools where LGBT+ acceptance may not be high or even taboo. All teachers were asked to provide information about their homeroom class.

The survey was completed by 757 class teachers from schools in all regions (kraje) of the Czech Republic. Due to the non-probability nature of the data collection, the data are not representative of schools, teachers, or students in the Czech Republic. Yet, it provides valuable insights into teachers' perceptions of students' diversity in Czech classes.

Multiple data checks were applied to the raw data. Firstly, we focused on the internal consistency of teachers' answers. For example, we verified whether the size of the school's municipality was plausible given its region, whether the number of pupils in the class deviated from the total number of girls, and so on. Where possible, the inconsistent answers, usually typos, were corrected. In other cases, implausible answers were assigned a missing value to avoid biasing the analytical results. Secondly, we introduced a minimum threshold for class size. Observations were excluded from the data set if the class size was smaller than 15 pupils (6th–9th grade of the elementary school) or was smaller than 10 pupils (1st–4th grade of the high school).

The final clean data set we used for the data analysis contained answers from 701 teachers. Appendices 1 and 2 display the number of observations and the proportions of perceived students' diversities per region and municipality size.

3.4 Concealability and uncertainty

Building on our theoretical discussion of stigma, concealability, and uncertainty of perceiving diversity, we hypothesized that some identity categories would yield higher levels of uncertainty (answers ‘I think so’ or ‘I'm not sure’ regarding perceived presence of significantly different students in the class) compared to others that may be, for example, more visible than others. To test this, we calculated the proportion of uncertain responses for each diversity category using the following formula:

$$uncertainty_{div} = \frac{n_{div, uncertain}}{n_{div}}$$

where *div* indicates one of the diversity categories (e.g., different native tongue, disability, sexual orientation), $n_{div, uncertain}$ is the number of teachers who chose ‘I think so’ or ‘I'm not sure’ for that particular category, and n_{div} is the total number of valid responses to the question. Based on these calculations, we grouped the categories into three levels of uncertainty (see Tab. 1):

- Low uncertainty (< 0.1)
- Medium uncertainty (≥ 0.1 and < 0.3)
- High uncertainty (≥ 0.3)

3.5 Diversity indices

The dataset provides information on the head teachers' perceived number of students in each diversity category within their classes. From these data, we constructed a diversity index ($DI_{div,c}$) to quantify the proportion of diverse students for each class *c*. The index is defined as follows:

$$DI_{div,c} = \frac{\sum_1^{div} n_{div,c}}{n_{div} n_c}$$

where $DI_{div,c}$ refers to the value of the index covering diversities *div* in class *c*, $\sum_1^{div} n_{div,c}$ refers to sum of counts of pupils in the class *c* with a diversities *div* over all diversities that are included in the index, n_{div} refers to the count of diversities covered in the index and n_c refers to the number of pupils within the class *c*.

The index theoretically ranges from 0 (no diversity observed in the class) to 1 (maximum proportion of overlapping diversities). When only one diversity is measured, the index becomes a simple proportion of students with that diversity out of the total class size.

Diversity in terms of...	Uncertainty	
Different native tongue	0.040	low
Institutional care	0.060	low
Disability or disadvantage	0.155	medium
Different ethnicity	0.199	medium
Psychological problems or neurodiversity	0.259	medium
Gender identity	0.397	high
Low socioeconomic status	0.454	high
Exceptional talent	0.481	high
Different religion	0.521	high
Minority in terms of sexual orientation	0.603	high

Tab. 1: Categories of diversity included in our study and proportion of uncertain answers, sorted from lowest to highest uncertainty
Source: Authors' calculations

Because the various forms of diversity in the Czech population tend to be relatively low in proportion, the index can be skewed toward 1 if multiple categories are reported in very small classes, or near 0 if few or no students in the class meet the diversity criteria. It should be noted that this index is not a measure of intersectionality, as the data do not reveal whether multiple diversities are present within the same individual student. Rather, it provides an aggregate view of how many students per class were perceived as 'different' by teachers across any of the included categories.

For the present analysis, we operationalized the degree of class diversity using several continuous diversity indices, each representing the proportion of students belonging to the following groups:

- General Diversity Index (non-LGBT) – includes disability or disadvantage, different native tongue, exceptional talent, different ethnicity (origin, skin color), low socioeconomic status, psychological problems or neurodiversity, different religion, and institutional care, without LGB and gender-diverse students;
- LGB Diversity Index – includes minority sexual orientation (LGB+);
- Gender Diversity Index – includes gender identity (non-binary or transgender);
- LGBT Diversity Index – a combined measure of LGB and gender-diverse students.

3.6 Explanatory variables and model specification

The main concepts used in this study were operationalized as categorical variables, namely the size of the municipality (to capture urban vs. rural differences) and Likert scale variables quantifying teachers' perceptions of received support and benefits resulting from diversity. As we assume a linear relationship between the dependent and explanatory variables, we use the following linear model (Groß, 2012) to test our hypotheses:

$$y = X\beta + \varepsilon$$

where vector y is the vector of dependent variables, X is the matrix comprising the independent variables' values, β is the vector of parameters and ε is the vector of error term variables.

The scope of the analysis was constrained by the lack of contextual variables, such as information on the characteristics of participating teachers or sampling technique used to recruit individual respondents. The variables used in each model are listed in Appendix 3). In models 5 and 6, the dependent variables represent teachers' perception of the support received and benefits resulting from diversity. Although these variables are measured on

a 4-point Likert scale, we assume that the underlying constructs are continuous. We recoded the responses onto a scale ranging from 0 ('definitely not') to 1 ('definitely yes'), maintaining equal intervals between the intermediate categories. This approach allows straightforward interpretation of the results and is less sensitive to a low frequency of responses in specific categories than alternative methods, such as ordinal logistic regression. Additionally, grade levels were recoded to reflect their sequential order, ranging from 1 (6th grade in elementary school) to 8 (4th grade in high school).

To address the limited representativeness of our sample of teachers, we constructed weights by comparing the actual regional distribution of teachers in our sample to the expected distribution based on administrative statistics. The resulting weights ranged from 0.249 to 13.214. We re-estimated all models using these weights. Across all models, the weighted and unweighted results were broadly consistent. However, in several cases, the weighted models yielded lower levels of statistical significance for individual coefficients. Given the approximate nature of the weights¹, their wide variability, and the limited impact on the conclusions, we decided to present the unweighted results throughout the article.

3.7 Analysis

To fit the linear models, we used an ordinary least squares (OLS) linear model, computed by the `lm` function in the R package `stats` (R Core Team, 2023). For each model, we checked for heteroscedasticity using the Breusch-Pagan test with the `bptest` function from the `lmtest` package (Zeileis & Hothorn, 2002). If the test indicated the presence of heteroscedasticity, we present the robust results with White's estimators that were computed using functions `coeftest` from the package `lmtest` and `vcovHC` from the package `sandwich` (Zeileis, 2004).

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive results

Our final sample encompasses teachers from a variety of school settings, ranging from small rural villages to large metropolitan areas, thus reflecting the diverse contexts in which perceptions of classroom diversity are formed. To enhance analytical clarity and ensure sufficient statistical power, we consolidated the original municipality-size categories into five groups: fewer than 4,999 inhabitants, 5,000–19,999 inhabitants, 20,000–99,999 inhabitants, 100,000–499,999 inhabitants, and 500,000 or more inhabitants. Table 2 presents the distribution of participating schools according to the original municipality-size categories, thereby illustrating our study's representation of the more cosmopolitan metropolis of Prague, as well as diverse urban, suburban, and rural environments. Descriptive statistics of explanatory variables that are used in the analysis are shown in the Appendices 4–6.

Municipality size	n	%
< 4,999 inhabitants	169	24.1
5,000–19,999 inhabitants	161	23.0
20,000–99,999 inhabitants	153	21.8
100,000–499,999 inhabitants	62	8.8
500,000 or more inhabitants	156	22.3

Tab. 2: Number and share of participating class teachers, per municipality size/level of urbanicity
Source: Authors' calculations

¹ The reference statistics include all teachers, whereas our sample comprises only homeroom teachers.

To visualize regional patterns, we also plotted the average values of the composite diversity indices across Czech regions. Figure 1 displays the general (non-LGBT) diversity index, which ranges from an average of 2.8% in the South Bohemian region to 8.6% in the Ústí nad Labem region. Analyzing municipality size reveals that the lowest mean non-LGBT diversity index (3.5%) is found in areas with fewer than 4,999 inhabitants, whereas the highest mean (5.1%) is observed in areas with 100,000–499,999 inhabitants.

Meanwhile, Figure 2 illustrates the LGBT diversity index, which varies substantially from 0.1% in the Zlínský region to 1.2% in Prague. In terms of municipality size, areas with fewer than 4,999 inhabitants show the lowest average LGBT diversity index (0.5%), whereas those with 500,000 or more inhabitants (i.e., Prague) display the highest (1.2%).

It is not straightforward to gauge how well our data reflect the true proportion of students with diversity in the Czech Republic because of the lack of data. A cue is provided by Michalík et al. (2022), who mapped students with SEN in the Czech Republic (see Appendix 7²). The proportions of diversities related to disability and disadvantage, low socioeconomic status, and psychological problems or neurodiversity were multiply-fold overestimated in our survey. The reason could be that teachers with more diverse classrooms were more prone to participate in our survey. Another explanation could be that teachers had a broader understanding of the surveyed diversities than what was reflected in the definition used by Michalík et al. (2022).

All in all, this indicates that our data only has limited representativeness. This is to be expected given the limited extent of our project.

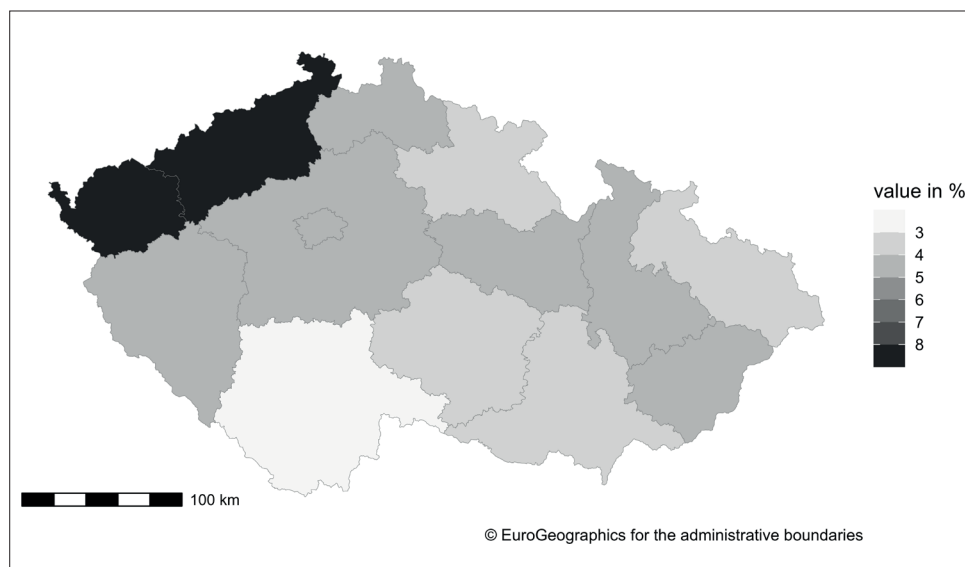


Fig. 1: Distribution of the General diversity index in the Czech Republic per region (in %)
Source: Authors' calculations

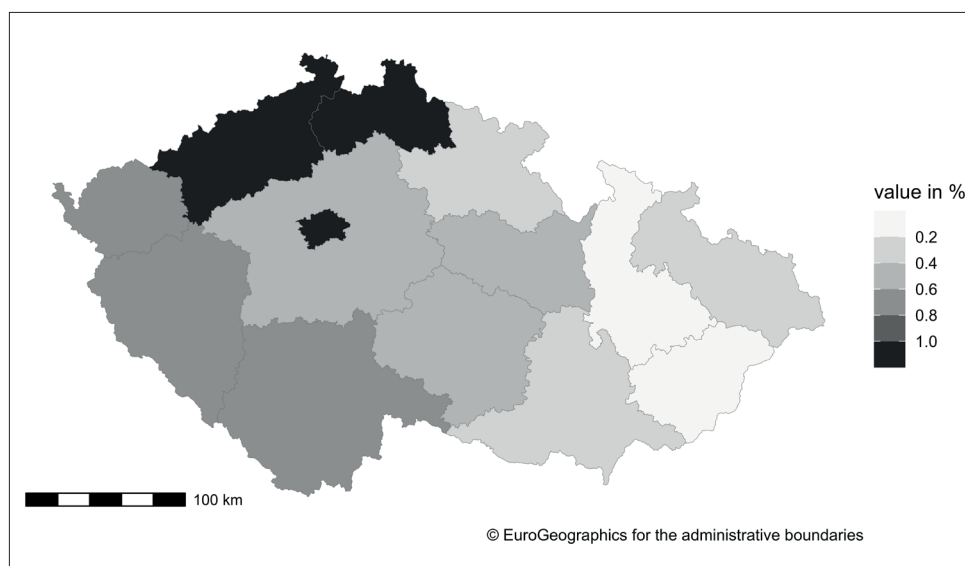


Fig. 2: Distribution of the LGBT general diversity index in the Czech Republic per region (in %)
Source: Authors' calculations

² We do not include comparisons with census data on other forms of diversity due to the limited conceptual overlap between how we operationalized ethnicity and how it is used in the census. Additionally, census data encompasses the entire population, while our study is restricted to students.

4.2 Hypothesis testing

To assess our hypotheses, we constructed a series of linear models using the composite diversity indices and teachers' perceptions as dependent variables. We used the R package *stargazer* (Hlavac, 2018) to generate regression tables.

Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis anticipates that larger, more urbanized (and potentially more cosmopolitan) municipalities will exhibit higher perceived LGB and gender diversity, and correspondingly lesser uncertainty, than smaller, more rural municipalities. The results of the linear models are presented in Table 3 for the LGB diversity index (model 1), the gender diversity index (model 2), and teachers' uncertainty about having LGB (model 3) or trans pupils (model 4) in their class³. We distinguished between sexual and gender minority students to be able to account for differences in uncertainty levels between typically more uncertain (and/or concealable) sexual minority status and less uncertain (and/or concealable) gender minority status (as seen in Tab. 1).

The F statistic suggests that, for all models, municipality size and grade level are statistically significantly related to LGB and gender diversities and uncertainty at 1% level (10% level for model 4). The linear regression coefficients have negative values that tend to decrease in absolute value with increasing municipality size (especially for the gender diversity index). This indicates that smaller municipalities have lower perceived diversity and higher uncertainty of both LGB and gender-diverse and trans students compared to municipalities with more than 500,000 inhabitants (i.e., Prague, the reference category). The differences between

Prague and smaller municipalities are statistically significant for the categories under 100,000 inhabitants (LGB index) and under 20,000 inhabitants (gender index). In case of uncertainty, differences are significant only for municipalities under 5,000 inhabitants and 20,000–99,999 inhabitants (uncertainty about LGB pupils). Except for uncertainty about LGB pupils, the difference decreases in magnitude and statistical significance with increasing municipality size. While these findings support Hypothesis 1, the R-squared statistics suggest only limited explanatory power of the model.

In terms of our cosmopolitan line of reasoning, which differs from the sole question of urbanicity, we originally attempted to distinguish⁴ also Brno and Ostrava from the metropolis of Prague. However, the small sample size in Brno and Ostrava (total $n = 19$) did not allow us to consider these regional metropolises as separate categories in our analysis, disallowing us from learning more about their specific contexts. However, we attempted to test the differences in the diversity indexes between the main metropolitan areas (Brno, Ostrava, and Prague) and the rest of the country. The results suggested that the LGB and gender diversity indexes had higher values in these metropolitan areas than in the rest of the country. However, these differences had limited statistical significance ($p < 0.05$). The total output of the analysis is not presented in this article but can be obtained from the authors upon request.

Hypothesis 2

Following Hypothesis 2, we expected teachers in schools located in larger municipalities to be more likely to perceive that they have sufficient support to manage diversity in their classrooms.

Municipality size (reference category: 500,000 or more inhabitants)	Dependent variables					
	HYP1: LGB diversity index (OLS model 1)	HYP1: Gender diversity index (OLS model 2)	HYP1: Uncertainty, LGB pupils (OLS model 3 ⁺)	HYP1: Uncertainty, trans pupils (OLS model 4 ⁺)	HYP2: Support to manage diversity (OLS Model 5)	HYP3: Diversity being beneficial (OLS Model 6)
< 4,999	– 0.009** (0.004)	– 0.004*** (0.004)	– 0.184*** (0.054)	– 0.191*** (0.054)	0.021 (0.027)	– 0.059* (0.031)
5,000–19,999	– 0.012*** (0.004)	– 0.004*** (0.004)	– 0.053 (0.053)	– 0.064 (0.056)	0.0003 (0.027)	– 0.112*** (0.031)
20,000–99,999	– 0.011*** (0.004)	– 0.002 (0.001)	– 0.159*** (0.055)	– 0.047 (0.057)	0.024 (0.027)	– 0.066** (0.031)
100,000–499,999	– 0.009* (0.005)	– 0.001 (0.002)	– 0.054 (0.071)	0.0004 (0.075)	– 0.005 (0.035)	– 0.044 (0.041)
Grade level	0.001 (0.001)	0.0003 (0.0003)	– 0.0002 (0.012)	– 0.002 (0.012)	0.002 (0.006)	0.010 (0.007)
Non-LGBT General diversity index (non-LGBT)					– 0.842*** (0.239)	– 0.779*** (0.278)
LGBT general diversity index					0.060 (0.475)	1.082* (0.553)
Constant	0.015*** (0.004)	0.004*** (0.001)	0.699*** (0.053)	0.476*** (0.056)	0.735*** (0.030)	0.650*** (0.035)
Observations	698	698	698	698	656	656
R ²	0.024	0.022	0.022	0.021	0.024	0.043
Adjusted R ²	0.017	0.015	0.015	0.014	0.014	0.032
Residual Std. Error	0.032	0.012	0.486	0.486	0.226	0.263
F Statistic (df = 4; 693)	3.367***	3.160***	3.175**	3.022*	2.312**	4.111***

Tab. 3: Results of the ordinary least squares linear models testing hypotheses 1, 2, and 3

Notes: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$; ⁺Presented standard errors are White's estimators

Source: Authors' calculations

³ Teachers were considered uncertain if they responded with 'I think so' or 'I'm not sure' to the question of whether their class included LGB or transgender students.

⁴ Brno is the second largest city in the Czech Republic with more than 402,000 inhabitants. Ostrava is the third largest with 283,000 inhabitants.

The results are presented in Table 3. The F-statistics show that the model variables are statistically significantly related to teachers' perception of having sufficient support at 5% level. However, the regression coefficients of model 5 do not suggest a statistically significant relationship between municipality size and support for managing diversity. This suggests that teachers' perceived support for managing diversity in classrooms does not systematically vary across municipalities of different sizes. These findings do not support Hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 3

Finally, according to Hypothesis 3, we expected that teachers working in schools located in larger municipalities would be more likely to view classroom diversity as beneficial. The results are presented in Table 3. The F-statistics show that the perceived level of diversity being beneficial is statistically significantly related to the model variables at a 1% level. The independent variable (teachers' perception that diversity is beneficial) is coded on a scale from 0 (disagreement) to 1 (agreement). The negative and statistically significant regression coefficients indicate that teachers in municipalities with fewer than 100,000 inhabitants are less likely to view diversity in the classroom as beneficial than teachers in Prague (reference category, municipality with more than 500,000 inhabitants). Notably, the effect is less statistically significant for the smallest municipalities with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants, suggesting a curvilinear relationship between the perceived level of diversity being beneficial and municipality size. These results generally support Hypothesis 3.

5. Discussion

5.1 Certainty regarding perception of difference among class teachers

The primary aim of this study was to explore how Czech elementary and secondary school teachers perceive classroom diversity, focusing on subjective factors that influence whether certain identities are recognized or overlooked. Building on theories of concealability and stigma, we sought to understand how teachers' uncertainty differs for more 'visible' versus more 'concealable' forms of difference. By gathering subjective perceptions rather than purely 'objective' data, our research underscores how cultural and institutional contexts may interact with the sensitivity and inherent visibility (or invisibility) of various student identities.

Our findings suggest that some diversity attributes are more readily recognizable by teachers, while others remain concealed and often unacknowledged. In line with expectations, native tongue differences and institutional care status were associated with low levels of teacher uncertainty, likely due to their visibility and formal documentation in the Czech education system. Class teachers usually know these factors either through direct observation of students' language use or through school records, particularly in cases involving orphanages or other institutional care settings. However, our data also show that certainty in recognizing a particular attribute is not necessarily tied to whether it is officially codified within the school system (e.g., talent or neurodiversity). This points to the need for clearer methodological guidance for teachers in identifying and addressing diverse student characteristics.

Other dimensions of diversity, such as disability, disadvantage, psychological or neurodiverse conditions, and ethnicity, ranked in the 'medium uncertainty' range. While some of these attributes (e.g., certain disabilities) may be concealable, others are more visible and have been addressed through decades of inclusive education reforms in the Czech Republic, which likely contributed to teachers' growing familiarity with recognizing some special educational needs (Pivarč, 2020). Awareness of psychological and neurodiverse conditions has been supported by initiatives

such as *Nevyšpust' duši*, *Na rovinu*, and *Blázníš? No a!*, yet their reach and integration into everyday classroom practice remain inconsistent. Despite the formal inclusion of mental health topics in the national curriculum, questions persist regarding their implementation and the extent to which educators feel prepared to respond to students' needs. Persistent stigma and unequal resources may still limit the recognition and support of these students, underscoring the need for continued training. Experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the urgency of addressing mental health in schools, yet our findings indicate that educators' uncertainty remains in the medium range, suggesting these challenges are far from resolved (Ma et al., 2021; Winkler et al., 2020).

Regarding ethnic/national differences, results indicating 'medium uncertainty' may be surprising at first glance. This is perhaps due to a frequent portrayal of ethnicity as something 'visible'. However, Czech historical and social contexts complicate how ethnicity is perceived (e.g., Romani, Ukrainian, Vietnamese communities), particularly when language skills, socioeconomic status, and regional demographics intersect. The sociocultural-specific convergence of ethnicity/nationality and intersectionality with social class can, however, either amplify or obscure these perceived differences, resulting in some students being readily marked and othered as 'foreign' compared to those who may 'pass' as 'unremarkable'. For instance, research suggests that educators might overlook Western-language speakers while concentrating on those with Eastern European or non-European origins (Jarkovská et al., 2018).

In line with our theoretical expectations, often more concealed statuses such as low socioeconomic status, religious identity, exceptional talent, and so far, mostly overlooked sexual or gender minority statuses, all scored in the group with 'high uncertainty'. These results generally align with the notion that deeply stigmatized or less openly discussed characteristics can remain hidden (Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009). Such results may be surprising for talent and socioeconomic status because both characteristics are integral to school learning and should be readily identifiable by teachers. Educators are expected to recognize these traits when objective data is available or interpret students' behavior in ways that account for their potential influence. However, despite the expectation that teachers can identify talent, this research suggests that their preparedness for working with gifted students remains limited, as teacher training in this area is often elective and underutilized (Kadrnožková & Janyšková, 2022).

Religious identity emerged among the highest-uncertainty categories, possibly because religious affiliation is often private and may be concealed, particularly in a society with strong secular norms such as Czech society (Novotný, 2019). Although outward symbols (e.g., head coverings and dietary restrictions) can hint at religious practice, many students may opt to downplay or hide such markers in secular classrooms (Paloutzian & Park, 2013). Thus, recognizing religious diversity requires cultural sensitivity and explicit dialogue, elements sometimes lacking when a dominant secular culture prevails.

Lastly, the heightened uncertainty surrounding sexual orientation and gender diversity reaffirms that, even as schools adopt inclusive rhetoric, stigma and fear of discrimination can discourage disclosure. The often inconspicuous nature of these identities, coupled with persistent societal stigma, may lead students to conceal their non-heterosexual or gender-diverse identities, limiting teachers' opportunities to provide targeted support (Smetáčková & Macháčková, 2024; Smetáčková et al., 2022). This dynamic highlights the complex interplay between concealability and social stigma, echoing research indicating that less visible differences require proactive sensitivity and sustained institutional support (Pitoňák & Čihák, 2023).

Finally, sexual orientation and gender identity remain the most difficult for teachers to detect, even as inclusive education rhetoric increasingly references LGBTQ+ students (Smetáčková & Macháčková, 2024). The high stigma and non-visible nature of these statuses frequently lead students to conceal their identities (Pitoňák & Čihák, 2023). Consequently, educators who might otherwise serve as key sources of support often remain uncertain about which students might benefit from inclusive interventions. This underscores the importance of fostering a school climate where students feel safe to disclose their identities without fear of discrimination and where teachers receive adequate training to recognize and support LGBTQ+ students effectively.

We can conclude that the visibility of students' diversity attributes plays an important role in how schools and teachers perceive and respond to their needs. Drawing on Goffman's (1963) distinction between discredited and discreditable identities and Quinn and Chaudoir's (2009) work on concealable stigmatized identities, we can differentiate between attributes that are externally identifiable, such as physical disabilities, appearance, or ethnicity, and those that require self-disclosure, such as sexual orientation, gender identity, mental health issues, or low socioeconomic status. At the same time, some attributes (e.g., SEN, language background) are institutionally recognized and formally addressed within school systems, while others (e.g., having same-gender parents or a non-binary identity) may remain unofficial or overlooked. This dual dimension, external perceptibility and institutional recognition, shapes how diversity is navigated in educational contexts. For teachers, this means they may become aware of and respond to certain student characteristics more automatically, while other equally important aspects remain invisible unless disclosed. The educational system should therefore support teachers in developing critical reflection on both their professional frameworks and personal beliefs, which may heighten their sensitivity to some attributes while causing others to be ignored. Consequently, fostering inclusive school environments requires not only formal policies but also a relational sensitivity to less visible, often stigmatized identities that impact students' well-being, learning, and sense of belonging.

5.2 The geographic dimensions of classroom diversity

Our findings underscore the geographical dimensions of classroom diversity, partially reinforcing the urban-rural divide as a consistent factor in teachers' recognition of diverse identities. Larger municipalities, particularly Prague, exhibited higher perceived diversity in both non-LGBT+ and LGBT+ categories, aligning with the cosmopolitan thesis, which suggests that urban settings foster greater exposure to cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic differences, as well as increased sensitivity to more 'concealable' identities (such as those related to sexual orientation or gender identity; cf. Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009; Katz-Gerro et al., 2024). In smaller municipalities, lower diversity indexes may reflect not only fewer objectively present differences but also stronger local norms of conformity and stigma that discourage the disclosure of stigmatized identities and attenuate teachers' awareness or sensitivity to them.

This trend was especially pronounced for perceiving sexual and gender minority students, where perceived uncertainty was highest in rural areas with populations under 5,000 inhabitants. These patterns support prior arguments that the visibility of sexually and gender-diverse identities depends less on their objective distribution and more on local norms and climates of (in) acceptance (Pachankis et al., 2021; Brown, 2014).

The linear regression models further supported this interpretation, revealing statistically significant differences in perceived diversity and uncertainty between Prague and smaller municipalities. Teachers in rural areas were more likely to report

uncertainty about the presence of LGB and trans students in their classrooms, reflecting both the concealability of these identities and the potential lack of localized support structures or social scripts that would otherwise affirm them. However, while these findings provide empirical support for Hypothesis 1, the limited explanatory power of our models suggests that additional structural, cultural, or institutional factors, such as regional political climates, curricular constraints, teacher training, or local activism, likely play a critical role in shaping perceptions of diversity. For instance, while larger cities tend to exhibit higher diversity recognition, certain regions with historically higher concentrations of ethnic or socioeconomically disadvantaged groups (e.g., Ústí nad Labem region or Karlovy Vary region) reported elevated levels of non-LGBT+ diversity, indicating how regional socioeconomic conditions can amplify the visibility of specific differences. In contrast, sexual and gender minority identities may remain undetected if local norms discourage self-disclosure, regardless of population density.

While we initially sought to distinguish between Prague, Brno, and Ostrava in our analysis, the small sample size from the latter two cities ($n = 19$) prevented a separate statistical comparison. However, a broader distinction between major metropolitan areas (Prague, Brno, and Ostrava) and the rest of the country revealed higher diversity indices in urban regions, albeit without strong statistical significance. This trend tentatively supports the notion of cosmopolitanism as both a demographic and attitudinal orientation (Hannerz, 2005; Katz-Gerro et al., 2024), but more detailed qualitative or mixed-method studies are needed to explore how such orientations translate into practice.

Contrary to Hypothesis 2, our findings indicate that the size of a municipality was not significantly related to teachers' perceptions of having sufficient institutional support to manage diversity. This suggests that local demographic context alone does not determine perceived institutional preparedness. Structural factors, such as the high level of school autonomy, unequal access to external resources, or inconsistent implementation of national equity frameworks, may overshadow geographic patterns.

Although our data suggest that teachers' professional training, prior experience with diverse students, and institutional leadership may play a key role, these were not directly assessed in our study. Further investigation is needed to determine how individual teacher characteristics, school policies, and local institutional frameworks shape educators' preparedness to work with diverse student populations. Notably, even in more urbanized areas where diversity is more visible, a lack of systemic support may still limit teachers' capacity to address students' specific needs effectively.

Our results provide strong empirical support for Hypothesis 3, confirming that teachers in more urbanized areas were significantly more likely to view diversity as beneficial. The regression analysis revealed that teachers in municipalities with fewer than 100,000 inhabitants were significantly less likely to consider diversity a positive factor in the classroom compared to those in Prague. This aligns with the cosmopolitanism framework, which emphasizes openness to cultural difference as a learned disposition fostered through exposure, institutional norms, and critical reflexivity (Szczepanski & Urry, 2006; Beck & Grande, 2010).

However, the underlying mechanisms driving this openness require further unpacking. It is unclear to what extent such attitudes are shaped by direct interpersonal experience, pre-service or in-service training, institutional support, or broader cultural currents circulating in urban media ecosystems. Future research should explore how these elements converge to form educators' orientations toward diversity and inclusion.

Collectively, our findings illustrate the need to move beyond ‘objective’ measures of demographic diversity when assessing school inclusivity. Recognition and acceptance of difference, particularly among sexual and gender minority students, are shaped not only by population density or geographical location but also by societal norms, political discourses, and institutional capacity. While urban environments are not inherently inclusive, they may tend to foster greater awareness of multiple forms of diversity and more frequent intercultural encounters, which, in line with a cosmopolitan thesis, may play pivotal roles in shaping inclusive contexts.

Proactive institutional support, especially in smaller or more homogeneous municipalities, may play an important role in ensuring that all students feel seen, affirmed, and safe in educational settings. Future studies should further investigate how school policies, teacher education programs, and regional cultural climates intersect with spatial factors to shape inclusion practices. As our findings suggest, the presence of inclusive policies alone may not be sufficient; addressing persistent stigma at the local level remains necessary. Our findings align with other research on contact between schools and LGBTQ+ parents, showing that homoparental families often face the greatest challenges in selecting schools for their children in mid-sized municipalities, compared to both larger cities and villages (Reichertová, 2021). In cities, a wide range of schools may offer families the opportunity to choose more inclusive LGBTQ+-friendly institutions. While in villages, close community ties can reduce the pressure to explicitly come out, as everyone is already familiar with one another. Mid-sized municipalities, however, often lack both the anonymity of urban areas and the familiarity of rural ones, making it harder for these families to find accepting school environments (Willson & Bridge, 2019; Rodríguez-Mena & Sánchez, 2017).

5.3 Limitations

This study relied on a non-probabilistic sample, limiting the generalizability of our findings. While the observed trends offer valuable insights into teachers' perceptions of diversity, they should be interpreted with caution. Additionally, missing data and the inability to capture intersectionality, that is, whether multiple diversities coexist in the same student, further restrict our understanding of classroom diversity. The uneven regional distribution of ethnic minorities and socioeconomically disadvantaged students also likely influenced our results, as areas with more pronounced socioeconomic challenges tended to report higher levels of certain diversities. Future research could address these gaps through more representative sampling methods and comprehensive data collection, with a particular focus on the intersections among ethnicity, socioeconomic background, and other potentially concealed identities.

6. Conclusions (and policy implications)

In this article, we examined multiple aspects of human difference in Czech classrooms, with particular attention to sexual and gender diversity, an area that remains underrepresented and frequently politicized. Our findings highlight that uncertainty, which may be a result of stigma, concealability, and other contextual factors, may shape educators' perceptions of who is ‘different’ in ways not easily captured by purely demographic or ‘objective’ data.

While schools have made progress in recognizing certain student characteristics, identities tied to sexual orientation and gender identity often remain concealed or misrecognized, increasing the risk that educators may fail to offer the necessary support. Moreover, our findings suggest that the recognition of diversity is unevenly distributed geographically, with teachers

in urbanized areas, particularly in Prague, exhibiting a higher awareness of sexual and gender minority students, while rural areas demonstrate greater uncertainty and lower perceived diversity.

We approached urbanicity both as a structural factor (operationalized through population size categories) and as a proxy for broader cultural, political, and infrastructural differences, including exposure to diversity, access to professional resources, and normative climates. This duality reflects the complexity of what the literature sometimes describes as the ‘cosmopolitan thesis’, the idea that urban centers tend to foster dispositions of cultural openness, reflexive tolerance, and ethical engagement with difference (Hannerz, 2005; Katz-Gerro et al., 2024; Szerszynski & Urry, 2006). While our models indicate a general linear relationship between population size and perceived diversity, qualitative experiences suggest that this may not always be straightforward or unidirectional. For example, medium-sized towns may not always fall neatly between villages and large cities in terms of openness, as local cultures, political climates, or social amenities may be more significant than scale itself. Future work should explore whether these patterns are curvilinear, clustered, or shaped by specific contextual variables beyond size alone.

Research across developmental psychology, sexuality studies, and educational science consistently underscores the urgent need to foster equitable, respectful, and affirming environments. For LGBTQ+ students in particular, exposure to supportive school attitudes during their formative years can profoundly influence both their well-being and academic outcomes. However, our study did not find evidence that teachers in more urbanized areas systematically perceive greater institutional support for managing diversity. This suggests that systematic teacher training, continuous professional development, and locally embedded school policies, rather than urbanicity alone, may play a significant role in shaping educators' preparedness to support all students. Consequently, recent legislative and discursive efforts aimed at suppressing access to LGBTQ+ content in education, as seen across parts of Central and Eastern Europe and elsewhere (e.g., Russia, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria), warrant scrutiny. Where such policies or climates prevail, concealable identities are more likely to remain hidden, undermining students' sense of safety and limiting their educational opportunities.

By illuminating these challenges, our study highlights the complexity of classroom diversity and the importance of addressing stigmatizing and exclusionary practices that hinder truly inclusive education. One of the study's key contributions lies in its methodological innovation in distinguishing and comparing various sources of student diversity, a framework that advances the interpretation of such differences within educational contexts. Our findings further suggest that teachers in urbanized areas are more likely to perceive diversity as beneficial, supporting the idea that greater exposure fosters more positive attitudes toward difference. The study also makes a theoretical contribution by refining existing models of stigmatized identities, particularly through expanding the ‘theory of visibility’ to include dimensions such as observability, concealability, and stigma. Moreover, it contributes to the field of geographies of sexualities by engaging with urban and cosmopolitan theories, and demonstrating the non-linear relationship between diversity acceptance and municipality size, while highlighting the nuanced influence of cosmopolitan factors on social attitudes.

In policy terms, our results suggest three priorities: (1) strengthening national and local teacher training programs on diversity; (2) ensuring that inclusive practices are consistently implemented in rural as well as urban schools; and (3) protecting educational spaces from restrictive laws or political campaigns that undermine teachers' capacity to address diversity. Future

research should continue to investigate how educators and institutions can bridge these gaps, ensuring that all students, regardless of their visible or invisible differences, receive the support they need to thrive.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Proportion of perceived classroom diversities in the final sample (measured as a proportion of the total final sample), per type of difference and region (in %)

Source: Authors' calculations

Region	Disability or disadvantage	Different mother tongue	Exception talent	Ethnicity	Socioeconomic status	Psychological problems and neurodiversity	LGB	Religion	Gender diversity	Number of observations
Hradec Králové Region	2.5	4.5	2.7	2.1	2.9	5.4	0.5	1.0	0.1	79
South Bohemian Region	2.9	3.2	2.5	1.7	3.7	5.0	1.1	0.6	0.1	47
South Moravian Region	2.3	4.0	1.6	2.3	4.7	4.3	0.5	4.6	0.1	34
Karlovy Vary Region	16.6	7.2	0.9	9.9	7.8	10.9	0.9	1.6	0.3	10
Liberec Region	3.0	5.5	1.9	3.2	5.7	8.9	1.4	1.1	0.8	21
Moravian-Silesian Region	2.8	2.1	3.3	5.2	4.8	6.0	0.5	2.2	0.2	57
Olomouc Region	5.4	4.9	2.7	3.5	8.1	6.6	0.2	1.7	0.1	26
Pardubice Region	2.2	5.4	2.6	5.0	6.7	6.0	0.9	0.8	0.0	21
Plzeň Region	3.0	9.0	2.6	2.4	4.5	7.0	0.9	1.3	0.4	60
Prague	3.0	10.7	2.8	4.5	3.4	8.0	1.8	1.6	0.5	165
Central Bohemian Region	5.6	6.5	3.0	4.2	5.1	7.1	0.8	0.9	0.4	83
Ústí nad Labem Region	3.0	8.9	4.2	14.4	14.9	12.0	2.3	0.6	0.0	24
Vysočina Region	3.7	5.0	1.1	1.9	3.3	6.6	0.8	1.3	0.1	60
Zlín Region	6.3	4.4	1.9	1.8	4.1	8.9	0.3	4.6	0.0	14
Total	3.6	6.6	2.6	3.8	4.6	7.0	1.0	1.5	0.3	701

Appendix 2: Proportion of diversities in the final sample (measured as a proportion of the total final sample), per diversity and municipality size (in %)

Source: Authors' calculations

Municipality size	Disability or disadvantage	Different mother tongue	Exception talent	Ethnicity	Socioeconomic status	Psychological problems and neurodiversity	LGB	Religion	Trans	Number of observations
1,999 or less	3.1	4.8	2.1	1.8	5.0	5.6	0.6	1.6	0.1	64
2,000–4,999	2.7	4.0	2.3	2.3	3.9	6.4	1.1	2.6	0.1	105
5,000–9,999	4.2	4.4	3.5	2.2	5.0	6.6	0.7	1.1	0.1	59
10,000–19,999	3.3	5.1	2.1	2.8	3.4	5.7	0.6	1.1	0.2	102
20,000–99,999	4.8	6.1	2.7	5.8	6.2	7.5	0.8	1.0	0.3	153
100,000–199,999	3.1	7.9	2.7	2.4	5.4	9.6	1.3	1.5	0.7	42
200,000–499,999	4.0	6.8	3.2	10.7	9.0	5.4	0.5	1.5	0.0	20
500,000 and more	3.1	10.8	2.7	4.6	3.4	7.9	1.9	1.6	0.5	156
Total	3.6	6.6	2.6	3.8	4.6	7.0	1.0	1.5	0.3	701

Appendix 3: Dependent and explanatory variables used in the linear models

Hypothesis	OLS Model	Dependent variable	Explanatory variable
Hypothesis 1	Model 1	LGB diversity index	Municipality size, Grade level
	Model 2	Gender diversity index	Municipality size, Grade level
	Model 3	Teachers' uncertainty about presence of LGB pupils in their class	Municipality size, Grade level
	Model 4	Teachers' uncertainty about presence of trans pupils in their class	Municipality size, Grade level
Hypothesis 2	Model 5	Teachers' perception of support they have to manage diversity in their class	Municipality size, Grade level, Non-LGBT general diversity index, LGBT general diversity index
Hypothesis 3	Model 6	Teachers' perception of diversity being beneficial to the learners in their class	Municipality size, Grade level, Non-LGBT general diversity index, LGBT general diversity index

Appendix 4: Descriptive statistics, categorical variables

Source: Authors' calculations

Response	Support to manage diversity in the class		Diversity being beneficial to the learners	
	n	%	n	%
Definitely yes	213	30.4	135	19.3
Rather yes	388	55.3	319	45.5
Rather no	90	12.8	214	30.5
Definitely no	10	1.4	33	4.7

Appendix 5: Descriptive statistics, continuous variables

Source: Authors' calculations

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	Min value	Max value	Count (non-missing)
Index of perceived diversity, LGB learners	0.010	0.032	0	0.500	698
Index of perceived diversity, trans learners	0.003	0.012	0	0.143	698
Uncertainty, LGB learners	0.603	0.490	0	1.000	698
Uncertainty, trans learners	0.397	0.490	0	1.000	698

Appendix 6: Distribution of participating class teachers according to school type and grade level

Source: Authors' calculations

Elementary school					High school			
Grade level	6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th
n	73	240	183	24	102	64	8	7

Appendix 7: Proportion of perceived classroom diversities in the final sample (measured as a proportion of the total final sample) and in the population of learners in a school year 2020/2021 (as a proportion of learners, statistics provided by Michalík et al., 2022), per diversity and region (Notes: To authors' knowledge, there are no available statistics that allow for a reliable comparison of the population proportions of other diversities among learners in Czech schools)

Source: Authors' calculations; Michalík et al. (2022)

Diversity	Minimum proportion				Maximum proportion			
	Our data		(Michalík et al., 2022)		Our data		(Michalík et al., 2022)	
	Region	Proportion	Region	Proportion	Region	Proportion	Region	Proportion
Learners with disability or disadvantage	Pardubice R.	0.022	South Bohemian R.	0.005	Karlovy Vary R.	0.166	Karlovy Vary R.	0.010
Learners with low socioeconomic status	Hradec Králové R.	0.029	Zlín R.	0.001	Ústí nad Labem R.	0.149	Ústí nad Labem R.	0.010
Learners with psychological problems or neurodiversity	South Moravian R.	0.043	Karlovy Vary R.	0.001	Ústí nad Labem R.	0.12	Moravian-Silesian R.	0.007