

Living together in diversity

20 min.

Thank you for inviting me to share our knowledge and strategies to combat racism and discrimination on a local level with a focus on muslim communities. In my introduction I will try to give you

A) a picture of Antwerp and its diversity,
B) a short panorama on the political framework of Antwerp,
C) an explanation of why and on how the choice was made for an inclusive strategy;
D) how we deal with policy instruments to manage diversity in the city (incl. that of muslims) and our interaction with actors in the field;
E) Finally, I would like to end my introduction with some hot issues in Antwerp within this topic of dealing with the participation of muslim communities in Antwerp ...

A) Diversity in Antwerp :

- Amongst approximately half a million inhabitants, 26 % of them is foreign born or has a migratory background, and of this figure 18 % come from outside the EU.
 - Our largest communities (outside those of the European Union) are Moroccan- and Turkish-rooted citizens, though we see an increase of several Eastern-European nationalities, like Polish and migrants of the former Yugoslavia. These nationalities are then followed by the Indians, Congolese, Jews, Russians.
 - Because of a lack in time, I won't describe the historical background of these minorities in Antwerp.
 - We do not have official estimates on how many muslims live in Antwerp, but within our offices, we think w're dealing with nearly 12 to 13 % of Muslims in Antwerp.
 - many of the 160 nationalities in Antwerp are socially active in organisations based on ethnic background. Currently we have a registration of 118 organisations of ethnic background. We know this because these have to fill out a form to be recognized as an association of volunteers working on a better living together in diversity by getting themselves known by various activities and projects.
 - Most of these grass root associations are member of an umbrella organisation. In Antwerp alone we have various important and influential umbrella organisations, like for example the Federation of Moroccan organisations or the union of Turkish organisations....
 - We count approximately 7 to 8 umbrella organisations located in Antwerp but with a working area that exceeds that of the city of Antwerp. All of them are ethnic-based but one. That is the Union of Mosques and Islamic organisations in Antwerp : clearly faith-based, but in fact it is also ethnic-based because the vast majority of its members are Moroccan mosques.
- I will get back on these umbrella organisations, when dealing with instruments to have a better participation of muslim communities in Antwerp.

B) Political framework of Antwerp :

- it was in October of 2006, when the local elections turned out to be a big victory for the socialist party especially.
- these results were moreover unique and special, actually national news, because it was the first time since 1991, when het Vlaams Blok (now it names itself "Vlaams Belang") gained huge election results, and getting stronger and stronger every electionperiod (whether local or regional elections). Until thus in october 2006. it didn't get stronger, no, instead it had a small backlash for the first time in their history.
- Cordon sanitaire : most Flemish political parties made and still have a concordance that they will never go into alliance with this Vlaams Belangparty, because of its lack of democratic values and its extreme right wing language nourishing the fear and insecurity feelings of the dominant populations.
- In 2006 : socialist, liberal and christen-democrats agreed on an inclusive strategy to face the challenges of a more and more diverse Antwerp society. It is on this topic that I will focus my introduction .

C) An inclusive strategy : what, why and how?

- after winning the local elections in 2006, the coalition parties agreed on facing the challenge of living together in diversity from an inclusive point of view.
- **Broad diversity** is a central element of the new *local government agreement 2007-2012*. The concept of broad diversity has to be understood as different from specific diversity which includes various policies targeting different groups discriminated for different reasons: disabled, ethnic minorities, etc. Broad diversity is featured as an inclusive policy. In other words, **diversity policy concerns all residents in Antwerp**. Henceforth diversity policy has to target all disadvantaged groups namely: ethnic minorities, holebi, women, disabled, poor. Nevertheless, as city experts underline, some groups are not included and there are still specific policies for them. It is the case of youth and elderly people. Moreover, the slogan of the city is "the city belongs to everyone" and this is like a flag of the diversity policy and the will of inclusiveness. This new way of approaching diversity without specifying target groups shows a significant shift from a categorical model of integration (target groups) to a more inclusive approach.
- **Diversity** is also defined as a **horizontal objective**. The scope of the horizontal objective diversity includes: (1) a diverse personnel policy in the city and daughters as a reflection of the diversity in the city and (2) considering systematically and actively the diversity of the residents in all services delivered by the city and daughters (through products and processes). The city daughters include the bodies where the city participates through the intermunicipal cooperation agreements, social housing companies, autonomous city structures city managed non-profit associations and other agencies. According to the city all these daughters perform city tasks. The city council wants the city representatives to monitor the execution of the policy lines for the city.
- The city also enters into agreements with the civil society, with schools etc., for instance the agreements of the city youth service with youth work partners. These agreements sometimes also include criteria with respect to diversity.

- one of the consequences of the Antwerps inclusive strategy was also a change in administrative level : whereas within social affairs several offices were working on the integration of diverse targetgroups : integration office for ecm, emancipation office, persons with a handicap, elderly, now we have one administrative office for the challenge of living in diversity in Antwerp. Within this office two main strategies are coordinated: one of diversity, one of social cohesion.

D) how we deal with policy instruments to manage diversity in the city (incl. that of muslims) and our interaction with actors in the field;

- as I said two main strategies : one of supporting diversity within the city administration and one of social cohesion.

- Let me start by saying sth. about diversity management : Responsibility is a key word!

- Responsibility for diversity policy has been designated among the elected representatives for the first time after the last local elections. Since the 1st January 2007, diversity is one of the explicit competences of an alderman. Monica de Coninck is the **alderman of social affairs, diversity and counters.**

- **Each service** involved is responsible for its own diversity policy, each department has its own manager (administratively responsible). Our new city service 'living together in diversity' (broad) and (within the department of Social Affairs) has now a team of diversity consultants, who are working as a supporting staff for all these departments and services.

- **For example** : Regarding diversity policy in employment, the alderman for personnel is the person politically responsible and the manager of the Personnel management department is the person administratively responsible. The agent responsible within the Human resource management department is staff officer and member of the executive committee. He is supported by the **workgroup Human Resources Management and Diversity (HRM)** which is a think-tank on the implementation of the diversity policy in the personnel policy of the city and the Social Welfare Service.¹

- This team bundles specific and updated experience on broad diversity and offers this to the departments. The team gives advice and follow-up. It develops instruments (for example a checklist 'limits to diversity' and an evaluation instrument).²

- In between time we have succeeded with managers in the city administration (supported by the civil society) to point out Six Challenges for 2012 :

- Het stadsbestuur kiest voor een diversiteitsbeleid dat doorsijpelt in alle beslissingen. Deze nota schetst voor 2012 zes grote uitdagingen.

¹ Source: Tactical objective Pm04 and memorandum 'Antwerp, a socially responsible city' (MVA maatschappelijk verantwoord antwerpen). Status: council.

² See 3.7

1. Antwerpen is een stad waar mensen met verschillende achtergronden mekaar beter begrijpen.
2. Iedereen kent de democratische en maatschappelijke spelregels en gebruikt ze om in dialoog te gaan en meningsverschillen bespreekbaar te maken.
3. In Antwerpen krijgt iedereen de ruimte om de eigen identiteit te ontwikkelen en te beleven..
4. Alle Antwerpenaren kunnen hun sociale grondrechten realiseren.
5. Alle diensten van Stad en OCMW geven het voorbeeld door diversiteit maximaal plaats te geven binnen hun werking.
6. De stad moedigt andere actoren (partners, bedrijven, organisaties) aan om diversiteit ook binnen hun werking vorm te geven

- Then we have the strategy of social cohesion. Focus on common aspects or similarities, active citizenship : taking up responsibility and claiming rights are here also key words! For some targetgroups it is recognized that equal chances are a condition to be able join better active citizenship

- In the beginning this strategy was conceived as also to be inclusive as much as possible by stressing the similarities between all inhabitants in Antwerp, (actually it still is conceived like that).
- But protest from “civil society” of the main target groups up to now resulted that even the alderman is asking us to try and point out the categorical helpdesks for the targetgroups, let alone the categorical instruments that we have within our strategy of social cohesion.
- Within the social cohesion strategy the city tries to subsidize initiatives (activities or projects) of the several target groups or groups apt to be discriminated against for different reasons: disabled, ethnic minorities, etc.so as to have an increase of their participation in the city. Not only by subsidizing but also by developing instruments to have their voices heard (like advisory councils), partnership contracts, etc.... Also a focus is put on **mediation** : diversity in the streets means not only similarities, but also differences and conflicts following these differences.
- For seven months now a new push by the inauguration of a **“helpdesk” specialized in discrimination issues and anti-discrimination law** : not only can you forward a complaint, but also it can be addressed to be informed about all aspects on law etc....
- A very important aspect of the social cohesion strategy is to have a focus on the territory aspects: not only regarding the 9 different districts within the city, but also from the perspective of increasing social cohesion on the micro level : that is the streets, the meso level : the neighbourhood and of course initiatives on a macro level : the city.
- We have therefore a team of 15 persons that is called “opsinjoren” : a word that is difficult to translate, but the closest I can get explaining it : it is a verb that means to shiny up the city : all inhabitants can for example have the

street closed by the police so the children can play a whole day without fearing traffic. Or the city corner new year reception, or the neighbourhood minifestival on the most close playyard.....

- Unfortunately : these are strategies, which means that current reality is somewhat different.

- Examples of the murders in 2006 : blz. 6 van Clip;
- Because of the lack in time and the focus of this workgroup I will now focus more on the city challenges on muslim citizenship issues....
- For many years, the city of Antwerp has invested in financing and supporting an **Ethnic Minorities Council 'allochtone overleg- en adviesraad'** in which the different migrant community organisations were represented. This council was never successful in profiling itself as an advisory body that could influence political decision making. The council struggled with a double function: advisory body on the one hand, pressure group for migrant issues on the other. This had lead to a deep crisis in the council. Everything points at the actual council being dismantled in the future; it is considered old-fashioned categorical model that increases polarisation rather than strengthening the dialogue. This is considered together with other categorial councils that can still have a place in new models of advise. In the meantime, our service maintains bilateral relations with **different federations and self-organisations**, for example through the intensive follow-up of some 30 projects that these organisations carry out with municipal subsidies. New forms of dialogue and collaboration emerge from these projects.
- As I said earlier most of these umbrella organisations are ethnic based and in full process of becoming more and more diverse themselves.
- But one is definitely faith-based : that is the **union of mosques and islamic organisations**. Yet and unfortunately : this umbrella organisation deals with a lot of internal challenges that it mostly seems to be absent in the public sphere, unless when it's a protocol or a formal occasion. Then on the contrary they seem to be very present.
- This aspect alone stresses the gap between the city's diversity challenges and the muslim challenges : the city tends not to be willing to overstress the formal aspect and wants to go further in its quest to have a thorough debate on values as democracy, division of state and church, freedom of individuals, and gender equality.
- A debate on two different speeds and in between time polarisation and radicalisation seem to grow...
- I say seem to grow, because if there is a gap, than it's the gap of disillusioned expectations : there where the Belgian majorities expected the children of muslims to be more "assimilated" taking over values and norms as existing within institutions and public spaces, suddenly these youngsters seem to seek solutions for their "life building plans" within the religion of their parents, their ethnic communities. And on the other had the youngsters seem to be disillusioned by the Belgian debates and discussions about Enlightenment values, that suddenly seem to be so important and so front positioned whereas

they see that the christian-based culture is still overtly present in attitudes, conduct and even in the ruling of law.

- Blz. 6 van Clip en verder.....

The headscarf issue :

Neutrality of the office is a basic value. Neutral authorities are politically neutral. In the local government agreement 2007-2012 this is clearly specified in article 430: *"the city authorities want to encourage the diversity of the personnel. It must be possible for a lot of people with very different personal beliefs to work for the city. But the external signs of their personal beliefs may not be shown in direct contacts with the customers. In these contacts the neutrality of the service and respect are primordial. External symbols of personal, religious, political or other beliefs are not worn in direct contacts with the customers."*

Members of the staff of the city of Antwerp cannot express their personal beliefs in their contacts with the customers. In March 2007, in accordance with article 430, the city published the memorandum: **"Diversity: clothing regulations for city personnel"**. It stipulates that:

- (1) Personnel in uniform does not wear any other clothes or marks, with the exception of the symbols of the city house style.
- (2) Personnel in work clothes or safety clothes does not wear any other clothes or marks, with the exception of the symbols of the city house style.
- (3) Personnel in direct contact with the public, customers or external partners wears respectable, non-showy clothes. External symbols of personal, political, trade union, sports, ... preferences are not worn during working hours, not even for charity. So no cross, yarmulke, head scarf, turban, HIV pin, mark of a service club or association, etc. are permitted.
- (4) Other personnel members also have to wear respectable, non-showy clothes which express courtesy. Earrings for men are possible, but heavy nose piercing are not. A head scarf is possible but a covering veil is not.

In line with this article of the new local government agreement is also the attitude of personnel management with respect to adjustments as a result of questions asked by personnel members which find their origin in culture or religion. In practice, the questions asked by personnel members are sometimes answered ad hoc with sometimes long-term negative consequences. According to the IS, the city needs a thinking frame to deal constructively with this issue.

The IS designed a **testing frame** that can be used by those involved. It consists of about ten questions which have to be asked with each decision whether or not to introduce a specific measure for a certain group (for instance: may you pray at work or not?). For instance: is the measure in conflict with the existing legal frame or not, does this specific measure undermine the joint responsibility and the citizen's ability to try and solve problems or to prevent problems; with this action will we have to cut down on the basic quality of our services; ... ?

In conclusion, widening the notion of diversity at this point in the context of diversity policy and in the even more critical context of diversity management seems to eliminate/filter out the diversity. How the cultural specificities, the

cultural differences that a diversity policy is supposed to respect and valorise could be regard? There is a risk to drawn the differences in a norm that is still defined and formulated by the majority. In other words, the difference is denied instead of being valorised by a policy that pretends to valorise and support all differences (cultural, gender, health, sexual orientation). The risk is to erase the characteristics of the "target groups" - is it still relevant to use this term anymore then - in order to give them the same opportunities as a "standard worker". So, the pitfall is that the "standard worker" is the autochthonous worker and there is no space anymore for the differences. Finally, does this broad diversity approach mean implicitly the development of assimilationist trend at least regarding ethnic minorities?