

What it means to govern diversity:

Local diversity officers and their role and position in three European cities

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1 Introduction

Although it has been widely acknowledged that integration is taking place at the local level, the processes of how integration policies are implemented locally are to date hardly researched. It is however in the practices of actors within local governments where the immanent tensions and contradictions of contemporary integration politics can be observed. Based on my PhD research (2009-2012), this paper analyses how the position and positioning of local diversity officers in Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Leeds defines these cities' contemporary integration approach. By way of extended research traineeships with these cities' diversity units I could observe from within these local state institutions what it means to govern integration today.

This paper puts forward two arguments:

Municipal government's staff is increasingly reflecting some of the diversity of the society it is meant to govern. Especially for diversity officers a specific knowledge/background on/in specific minority groups often makes part of recruitment criteria and/or personal motivations. The implied assumptions about a necessary 'cultural knowledge' for dealing with specific groups and expectations about the relevance of specific backgrounds for their job is highly contentious. It results in rather arbitrary self-definitions and ascriptions of municipal diversity officers, with many implicit assumptions about what kind of knowledge and competences are needed to 'manage diversity'. Exploring these assumptions and making them explicit is a pre-requisite for a future process of professionalisation of diversity officers.

Municipal diversity officers are positioned in a complex field of stakeholders, as they are interacting and collaborating at the same time with political representatives, the municipal organisation and civil society. This article identifies two factors, which make these relationships particularly challenging: In view of a neo-liberalisation of governmental organisations, their position within the municipality is subject to frequent reorganisations and highly unstable. What is more, an increasingly symbolic use and value of diversity politics exposes them to substantial pressures. The symbolic use of diversity policy creates a

reactive and short-term politics, which impedes the implementation of the policies' long term objectives.

The analysis of these issues in the three cities will lead me to a nuanced analysis of the similar yet context-specific workings of the lack of professionalisation, the impact of symbolic politics on everyday policy implementation, and the neo-liberalisation of municipal governmental organisations, in the implementation of local integration politics.

2 The implementation of integration policy

'Diversity' appeared in the past years as a new integration policy concept and diversity policies were introduced especially on the level of cities, where issues of integration are most directly felt. However, to date there is little research on how the introduction of this concept has changed existing practices in the sector of integration politics and how it has changed the configuration of local governments' relationships with local residents. My research starts out from the idea that knowing more about the meaning of diversity politics in practice will help us to better locate this new concept in theoretical terms.

Research on the decision-making and implementation of immigrant and immigration policies is still a young field. Zincone and Caponio (2006) depict it as the 'fourth-generation' of research in migration studies and give it a prominent role in the development of migration research. As they have stated (*ibid.*), most of the research looking at the processes of policy-making and implementation in migration studies to date consist of grey literature, such as PhD dissertations and research reports. So far only a few studies have investigated the implementation of local policies or the behaviour of local officials in the field of migration (*ibid.*). This paper contributes to this emerging literature on the implementation of integration policies by looking at central actors involved in it.

In this paper I am investigating the role of diversity officers in defining diversity through their practice. This fills a gap in the existing literature on the implementation of migration and integration policies. The few available empirical studies in this area have largely relied

on official policy priorities and have not analysed how these are negotiated in the actual implementation of the policies (Borkert and Caponio 2010). This reliance of the present literature on official policy texts is exemplified by the edited book by Zincone et al (2011). While providing a very valuable contribution in focusing on migration and integration policymaking, all case studies in the book rely on official policy texts, backed up by the insights of their individual authors (which often have extensive experience on the studied cases) (ibid.,). My paper is based on participant observations in diversity units of Antwerp, Amsterdam, and Leeds, conducted in the framework of my PhD research (2009-2012). Becoming a research trainee with the diversity unit in each of these cities has allowed me to gain an in-depth idea of the everyday practice of municipal diversity officers. Over a time of 5-8 weeks in each city I could 'shadow' their work and investigate their interpretation of political decision-making and policy implementation. Based on these insights, I analyse the role and position of diversity officers in practice and the implications of their position for the meaning of diversity politics.

3 The expected knowledge of diversity officers

Mieke, Renaldo, Sevil, Peter, Nadine, Saleem and Fatima¹ are a diverse group of people with different ages, education, sexual orientation, ethnic and religious background. Yet, as 'diversity officers', they share a professional profile that we find today across European municipalities. Their jobs have been created to facilitate the 'management' of diversity or integration in the urban sphere. Installed through municipal governments and as 'experts', 'consultants' or 'coaches' for the topic of integration and diversity, they are meant to implement diversity within the municipal organisation and/or in broader municipal society. They consult other municipal units on diversity issues, they administer funding schemes, draft new policy proposals and discuss them with politicians, they manage and implement projects often in collaboration with NGOs or private organisations, and they maintain contacts with civil society.

¹ Names changed for reasons of anonymity.

Cities did not always have targeted staff to deal with integration or diversity. It has been only after the coming of guest workers, asylum seekers and often as a political reaction to a perceived 'crisis' of dealing with the results of increasing diversity, that integration or diversity services were established within municipal administrations in the past decades. Their role and position is defined by being embedded in the in the power relationships of bureaucratic municipal organisations and they act as officials of the city. At the same time, they are residents themselves and many of them have obtained their positions within the local administration due to their role as 'active citizens' or as 'leaders' of civic communities or initiatives. Saleem, for instance, only got his job because of the self-initiative he had demonstrated by founding a neighbourhood initiative aiming to contribute to the relations of residents. This initiative outweighed his lack of a specialised education and limited language skills when being recruited for the job. Other diversity officers had obtained a relevant university degree and came to the diversity unit as trainees. Diversity officers are developing and changing the government and a diverse society, as they are 'an insider' of both. To date, however, the expected knowledge and capacities of diversity officers are only vaguely defined.

3.1 Identity and awareness of disadvantages

Diversity officer have different backgrounds and identities and we can assume that their particularities inform each individual officers' approach to the job. Do different identities of diversity officers create different ways of 'managing diversity'? What is the impact on the outcomes of their work? As no special educational programmes for diversity officers exist to date and professional organisations have not been developed, the significance of their different identities and backgrounds remains to be explored.

Listening to Sevil's story, I learned about her self-identification and its importance for how she saw herself and how she conceptualised her life, but also how she conceptualised her role as a diversity officer. The story she told me started out from the struggle she experienced with her parents interpretation of 'their culture' and the close-knit social network and the resulting social control she experienced as daughter of what she described

as conservative Turkish guest workers in a small Dutch village. Her story was also about challenging some of the pre-conceived ideas of her parents about their daughter's appearance and life plans while safeguarding her parents' respect and love. Sevil's adolescence was informed by negotiating her background (rebellious against and rejecting some and adopting other aspects of her parents' ideas), and defining her own lifestyle, as a young educated woman that had moved to Amsterdam after her studies, who had a good job, who was easy-going and extrovert and who liked stylish yet sportive/casual clothes. It was this story that she told me when I asked her about how she came to the job of diversity officer. She made clear that her own experiences and identity were an important resource for her self-positioning as diversity officer. Sevil was not alone in referring to her identity as a resource, and many of her colleagues similarly made the link between their personal identity and their ability to do the job.

Not all diversity officers, however, are happy with using their own background as a resource in their work. Renaldo mentioned his strong hesitation and doubts about taking up a job in which he would work specifically on issues regarding his own community (IP A3 215). His personal involvement on the one hand made the position of diversity officer interesting, but just as several of his colleagues, he was concerned about the blurring of boundaries between private and professional life.

From what we know so far, we could assume a strong personal identification to be either a resource or an obstacle. Fatima approached her own identity in a way which reflected a more nuanced approach. She saw her identity as a personal resource for the job, while also acknowledging the difficulties this sometimes entails for protecting her personal sphere:

I think it is a plus point if someone then also comes from the culture it is about (...). You then also have a sort of extra drive or connection, because you are just standing a bit closer to the people this is about. (...) But there is also a downside to it, because sometimes your job also feels very personal. (IP A10 77)

Experiencing Fatima's self-representation and habitus in the office I also felt that she was particularly concerned about being reduced to her personal identity and it seemed important to her that others would see her in the first place as a skilled professional, next to being a woman of Moroccan origin. She had experienced how her own migrant origin was

being referred to and drawn upon very quickly when some incidents happened in her community (IP A10 65). In a debate with Sevil, Fatima contested whether it would be appropriate to openly argue from and identify her own background at public events when acting in the role as official. She felt that this might conflict with an assumed need to be neutral as an official (IP A1 309). Some officers also challenged the importance of specific group expertise as they started out from their identity as multiple and as involving different belongings. Acknowledging such complex identities would make expertise on one particular characteristic insufficient and superfluous (IP B7 30).

As a professional group, diversity officers were thus unanimous whether they wanted to use their identity or background for their job and whether someone with a specific background necessarily should work on his or her own identity group (IP A1 252). Individual officers apply very different strategies of making meaning of their personal background and putting it to use for their job. Being of an ethnic minority origin is used explicitly as part of one's knowledge by some diversity officers, while other diversity officers reject an explicit reference to their own ethnic identity in their job. They will most likely feel reduced to their ethnic identity if they are continuously approached on issues concerning their own ethnic minority. This unanimous approach of having personal characteristics inform diversity officers' professional activities was reflected also in recruitment and selection procedures. Across cities, there was no default way of approaching aspects of identity when recruiting diversity officers. Although it obviously was important for municipalities to have a 'diverse team', they rarely explicitly formulate ethnic background or specific forms of identification as a requirement for the job. In Antwerp, for instance, having a certain minority ethnic background was framed as a welcome but coincidental surplus to other qualifications.

Sometimes, it is not only one's personal identity but specific experiences as a minority member and of unequal treatment or discrimination that diversity officers referred to as relevant resource. Nadine for instance said

I am myself from Moroccan background and I myself have felt a lot of racism and discrimination on the job market. And I am now working on personnel policy. So you try to have a policy through which people get equal opportunities (Nadine 33).

As Mieke pointed out to me, an awareness of discrimination is, however, not reserved to minority members. It can also be strategically used by diversity officers of majority background.

The advantage you have if you are not yourself a part of the group, but you engage yourself for it, that you have easier access. Because you already belong to that group, you sit a bit like a Trojan horse there, you know. (IP A7 208)

Having also diversity officers from the majority as part of the team can then be a strategic capital, as it is easier for them to break through established hierarchies. However, not all diversity officers necessarily have that awareness or are able to make use of it in their work. A few diversity officers were criticised by colleagues for failing to address power imbalances and for the imposing stance they took in their everyday work, with profound negative effects on the outcomes of their work (IP A7 441). One example was a diversity officer who lacked an awareness of the power relations at play when making agreements with civil society representatives, compelling them to agree to his suggestions. This resulted that often they never came back and refrained from sticking to agreements. As one officer criticises

He makes an appointment and then the appointment is made, done. And if it then doesn't work, it is not his fault, it is their fault. You can take that view, but then you won't get further. And it is also a personal style of working, because if you say I made an appointment and if the appointment is not met, then it is their problem. Or do you say no, I am sitting here as public authority and it just is my task that I make sure it does work out. Thus that you are here as service provider, thus that you also get back to people one time and question (why) is this now happening and what do we need to do. (IP A7 464)

Relating with others without preformed stereotypes and being empathetic about their situation and claims is therefore one central ability diversity officers had emphasized (IP C13 172, IP C10 544, IP C6 68).

Although the question whether one's personal identity shall inform diversity officers work or job profile is not made explicit or responded to in unanimous ways, the personal identity of diversity officers and the ensued knowledge and capabilities seem to have a specific relevance for this occupational group. Listening to different diversity officers' stories, there

seems no one size fits all pattern, as demonstrated in the this section, providing specific challenges for addressing identity in a process of professionalisation.

3.2 Altruists and careerists

In diversity officer's accounts, the motivation for doing the job appeared as another important factor informing their position. The motivation of individual diversity officers also differentiated them from each other. Sevil, for instance, emphasized how important it was for her that the job of diversity officer allowed her to work on something that 'made her heart beat faster' (IP A1 180).

A more ethical/moral motivation of diversity officers was often based on a personal identification with a specific vision for society or the experience of being a member of a minority. Several officers mentioned the motivation to change society as a starting point for choosing this profession (IP C2 19).

Passion for the topic was crucial for some officers to work on the policy implementation and to accept the structures of the bureaucratic institution, which might not be the most rewarding in terms of career advancement or income level (IP A7 27). Mieke gives a strong account of how being able to work on realising her ideals was more important to her than status or income:

I always also had the idea for myself that with what I had learned I could give something back to society. Now, you also have people who say with what I have learned I am going to earn a lot of money, but I cannot identify with that. (IP A7 480)

Other officers refer to disadvantages based on their experiences as members of particular social minorities as motivating them to choose their profession. Difficulties of women in their family and social environment, for example, were the motivation for one diversity officer to work on women's issues professionally (IP A11 12, IP A7, 38, IP A1 275). Some diversity officers told a story in which empowering themselves has led them to want to empower others (IP B3 117) and where they saw their own engagement as 'doing something back for society' (IP A11 154). Several officers also mentioned experiences of

racism (IP C2 33) as a central stimulus for wanting to work on these issues and to change the situation for other people:

I am myself from Moroccan background and I myself have felt a lot of racism and discrimination on the job market. And I am now working on personnel policy. So you try to have a policy through which people get equal opportunities, notwithstanding their colour or name. This is why. (...) And because I experienced it myself also, I just experience a lot of discrimination, people seeing you and getting frightened or saying very daft or bad things. And then you realise this is actually happening to me, but thus this is also happening to other people. And then you become more conscious about the need to recognise diversity. (IP C2 33)

Next to such more collective-oriented, altruistic reasons, I also encountered more self-oriented career considerations. As Peter said,

It was also a logical step in my development to become somewhat more occupied with these themes on the policy level. (IP C10 78)

Sometimes both grounds for becoming a diversity officer were mentioned by the same person, sometimes one was emphasized over the other. Hardly any diversity officer was doing the job only because of the implied career opportunity or only because of the opportunity of realising their altruistic goals. Other factors, such as the benefits of the bureaucratic institution as a workplace and the family-friendliness of the bureaucratic workplace also played a role for some diversity officers (IP C9 45). Becoming a diversity officer for some represented a move from practical work 'on the ground' to more policy-oriented work, which was seen as a logical and strategic career step to reach a higher position. For example, one diversity officer had been a secretary within the municipal organisation before and only by obtaining a university degree was able to gain a position as a diversity officer (IP A11 15). Another diversity officer had started as a trainee in the diversity unit and over the years had moved up to the position of head of unit (IP A14 22). Others started their career at the neighbourhood level and later moved to the municipal level (IP A2 12).

Becoming a diversity officer was often based on both altruistic motivations combined with professional aspirations. Individual officers' background often seemed important in their reasoning why they wanted to do that job, thus resulting in a diversity of motivations for becoming a diversity officer.

3.3 Ambiguities and unresolved tensions

The importance of identity as a knowledge base and as a resource is quite distinct for a public official and differentiates diversity officers from other officials in the municipal organisation. As I demonstrated, both majority and minority identities can be a resource for diversity teams. The challenge for municipal organisations is to make clear if it is legitimate for diversity officers to draw on their identity and background. At the same time there need to be safeguards to prevent diversity officers from becoming reduced to their identities by other colleagues or the organisation as such. To date, there is also a lack of explicit guidelines, whether diversity officers are expected to translate their awareness of inequalities into their interactions with civil society members. The insecurities of recruiters to openly refer to aspects of identity in recruitment procedures can be seen as symptomatic of the theoretical insecurities of diversity concept as such. Diversity politics acknowledges different categories of identity, but remains vague and is shying away from singling out particular issues and approaching people based on specific identity aspects.

I also showed that diversity officers often combine self-interest and more public-oriented motivations. A diversity officer might thus neither be purely altruist or purely career-oriented, but the motivation to do this job may involve both more public-spirited motives and more self-interested motives. The combination of altruistic and careerist reasons might not be specific for diversity officers, but the strong presence of public-spirited goals next to careerist goals makes this group of officials quite likely to enter a separate process of professionalization. We can expect that diversity officers with some altruistic motivation will be highly motivated to gain and retain some power over the definition of problems and solutions for them. Diversity officers with a sole motivation to foster a career, however, are most likely to move on to different roles and positions after some time.

4 The impact of neoliberal pressures and symbolic politics

In the previous section I have argued that diversity officers are to a large extent defined through their individual profile of competences and knowledge. However, the success of diversity and its implementation depends also on other factors. Next to the individual definition of diversity officers and their profile, the organisational cultures in which they are embedded, and the political styles which they have to accommodate have an immense effect on their work. By exploring diversity officers' relationships with other stakeholders, such as politicians and civil society representatives, I will identify two structural factors that have a detrimental effect on diversity officer's work in this section.

Diversity teams in Antwerp, Amsterdam, and Leeds are positioned in different ways in the larger institutional structure and the political discourses and the composition of local governments differs across cities. Also, their diversity units existed for a different length of time, experienced different developments, and focused on different issues and tasks. Yet, all three cities struggled to some degree with two factors, which inform current activities of cities in the field of diversity: a neo-liberal way of managing municipal organisations and a symbolic politics as regards diversity and integration.

4.1 The case of diversity mainstreaming and neo-liberalisation in Antwerp

The case of the diversity unit in Antwerp is a particularly telling example for the negative impact of a neo-liberalisation of local governments. It circumvented, as I will argue, the full implementation of mainstreaming diversity within the municipal organisation. Operating since 2007, the diversity unit's primary task until 2011 was to convince the municipal organisation of the value of diversity policy and to promote its implementation across the municipal organisation. Each of the 12 so-called 'diversity consultants' was responsible to make the new policy concept of diversity known in one assigned directorate, also referred to as the 'mainstreaming' of diversity. In 2011 and after a couple of years of consultancy, however, the unit took a decisive turn in its activity. When the municipal organisation put a new manager of the directorate in which the unit was embedded in place, he encouraged the unit to re-evaluate its activities in order to keep booking successes. By now the unit had

been successful to some degree, as it could implement diversity measures in those directorates that were more open to the concept, while facing and struggling with some resistances by other directorates. The new director together with the head of the unit decided to re-orient the units' focus to project work and to stop with consultancy of other municipal directorates. This would allow the unit to continue booking 'successes'. It however also implied for directorates who were resisting against or struggling with implementing diversity that they would now no longer receive any attention or support.

In the decision to shift the unit's activities, we see a clear prioritisation of short-term over long-term successes. The decision to give up the goal of implementing diversity across the whole organisation also signalled a move away from a social welfare approach, where one would invest into something which is expected to profit the social fabric in the long run. Instead, a social entrepreneurialism was favoured, particularly valuing the willingness to make brave changes and expecting that this will increase an organisation's efficiency. It is the notion of 'neo-liberalism', which seems to encapsulate the ideas that were guiding the decision-making against a continued 'mainstreaming of diversity' as observed in Antwerp:

Neo-liberalism is a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedom and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade. (Harvey 2005:2)

While urban bureaucracies are surely a long way from resembling private businesses, the emphasis on changing towards such a more entrepreneurial model was noticeable in all three cities. Two concrete manifestations of such a neo-liberal spirit were the reduction of classic subsidies (or at least the consideration of doing so) and experiments with new forms of 'partnership' between diversity officers and civil society representatives in Amsterdam, Antwerp and Leeds.

'Partnership working' made part of re-organising the interaction of diversity officers and civil society that was underway in all three cities. The diversity unit in Leeds, for instance, tried to create a real involvement of civil society through their 'Equality Assembly'. Citizens were stimulated to have their say on local policies with the only incentive of being heard and of

having a relatively transparent feedback on one's impact. Its establishment was based on the recognition that the council has to ask citizens before making decisions and listen to their concerns with existing policies. At the same time citizens are seen as having interests and they should therefore be able to inform the policies that affect them:

I think things are gradually changing in terms of the councils are better understanding of what involvement, meaningful involvement really means and the councillors are just getting their head around the fact that actually we do need to ask people. They know better than we do. We do need to ask people and involve people at the right time, you know. Because what the council had a habit of doing, was making a decision and then asking people, but the decision was already made. So it was kind of no point in asking. But now we are getting better in asking alright this is the decision that needs to be made, and it is gonna impact on loads of people or it is gonna impact on the disabled community in particular, let's ask them what they think. And then we can build their views and comments into the final decision. (IP B1 143)

The Equalities Assembly thus is meant to profit both citizens and council. It allows the former to be heard and the latter to get the contact it needs to realise its tasks in a good way. The diversity officers ensure the two-way direction, but the configuration of this relationship according to one diversity officer has not been easy and is still work in progress (IP B6 113). In the first years of the build-up of the Equality Assembly, the representation of all communities in the Assembly and their actual impact on policy decisions and the municipality's services were quite a challenge².

As Cochrane observed for the field of urban policy (Cochrane 2007), partnership working is just one element of a neoliberal way of public service delivery, reflecting a more entrepreneurial approach. While urban policy in the 1960s and 1970s had focused on struggles in and against the state, it was 'turned on its head' in the 1980s to focus on economic regeneration and urban competitiveness (Cochrane 2007). I would argue that a similar development, even if slightly deferred, can be assumed to have taken place in the field of integration policy. In the 1980s and 1990s multicultural and assimilation policies had focused on struggles of minorities and majorities for cultural recognition or domination. With diversity policy a more neo-liberal way of managing socio-cultural differences was introduced from the late 1990s or early 2000s, reflecting a more entrepreneurial and managerialist approach to the accommodation of social and cultural differences.

² City of Leeds, *Equality and Diversity Annual Report 2008-2009*, p. 16

One development that was connected to new partnership working in the context of diversity policy was a decrease of existing funding schemes and the decision that partnerships would no longer be based on financial incentives. The provision of funding was no longer regarded as essential. In Amsterdam the reformulation and possible withdrawal of certain funding streams was being debated. While municipal funding for minority organisations has been central to previous multicultural policies, this was now being questioned³. Subsidies have been declining for several years now (IP A13 155) and there are suspicions that they might soon be abandoned altogether (IP A12 53). The private sector is seen as potentially having an important role in taking the place of a shrinking welfare state. To date, this potential role however seems largely hypothetical and actual collaborations with private enterprises and municipal governments are scarce and marginal.

A new way of working would be to get rid of subsidy schemes and to create a new way of interacting with citizens and their initiatives, as some officers suggest. According to one diversity officer the question is:

...how you deal with all the different developments in the city, with all the different sorts of people. Very traditionally you could say: this is the government, these are some specific developments, we need to have some policy for it, there needs to be money assigned to it and then we go and distribute that money a bit. Very black and white, that's the standard. But with us this all doesn't work, because the people and things you have to do with are so heterogeneous, so different to arrive at things. (...) Thus you need to do it much more via interactions with those people and organisations in the city. Money can be important, but make sure that you know each other, make sure that people create bonds with other people and organisations. That is, I think, much more important than the classic way. (...) Continuously creating links between these and those, sometimes really unexpected links, and through that new things and perspectives are created, also for people themselves. (IP A4 112)

³ One officer however explicitly acknowledged persisting specific needs of ethnic organisations (IP A8 83). She differentiates between activities of first and second generations (IP A8 190), as their target groups often have different levels of education (IP A8 106). Also one needs to be aware of different capacities to write funding applications of different societal groups, as e.g. associations for homosexuals or general voluntary sports organisations need different activities and often present their funding application more professionally than e.g. an association of a migrant ethnic self-organisations (IP A8 94; IP A8 49). Types of activities also differ between voluntary organisations of the ethnic majority and ethnic minority members, although there might be a possibility of similar activities for lowly educated majority and minority members (IP A8 118).

As Amsterdam was underway to slowly but surely decrease the subsidies it was giving away, co-funding through private organisations was considered as a possible pre-requisite for societal initiatives to be considered for still receiving some subsidies (IP A5 411). Such a funding scheme could involve somewhat stricter requirements for government funding (IP A5 428). One could define some terms and conditions, such as a minimum number of private investors or a minimum amount of investment from other sources in order to co-fund a project (IP A1 482). The obvious effect of such an approach is to stimulate initiatives which are able to 'sell' their ideas also to the private sector, requiring resources for professionalising in terms of fund-raising and self-marketing. Initiatives which lack the abilities to do so, and those of the lower-tier and less-skilled parts of society can be expected to lose out in this scheme.

Next to 'partnership' working, the making of new urban managers and new urban professionals, a concern for evidence-based policy and the mobilisation of new technologies of management were central expressions of a neoliberal approach in the field of urban policy (Cochrane 2007). Evidence based-policy created methods of evaluation and accountability, which we see reflected in the strategic targets and performance management frameworks regarding diversity in all three cities. It was promoted under the header of 'New Public Management' since the 1980s (Uitermark and Duyvendak 2008). Diversity officers both saw the added value of these tools, as they allowed them to mark progress, but they were also critical of the actual insights these outcomes, as good indicators are often missing (IP C4 94) and the collected data only shows progress, but leaves unclear how far one became closer to achieving set targets (IP B1 249; IP B1 262). All evidence is anecdotal (IP B1 303) and there is no measurement or evaluation mechanism which allows planning ahead (IP C4 142). When it comes to reporting the results, one diversity officer feels they are struggling to find a way of determining how the data should be analysed and how to establish results on whether something was a success or not (IP C4 84). I can conclude that these strategic targets might serve to communicate policy across the organisation, but they also seem to mainly create a myth of effectiveness and pro-activity rather than actual outcomes.

Overall, a neo-liberal logic seems to translate into a rather unstable position of diversity officers, facing frequent changes and reorganisations of their work focus and finding new ways of interacting with citizens. The rationale is that changes as such might be desirable and that social policy is not about creating an outcome of social welfare but about effectively managing social relations.

4.2 Amsterdam's dealings with a symbolic politics

As a second detrimental factor for the implementation of diversity, I identified the symbolic use of diversity policy. To illustrate my point, I will mainly focus on the example of the struggles of Amsterdam's diversity team to consolidate a collaborative atmosphere in the team and with politicians in face of a strong symbolic use of diversity.

To understand the meaning of symbolic politics in Amsterdam, we have to go back a couple of years in history. The murder of Theo van Gogh in 2004 was an important event in Amsterdam's approach to integration, and it had a deep and lasting effect on the political culture of dealing with diversity. Since the event, local politicians seemed to accept a high symbolic value of the concept of diversity. As Edelman (1971) noted on the symbolic use of politics, 'political acts, speeches and gestures involve mass audiences emotionally in politics' and it is this emotional involvement of the larger urban population into the discourse of 'managing diversity' that was the goal of politicians in Amsterdam. Although diversity had been introduced already in 1999, the murder of Theo van Gogh made it even more relevant, to symbolise a change to a more positive and 'productive' approach of difference. It served to replace a dominant discourse of a failure of multiculturalism, which was experienced as somewhat destructive by politicians. New political forms, such as the 'management by speech' in Amsterdam, were created to 'symbolise what large masses want to believe about the state to reassure themselves' (ibid.). It was a belief of a local government which is proactive and which is capable of managing difficult situations that are resulting from the diversity in the city, while valuing the added value of this diversity.

However, for politicians and diversity officers, this resulted in a highly reactive way of addressing issues of diversity. For instance, politicians immediately wanted to react if something happened in the city that could be related to diversity, a technique that was called 'management by speech'. Suppose a jewellery shop was robbed by someone of migrant origin, it was agreed that one of the aldermen would immediately drive to the site of the crime to give interviews and to assure the media that the situation was competently managed. The effect of such a symbolic politics on the work atmosphere in the diversity unit was devastating. When I came to the diversity team in 2011, I found a large unit and a knowledgeable and experienced group of people. Yet, the team seemed to be in a permanent state of emergency and the hectic atmosphere left tangible effects. Working more next to rather than with each other, several inter-personal conflicts smoldered between team members. Most of the hectic seemed to be related to the demands of the alderman, with many meetings on the agenda throughout the week and requests for speeches to be written on an ad-hoc basis. The situation was intensified by several other team-related problems, as the team was still working out the merger with another unit (the result of some neo-liberal management in Amsterdam) and the temporary election of a head of unit that was not entirely supported by the diversity team members. It was clear, however, that the symbolic value that was allocated to diversity translated into a high pressure and a distracting work atmosphere for diversity officers. The urge of politicians to be present and to appear proactive had an eroding effect on the motivation of diversity officers and on their relationship and collaboration with their political leaders.

Although the configuration of a very direct interaction between diversity officers and alderman was quite particular in Amsterdam, it was not the only city where the symbolic value of diversity played out. In Leeds, the politics of community cohesion, delineated in the 'Community Cohesion Action Plan' was established after the 2001 riots in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford (IP B6 23). While community cohesion was given a very prominent place with its own policy document for 2008-2011, there was no continuation of the policy after it ran out in the middle of 2011. The policy had mainly served to symbolise a proactive government, but it was again submerged in the broader policy framework after the concept lost its attention and thus symbolic value. Events can trigger the creation or use of a concept

to respond to the symbolic needs of politicians. It is however likely that the attention fades again with the passing of time (IP A3 140).

In Antwerp, some diversity officers criticised politicians who used diversity more as a marketing strategy for the city. In their view they were exploiting diversity's symbolic value to create a positive image of diversity without addressing the actual issues of poverty and deprivation. Involving different groups in the city was rather meant by politicians as a sort of window-dressing rather than an actual aim to achieve equal participation, as one diversity officer claims (IP C9 191). Antwerp's diversity policies would target only the middle class, and therefore clashed with the promoted aim of creating a city for everyone (IP C6 169).

And actually everything that the city does is targeted at the middle class. (...) This is where the entire budget is going to. They do want to work on diversity, (...) but if then ethnic minority people suddenly come, if poor people come, and then suddenly something in the atmosphere is changing. And actually they don't want it [that they come], because the middle class is sensitive to that. Ethnic minority people may come, as long as they belong also to the middle class, workers might come, but they have to fit into our middle class pattern (...), everyone might come, but we don't change our concept. Because we middle class want that everything stays as it was. And sometimes I would really want that it [diversity policy] is for everyone. And I don't find it acceptable that the municipality is pumping a lot of money into only a part of the population. (...). Ethnic minority people may come, but they have to be the same as us. Actually everything the city does is going into that, and with this I have a big problem. It seems as if a lower class also should be of lower value. And I don't find it responsible that you give all the money, all the tax money to the middle-class, but this is how it currently is in practice. (IP C6 169)

With all three cities ascribing a symbolic value to new concepts such as diversity and community cohesion, this allowed them to go beyond a discourse of the 'failure of multiculturalism'. However, we have identified profound problems this symbolic politics is creating as well. Overcharged units and an eroding work atmosphere, unsustainable concepts that are soon outdated, and, maybe most profoundly, the use of the concept of diversity as a sort of window dressing without actually committing to working towards the more-long term changes of social relations, were some of the observed effects of the symbolic use of diversity.

4.3 Implications for the implementation of diversity policy

Neo-liberalisation and symbolic politics have been dynamics that accompanied and spurred the process of implementing diversity policies. As I demonstrated, there are some positive effects, as partnership working stimulates municipalities to think about new ways of relating to citizens and evidence-based policies and the vocabulary such as 'effectiveness' allows diversity officers to be taken more serious than before. Yet, detriments prevail. A neo-liberal politics stands in the way of achieving long-term changes in the relationships across differences in the city, as the urge for evidence and the scoring of successes makes it difficult to achieve the complete implementation of policies of diversity. Parallel budget cuts and austerity measures circumvent co-operations to become meaningful or attractive. The need for new political symbols has made diversity particularly attractive, but the symbolic use of diversity policy is not necessarily leading to attractive outcomes. Symbolic politics as creating pressures and lead to a reactive and short term politics, that are either swiftly replaced once their political value diminishes, or which are too short-sighted in the way they are interpreted.

5 Professionalisation - a strategic response?

One possible answer to the identified insecurities in defining diversity officers' position and the impact of neo-liberalism and symbolic politics is a possible process of professionalization of diversity officers. This is insofar an attractive option, as it entails that diversity officers can be actively involved in creating their position within municipal organisations. At the same time, there is a danger of prioritising some profiles over others and thus to lose the 'creative mix' of backgrounds, identities and forms of knowledge that diversity officers currently display.

Today, if at all, diversity officers are at the very beginning of a process of professionalization. Many of them might not see themselves as part of a specific group of professionals, but just as general 'public officials'. A 'process of professionalisation' according to Bourdieu (1991) would involve that only selected individuals will be appointed 'diversity officers' and have

access to this position and title. Professionalisation has also been depicted in the literature as a process by which certain occupations develop 'a tacit and technical knowledge-base' (Evetts 2003), which makes them distinct from other occupations. Back in the 19th century the occupational groups of lawyers and doctors were amongst the first who started to professionalise. They established control mechanisms for the power and knowledge they were exercising in their work, e.g. by means of professional organisations or health insurance schemes (Johnson 1972).

Applied to diversity officers, this literature allows to reflect on the occupation of diversity officers and to assess whether and in which ways diversity officers are professionalising. Is there a 'tacit knowledge base' emerging, on which all diversity officers draw on? Are they having or wishing to have a certain power to define the nature of problems and of potential solutions? From my research, it seems that diversity officers to date are fairly vulnerable to the specific structural factors and recruitment practices in each individual city. Furthermore, there is no specific professional organisation and international connections remain on an ad-hoc-basis. It is only in networks such as Eurocities Working Group on Migration and Integration or the Intercultural cities network of the Council of Europe where the awareness about an internationally developing profession of diversity officer may have been fostered amongst a select group of diversity officers.

It will be left to future research to determine whether such a professionalization is taking place and how it informs the definition of possible motivations of diversity officers for doing the job and the definition of boundaries of symbolic uses and neo-liberal considerations.

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