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Mainstreaming disability in policies: the Flemish experience

Whilst research on gender mainstreaming (GM) is extensive, literature on disability mainstreaming (DM) is scarce. This article builds on the experience of GM to explore the conditions affecting DM focusing on the first Flemish policy cycle of DM (2010-2014) in two policy domains, employment and education. We found no substantive difference in the conditions necessary for the successful implementation of DM compared to that of GM. Also, developments specific to the policy domains had more influence on the inclusive character of policies than the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities or the Flemish approach to DM.

Keywords: gender mainstreaming; disability mainstreaming; equality policies; inclusive policies; Flanders

Introduction

The ongoing shift in Flemish disability policies from a welfare-based model towards a social model and rights-based approach has its origins in the last decade of the twentieth century (VAPH 2013). Consequently, disability has become regarded as a social construct, rather than a medical fact (impairment), and the difficulties that persons with disabilities face in society, as stemming primarily from prejudice, discrimination, and barriers put in place by society and its political institutions (Kelemen and Vanhala 2010). The 2007 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), ratified by the Belgian state in 2009,¹ endorses this perspective (UN 2007), suggesting policies that advance the inclusion of persons with disabilities by removing the barriers to participation in society (Kelemen and Vanhala 2010).

¹ As a consequence of the ratification Belgium implements a ‘handstreaming strategy’ and established a National Higher Council for Disabled People to guarantee the participation of disabled people. The Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities is the independent public institution supervising the implementation of the UNCRPD. It is the pendant of the federal Institute for Equal Opportunities of Women and Men.

Such policy solutions can be found in a mainstreaming strategy, a so-called horizontal policy approach (Council of Europe 1998) used to open up the various policy areas to the demands of equality. Mainstreaming as a strategy for equality policies was initially applied to gender equality policies in development policies and became globally known as gender mainstreaming (GM) at the occasion of the fourth UN World Conference for Women held in Beijing in 1995. The presumed advantages of GM soon led to mainstreaming demands by various other social policy groups, such as persons with disabilities (Geyer and Lightfoot 2010). In 1996 a new EU Disability Strategy was adopted in pursuance of the 1993 UN Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. It identified a range of obstacles to equality in various policy domains, and the EU Action Plans since 2003 emphasise the need for a mainstreaming of disability policies (Priestley 2007, 2012). Regional and local authorities were included early on. In 2005-2006, the European Disability Forum ran the project 'Mainstreaming disability in regional and local policy' applying a disability mainstreaming (DM) strategy known as 'Agenda 22' (Europe Disability Forum 2007).

Flanders was one of the regions participating in this DM project. In 2009 a new opportunity for DM in Flanders opened up. The government declaration for the period 2009-2014 added disability to the competences of the Department for Equal Opportunities in Flanders. The GM strategy already in use, the so-called Open Method of Coordination (OMC), also became the strategy for mainstreaming the inclusion of persons with disabilities. OMC is characterised by the fact that policy actors such as ministers or policy departments decide upon common goals but each develop their own strategies and tools to reach them. It is a method in use at the European level in the field of social policies where the actual European competencies are limited (AWIPH 2011; Gelijke Kansen in Vlaanderen 2012; GRIPvzw 2011b).

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This article investigates whether the first Flemish OMC cycle (2010-2014) concerning disability is a successful case of inclusive policy making. We rely upon the conditions highlighted for successful GM as an analytical framework, distinguishing conditions pertinent to mainstreaming equality policies (common for GM and DM), from elements germane to mainstreaming disability (different than for GM) and elements specific to disability policies, in the policy domains of employment and education (difference between policy domains).

GM is a highly demanding policy strategy requiring a fundamental transformation of the policy making process. All policies are required to be tested for their effects on (un)equal power relations between men and women. It requires gender research covering a wide variety of topics, accurate gender sensitive data, insights into the causes of gender inequality and training to develop gender expertise (Daly 2005; Jahan 1996; Lombardo and Meier 2006; Pollack and Hafner-Burton 2000; Rees 2005; Woodward 2003, 2008). GM also brings a change in the form of decision making structures and processes, more precisely a horizontal approach addressing all policy areas (Beveridge & Nott, 2001; Woodward, 2008). It demands specific policy tools, procedures, practices, and actors. Tools include gender focused data and statistics, research generating knowledge of mechanisms causing gender inequality, 'gender impact assessment,' and the effective monitoring and evaluation of GM in policies (Daly 2005; Meier and Celis 2011). Procedural changes include the development of expertise among policy actors, the institutionalisation of women's participation, and their representation throughout the policy process (Benschop and Verloo 2000; Celis and Cortier 2008; Daly 2005; Lombardo and Meier 2006; Meier and Celis 2011). GM also increases the diversity of actors involved in the policy making process as it means that gender becomes the concern of all departments and agencies, and is carried out by actors involved in the different policy areas. These policy actors are required to develop the necessary expertise to realise GM through the involvement of external actors from civil society and academia (Walby 2011).

As the political agenda transforms the policy trajectory, the decision making structures and processes need to change so as to meet new objectives. There are a number of conditions for the successful implementation of GM. The most important one is the commitment of top politicians and bureaucrats, a commitment to be formalized (Benschop and Verloo 2000; Celis and Cortier 2008; Roemburg, Spee, and Michielsens 2004; Woodward 2003). The commitment to GM also requires allies within the various policy domains (Pollack and Hafner-Burton 2000; Rees 2005; Woodward 2003). Some characteristics specific to GM can undermine formal commitment, such as the almost exclusive use of ‘soft’ policy instruments facilitating policy learning, networking, and deliberation. Without binding provisions, clear aims, responsibilities, and sanctions for non-compliance, the implementation of GM is weak (Beveridge and Nott 2001; Hafner-Burton and Pollack 2009; Mazey 2002). When political goodwill, resources and knowledge are limited, gender equality risks becoming ‘everybody’s – and nobody’s – responsibility’ (Mazey 2002; Roemburg, Spee, and Michielsens 2004). A further condition is the allocation of financial and human resources for realizing GM (Bacchi and Eveline 2009; Benschop and Verloo 2000; Beveridge and Nott 2001; Stratigaki 2005; Woodward, 2003). Additionally, a GM agenda has to represent the interests of different groups of women and men. An important limitation is that mainstreaming one category of inequality, such as gender, often means prioritizing this over other inequalities such as those based on race and class. Diversity mainstreaming is a possible way out, but gender advocates fear that gender issues will disappear from the agenda. One of the hazards of this reluctance to move beyond gender issues, is that participative practices would only focus on certain voices in civil society and privilege certain gendered identities over others (Jahan 1996; Mazey 2002; Squires 2005; Woodward 2008).

We argue that GM and DM are comparable policy processes requiring similar conditions for successful implementation. Like GM, the success of DM depends on the extent

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to which it has been able to cause a shift in the mainstream agenda. DM requires an analysis of unequal power relations and granting priority to actions that target structural causes of disability. This social model implies a shift in discourse from impairment to disability (Miller and Albert 2005). DM also implies a horizontal approach that involves all policy domains and can only take place when specific policy tools and procedures are applied and a wide range of actors is involved. To that end, political commitment to the inclusion of persons with disabilities is required, with clear mission statements, accountability mechanisms, and allies. Sufficient financial and human resources need to be allocated and the interests of different groups of persons with disabilities should be represented in order to contribute to the inclusion of all persons with disabilities.

We expect the Flemish OMC for DM to have similar strengths and weaknesses as its predecessor, the OMC for gender. According to Meier and Celis (2011), the Flemish OMC for gender does not fall into the trap of limiting itself to procedures. It contains both procedural and substantive criteria. Policy domains are held accountable for their OMC action plans and tools for monitoring and evaluation are present. Major policy goals are translated into concrete indicators, allowing for stronger evaluations. However, the OMC only involves ‘soft’ policy tools without sanctions for non-compliance. Individual ministers decide about the actions and resources. Therefore, the success of GM through the OMC depends largely on the will of policy actors. Intersectionality is no part of the focus of the Flemish OMC. The distinction between gender and other discriminatory grounds was lobbied for by the Belgian women’s movement, a strategy supported by the fact that ethnic minorities do not fall under the remit of equal opportunity policies (Celis et al. 2012; Meier and Celis 2011).

In the next section, we describe the selection of cases, choice of participants, method of data collection, and criteria for data analysis. The section thereafter analyses the Flemish attempt of DM, elaborating on each condition for DM deduced from the literature on GM.

Finally, the conclusion discusses to what extent the new policies have facilitated DM, the differences in the process of DM between both policy domains, and how this relates to the literature on GM.

Method and data

Our study is concerned with the process of DM in Flemish policies through an exploration of the Flemish policy domains of employment and education. These are important Flemish competences where equal opportunities are a salient policy concern in contrast to, for instance, agriculture and fisheries. Equality issues in these policy domains – as in the majority of the traditional policy areas – were previously dealt with using measures and tools targeting specific disability issues in an isolated fashion. In that respect the policy domains of employment and education are exemplary. Given the salience of equality issues in these domains we furthermore contend that when DM fails in these policy domains it is highly likely to fail in other policy domains where policy effects on inequality are less palpable. Involving two equally important policy domains allows us to go beyond the specificity of a particular case. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that the focus on these policy areas also has downsides. Most importantly, it excludes other key issues in the accessibility agenda such as mobility or regional and urban planning policy.

We decided to rely on the Flemish case rather than the Belgian federal policy level or any other sub-state in Belgium for a number of reasons. First, the ongoing process of federalisation leads to an increasing downloading of competencies to the regions (the Belgian sub-state level in charge of territory related competencies) and communities (the Belgian sub-state level in charge of person related competencies). Studying the sub-state level, and how it responds to international and supranational influences, is of broader interest to other regions experiencing similar processes downloading policies that generate opportunities for policy innovation. Secondly, Flanders contrary to Brussels and the French part of the country,

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institutionally merged its territory and person related competencies, allowing for studying a more comprehensive spectrum of policy fields (while employment is to a large extent a territorial competence, education is a person related one). Third, Flanders was the first political level in Belgium to adopt GM, back in 1995, while all other policy levels did so but a decade later.

The empirical data has been generated through semi-structured in-depth interviews with policy officials in the two policy domains. We chose this method because no written evaluations are available so far. The thoughts and perceptions of policy makers are likely to be the most accurate source of information about the policy process. We interviewed two types of policy official: policy officials who were directly involved in the Flemish DM process, and those involved in giving advice on disability policies. We interviewed 18 policy officials within the departments and government agencies and two of the Flemish advisory Councils of Education and Employment, respectively known as VLOR and SERV.

The framework for our analysis is drawn from research evaluating the conditions for GM since policy goals of GM and DM are based on similar analyses of the inequalities targeted, and both use a strategy aimed at transforming mainstream structures (re)producing unequal power relations (Rees 2005). Moreover, in the Flemish context, the OMC is used for both GM and DM. Participants were interviewed about the following topics: the influence of the Belgian ratification of the UNCRPD and of the OMC strategy for DM on the presence of the identified conditions for DM. We applied a deductive logic and analysed the extent to which assumed conditions for DM were being fulfilled, and which elements influenced this process in positive or negative ways. We also searched for differences between GM and DM, and between the processes of DM in the two selected policy domains.

We used a criterion of consensus and a criterion of complementarity in order to decide which perceptions of participants to maintain and analyse. The consensus criterion was used

when different participants shared similar perceptions on a common topic. The standard of complementarity applied on specific topics where only one, or a few participants, expressed a particular perception that completed the information we gathered through the consensus criterion. Only solid and verifiable complementary perceptions have been retained for analysis.

An analysis of Disability Mainstreaming in two Flemish policy domains

Agendas

The ratification of the UNCRPD and the introduction of an OMC cycle for DM had only indirect effects on the policy agendas of the two policy domains. The OMC cycle stimulated the search for a shared discourse on disability for all Flemish policy domains and the action plans raised DM awareness in non-specialized units within the policy domains. However, the UNCRPD and the Flemish OMC strategy for DM did not transform the policy agenda of employment and education for two interconnected reasons. First, the content of the OMC agenda for DM is not the result of deliberation between the policy domains, but copied from the policy notes and papers of the different policy domains. Therefore, the agenda of the horizontal policy level for DM depends on the dominant discourse and policy priorities within different policy domains. Second, both policy domains were already moving towards a more inclusive discourse on persons with disabilities, but this discourse and the subsequent policy priorities reflect a limited perspective on DM. Priority is given to integrative policies, making students and employees comply with the requirements of the school and labour system rather than tackling structural barriers for inclusion. Sometimes, actions were presented as inclusive when the main objective was rationalization through the integration of persons with disabilities in the regular circuit without further assistance. And some actions on the OMC agenda have nothing to do with inclusion.

The priority for integrative policy solutions is based on different grounds in both

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policy domains. In education, the discourse on inclusion conforms to the UNCRPD. The framing of disability as a structural problem in education fits the broader analysis of the actual Flemish education system as highly competitive and based on inequality. Inclusive education is thus an ambitious objective that touches the very conceptualization of ‘good education’ as the shift towards inclusive education is supposed to tackle the exclusionary context. However, inclusion is hampered by the concurrent policy objective of competitiveness and by a strong tradition of special education, feeding the fear of insufficient supportive measures to realise high quality inclusive education. In employment, differences between the dominant discourse on activating potential human resources and an inclusive logic are the principal reasons for integrative policy choices. The inclusion of persons with disabilities in the labour market is seen as part of the core business of the policy domain, i.e. the activation of unemployed people. But whereas inclusion is essentially a discourse of equal opportunities and human rights for all persons with disabilities, the strong anti-categorical vision of the Minister of employment, and the preoccupation with employers’ interests , strengthen an economic logic giving priority to the (cost)-efficient deployment of potential labour forces over the inclusion of more vulnerable, less easy to activate groups. Equal opportunities and quality of work thus come second. The inclusion of persons with disabilities requiring structural adjustments such as adjustment of the job description is given little importance.

Tools for reaching the inclusion of persons with a disability

A second condition is the availability and use of instruments for DM. An official Belgian report, the parallel report of the Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities, and shadow reports from civil society to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, are tools for monitoring and evaluating the UNCRPD. The report of each policy domain on the action plan is a self-evaluation presented to the Flemish government and discussed in the Flemish parliament. The monitoring mechanisms for both the UNCRPD and the OMC action

plans – except for the reports from the Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities and civil society - are mainly used to fulfil the formal reporting duty for the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Flemish Committee for Equal Opportunities.

However, monitoring of the UNCRPD does not involve the action plans, and monitoring of the OMC does not involve the UNCRPD. Clear indicators for monitoring inclusion in the policy domains are absent and most indicators listed in the action plans are vague.

Mechanisms monitoring disability policies in the individual domains do exist, but most of them do not monitor inclusiveness. The advisory Council for Education only monitors disability policies (not their inclusivity). Several reports of the policy domain employment follow up on employment policies for persons with disabilities. However, the Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities formulates advices following up on the inclusivity of education policies, and the Diversity Committee within the advisory Council for Employment monitors the inclusivity of employment policies.

In both policy domains, academic research informs the design of inclusive policies and is sometimes used as a tool to assess or evaluate their effects. Only few data and statistics on persons with disabilities are kept and they do not distinguish between subgroups, making it impossible to evaluate which subgroups remain excluded. The most effective impact assessment is done by organisations defending the needs and interests of persons with disabilities which participate in the policy process, and by policy officials and politicians with the necessary expertise to assess the impact on persons with disabilities. The more this participation is a structural feature of the policy domain and the more policy officials and politicians will commit to the inclusion of persons with disabilities, the better this impact assessment seems to work.

Procedures

The development of expertise as well as the participation of persons with disabilities are

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further necessary conditions for DM. Although the OMC is meant to stimulate the exchange of expertise (Meier and Celis 2011), the only exchange in the OMC cycle on disability occurs through the design of common objectives and through expertise that is brought in from academia and civil society. The constitution of the Flemish Committee for Equal Opportunities hampers the exchange of expertise as its delegates are not always experts, and few policy officials in charge of the actions contained in the OMC action plans are involved. The UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities brings in expertise from representatives of persons with disabilities by including civil society in its reporting procedure. In the Flemish Committee for Equal Opportunities persons with disabilities are not allowed to participate systematically, but memoranda of organizations of persons with disabilities are presented so as to influence objectives and action plans. Neither the UNCRPD, nor the OMC contributed to the development of expertise on DM, or enhanced participation of representatives of persons with disabilities in the policy domains concerned.

However, some procedures for expertise development and participation were already in place, or were being developed as a result of other incentives than the introduction of the UNCRPD or the OMC. Employment is the better pupil in the class when it comes to the development of expertise and participative practices. Expertise building happens in the first place by exchange, experiment, and participative practices of expertise present in the policy domain through existing structures for participation and exchange. In education expertise is mainly developed relying on sources external to the policy domain. Both policy domains involve representatives of persons with disabilities in the policy making process in different ways. In employment, persons with disabilities have been structurally represented in the Flemish employment agency (known as VDAB) since 2008, and participation was already structurally embedded in employment policies before that. Representation in these participative structures is mainly facilitated by a consultative body financed by employment

policies and put into practice by a civil rights organization for persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities are also structurally represented in the Diversity Committee of the advisory Council for Employment. However, the previous legislature (2009-2014) only put limited importance on participation and advices of the Diversity Committee were given little weight in policy decisions. In education participation is not structurally anchored, and persons with disabilities are not structurally represented in the advisory Council for Education, but participation became more important and more ad hoc consultations of diverse organizations for persons with disabilities have been organised. In education, a greater diversity of organizations participates in the policy making process, leading to a better representation of the in-group diversity of persons with disabilities and diverging visions on inclusive education. Similar to the GM literature stressing the importance of structural representation, the importance placed on participation and representation of in-group diversity appeared as important for successful DM.

Actors

A fourth condition for DM is the involvement of a broader range of actors in the policy making process. With the ratification of the UNCRPD and the introduction of an OMC cycle, various new institutions became actors in the policy domains: the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; the Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities as the independent monitoring mechanism for the UNCRPD; the Flemish Department for Equal Opportunities as the regional focal point for the UNCRPD; and the Flemish Committee for Equal Opportunities for the development of OMC action plans, the monitoring and evaluation of the OMC cycle, and the exchange of expertise between domains. Civil society became an important watchdog for the implementation of the UNCRPD in policies.

With the UNCRPD and the OMC cycle on disability, each policy domain became an actor in the design and implementation of inclusive policies. The Interfederal Centre for Equal

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Opportunities became a new actor in the policy domain of education through its advisory role on inclusive policies, but remained largely unknown as a DM actor by policy officials in employment. Also, DM actors often did not have the necessary authority to influence policies. For instance, the selection of delegates to the Flemish Committee for Equal Opportunities is based on coincidental interests and expertise of policy officials, rather than on their responsibilities or position. Most of them are not leading policy officials and have limited mandates, and not all of them have responsibility for the actions in the OMC plans. This composition of the Flemish Committee for Equal Opportunities makes it difficult for the latter to exert influence on the content of policies. Moreover, as each policy domain is responsible for the content of its own plan, the Department for Equal Opportunities is left with merely formalistic responsibilities regarding the action plans. Both policy domains involve a broad or growing range of actors, but this is not the result of the UNCRPD or the OMC cycle. And these actors do not necessarily dispose of much power to act.

In both domains networks of academics, civil society and policy makers complete the triangle of empowerment necessary to inspire inclusive policies. There is a growing involvement of actors of other units, other policy domains, and beyond because there is more – though still little – cooperation for realising inclusive policies. A variety of organizations for persons with disabilities have been involved in an ad hoc fashion when it comes to recently adopted measures for inclusive education and participation was already structurally embedded in the employment policy process. Nonetheless, some competences regarding employment still reside at the federal policy level, requiring cooperation across the sub-state level, which affects cooperation with other Flemish policy domains.

Commitment

Another condition for DM is the commitment to the inclusion of persons with disabilities, enforced by formal mission statements, the accountability of policy officials, and the presence

of allies throughout the policy domain. Over the last five years, a range of mission statements have been adopted. The UN Convention, ratified in 2009, is a binding mission statement for all Flemish policy domains. The 2008 Flemish framework decree on equal opportunities and equal treatment policy is binding, too, and its adaptation in 2014 makes the OMC for disability mandatory. Inclusive education, the employment of persons with disabilities, and the OMC for the inclusion of target groups such as persons with disabilities were mentioned in the government declaration for the period 2009-2014. As to the OMC cycle itself, only the general objectives are regarded as a proper mission statement, because they are the result of a deliberation process including all Flemish policy domains. One of the generic objectives is the integration of inclusive policies. However, as long as the OMC plans copy existing policy initiatives, this will not make up for stronger mission statements on the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

For employment, the Belgian ratification of the UNCRPD in 2009, and the introduction of the OMC cycle on disability, have been preceded by more ambitious statements on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the regular labour market, limiting the added value of the UNCRPD and OMC. In education there have been external policy statements in favour of inclusion such as the Flemish ratification of the UNESCO Salamanca Statement of 1994, but the UNCRPD is a more ambitious mission statement on education policies. While employment has its decree on proportional labour participation since 2002, proposals for inclusive education from two former ministers of education failed to get adopted. The 2014 so-called M-decree is a first, still moderate, mission statement on inclusive education that actually has been adopted. It contains no guarantees for students who need an adapted curriculum, and therefore should be considered as a mission statement in favour of integrative rather than of inclusive education.

The influence of mission statements on DM depends to a great extent on the

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accountability of policy actors. The UNCRPD is important at the symbolic level: it makes local policies 'do something' about inclusion. Policy domains are accountable to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to some extent, having to contribute to the Belgian report. Though this committee has sanctioning power, it only uses it in extreme cases. Having an OMC plan is mandatory and policy domains are obliged to report to the Department for Equal Opportunities, as well as to the Flemish government, and are concomitantly subject to parliamentary questions on their realisation. However, both the freedom for policy domains to decide on the content, and the absence of sanctions, make the OMC an extremely soft instrument. Equally, the Department for Equal Opportunities does not have the authority to put requirements to the content of the plan. As a result, ministers and policy officials are only held accountable for actions copied from policy papers. Also, actions spelt out in the OMC plan not necessarily focus on inclusion. The OMC cycle is often perceived as an administrative burden, as yet another system and timing of reporting on actions also reported elsewhere. Moreover, responsibilities for the actions in the OMC plans were not clearly distributed, making accountability difficult.

The integration of inclusive objectives in policy notes, policy letters, and decrees imply a stronger commitment to inclusion than international mission statements and the OMC cycle, because policy makers are more often held accountable for them. Members of parliament hold ministers accountable for them, and they are translated into the objectives of the department, management agreements of the agencies, and job descriptions that count in the evaluation of policy officials. Though the strategic objectives of both policy domains contain actions for inclusion, there is only a formal obligation to have an OMC action plan. Moreover, political organizations, ministers, and policy officials are held accountable only for achieving their objectives, not for the inclusiveness of policies.

The presence of allies on different policy levels and in the field of implementation

enhances commitment throughout the policy domain. In both policy domains contacts with persons with disabilities, organizations, and allies for inclusion were very important for creating commitment. In education, the political priorities of the minister, and his double competence over education and equal opportunities, enhanced the commitment to inclusion and the OMC cycle. The presence of allies on the international policy level and within other countries, coupled with the fact that some members of parliament are especially committed to promises concerning inclusive education, put social pressure on politicians to work on inclusion. However, the presence of allies was limited to a small number of experts within the department and there were no clear allies in top positions. Resistance at the level of schools and teachers was a very important threshold for inclusion, given the weight of social partners and umbrella organizations defending their rights in policy negotiations. In employment, the minister was less committed to DM, but the general administrator of the Flemish employment agency is an old ally when it comes to inclusion, with a large network of further allies throughout the agency. This is significant as the Flemish employment agency is in charge of the most crucial policies for persons with disabilities. While the Minister of employment was an ally of an anti-categorical version of diversity mainstreaming, working on employment for persons with disabilities is a less sensitive policy issue than inclusive education because there is little resistance in the field to the inclusion of persons with disabilities. The target group is also less politically sensitive than for example, persons with an immigration background. The Minister of social economy is also favourable to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the regular labour market, be it for budgetary reasons. In contrast to the field of education, labour unions, and employer's organisations are open to the inclusion of persons with disabilities. However, employers involved in social economy projects, as well as their employees with a disability, are more resistant to inclusion in the regular labour market. The first fear to lose their best employees, the second the fact that a position in the regular labour

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market comes with less support on the work-floor and a higher risk of job-loss.

Financial and human resources

The lack of financial and human resources, another important prerequisite for DM, to transform both the labour market, and the school system, is an important obstacle in the Flemish case. The UNCRPD and the OMC cycle did not trigger extra investments, and the policy domains invested little in the OMC cycle as a result of financial scarcity and limited commitment. Involved policy officials were not released from other duties in order to invest time in the crucial exchange of expertise and cooperation with other policy domains. The absence of a financial system that allows for shared budgets, where joint responsibilities demand inclusive policies, leaves the decisive power with the policy domain that invests most in a specific action. There is a substantial 'lack of fit' between the stated desire to structurally transform the system in order to reach inclusion, and the dominant individual models of finance in both policy domains. Meaningful inclusion ought to be targeting a much larger group than what the school and labour system classify as persons with disabilities, and would also need to consider more vulnerable persons with disabilities.

In education, limited resources for implementation, and limited human resources for inclusive policy making are an important cause for resistance by the field. On the policy making level, inclusive policies mean an extra workload for disability experts already present. Some measures for inclusion will only be affordable when inclusion is already taking place: resources can be reoriented to regular schools when there are fewer students in special education. Within employment, responsibility for the employment of persons with disabilities was transferred from welfare to the Flemish employment agency, and the financial means and human resources followed accordingly. However, priority is given to actions for inclusion that serve the policy objectives of cost-efficiency and the activation of potential labour force. The anti-categorical stance of the minister is often used as a pretext to save money. Yet,

categorical accents are necessary in the given context so as to make inclusion work. For example, the need for so-called ‘supported employment’ is specific for persons with disabilities, whereas persons with a migration background have more problems gaining access to the labour market.

Disabilities

The group of persons with disabilities is no less diverse than any other group in society when it comes to characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and sexual orientation. Also, subgroups of mental, physical, and intellectual disabilities are very diverse and new, hitherto medically uncategorized, subgroups are being added. Different disabilities and socio-demographic characteristics create different needs. Meaningful inclusion has to target all persons with disabilities. Despite the substantial body of research that demonstrates such diversity, and the recognition by policy officials of the range of needs that persons with disabilities present, disability policies in both policy domains pay little attention to diversity.

The OMC cycle does not contribute to the mainstreaming of disabilities in the broad sense of the word. The Department for Equal Opportunities has limited competences when it comes to ethnicity and poverty and has to take care not to intervene in the policies of the competent ministers. Though gender is its oldest competence and an OMC cycle on gender is being monitored in the Flemish Committee for Equal Opportunities, this does not contribute to gender-sensitive disability policies. Both education and employment have little attention for intersectional groups. Within education, disability is kept separate from other target groups that are identified on the basis of indicators for equal education opportunities (known as GOK-indicators). Similarly, advice concerning disability is not given by the Equal Education Opportunities and Diversity Committee of the advisory Council for Education, but by the General Council. However, there is a growing awareness about the link between disability and diversity. The advisory Council for Education takes the GOK-indicators into

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account in its advises on policies for persons with disabilities. Employment policies generally do target different groups at the same time, but taking into account characteristics other than disability determining the position of persons with disabilities is perceived as part of the implementation but not of the policy making phase. The Diversity Committee of the advisory Council for Employment pays attention to intersecting inequalities, but the requirement to keep advice focused makes that the committee does not systematically address issues other than disability. Also, policy measures in both domains do not take into account specific disabilities. As a consequence, policies (un)willingly prioritize actions that target assertive and easy to integrate subgroups of persons with disabilities. Inclusive policies in education principally target those persons with disabilities who are least disabled in an environment that is based on intellectual competition, whilst inclusive policies in employment principally target easy-to-activate persons with disabilities.

Real DM is always diversity mainstreaming. Some policy officials hesitate to assume this aspect of DM, thinking that it is less difficult to keep ‘disability’ on the agenda than other issues. The separation of disability from other indicators for exclusion in education hampers DM because it hampers diversity mainstreaming. Employment applies a reduced form of diversity mainstreaming in that it searches solutions of use for all. The consequence thereof is that only common needs are taken into account. Thus DM can be a threat to real inclusion when it only supports measures for ‘all’ since some groups become invisible or do need specific measures.

Conclusion

The findings support our assumption that the processes of DM and GM are facilitated and obstructed by similar elements. We did not find different conditions for DM and the OMC cycle on disability compared to the conditions of GM and the OMC cycle for gender. The ratification of the UNCRPD and the introduction of an OMC cycle for DM had some indirect

positive effects on the course of DM in the policy making process in the policy domains education and employment, but other changes had a much stronger influence on the extent to which the policy domains complied with the necessary conditions for DM.

The policy agendas of the individual policy domains did not change as a result of the ratification of the UNCRPD or the introduction of an OMC cycle. They contributed to the introduction of some new tools for DM, but mainly those for monitoring and evaluation that were linked to the obligation to report to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Flemish Committee for Equal Opportunities. However, tools for monitoring the UNCRPD did not follow up on the OMC plans and vice versa. Despite the involvement of civil society in the reporting to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and deliberation in different policy domains over common objectives for the OMC cycle, neither the UNCRPD nor the OMC contributed to the development of expertise on DM or the enhanced participation of representatives of persons with disabilities in the individual policy domains. With the ratification of the UNCRPD and the introduction of an OMC cycle on disability, various new institutions became actors in the policy domains and civil society became an important watchdog for the implementation of the UNCRPD in policies. However, the authority of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and of the Interfederal Centre and Flemish Committee for Equal Opportunities is limited and the latter has mainly formal responsibilities. Despite the presence of various mission statements that enforce the commitment to the UNCRPD and to the OMC for disability, the authority of the UNCRPD is symbolic. Having an OMC plan is but a formal obligation. In both policy domains, there are allies for DM. However, the less than enthusiastic commitment of some policy actors in crucial positions hampers the process. The UNCRPD and the OMC cycle did not trigger extra investment in inclusive education and employment and the individual policy domains invested little in the OMC cycle. Neither the

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UNCRPD nor the OMC cycle contributed to the mainstreaming of disabilities in the broad sense of the word.

The course of DM differed in both policy domains, due to a different history and a different focus. In education, the UNCRPD and the OMC cycle have more of an added value, and are more ambitious than in employment, because inclusive education policies are new and there is strong resistance by the actors in charge of policy implementation. Apart from ‘negative’ causes for the positive influence of the UNCRPD and the OMC cycle on DM in education, the political priorities of the Minister of education also enhanced commitment to inclusion and to the OMC cycle. In education, the priority for integration over inclusion is mainly the result of the dominant policy discourse. In employment, the differences between the dominant discourse on activating human resources and an inclusive logic are the principal reasons for integrative policy choices. Development of expertise and participation were already present in employment policies, whereas expertise and participation in education had to be imported and organized time and again. However, where employment put limited political importance to existing participatory structures, participation gained in importance in education. Limited resources hamper inclusive policies in both domains, but as inclusive actions in employment are also cost-efficient, there are more resources for steps towards inclusion than in education. Whereas the separation of disability from other indicators of exclusion in education hampers the mainstreaming of disabilities, the limitation of DM in employment policies to common needs excludes groups in need of specific measures.

The OMC on disability and gender are hampered by similar factors: the use of soft policy tools and the absence of sanctions for non-compliance make the success of the OMC rely on the will of policy actors and everybody’s – and nobody’s – responsibility. Our analysis shows that political commitment to the OMC on disability and inclusive policies is limited. Intersectionality had not been institutionalized as part of the Flemish OMC for GM,

and this did not change with the introduction of the OMC for disability. Though literature on the Flemish OMC on gender is scarce, we have reasons to believe that the OMC on gender is more successful than the OMC on disability. Where the OMC for gender succeeds in avoiding the trap of procedures and allows for stronger evaluations based on concrete indicators (Meier and Celis 2011), this is not (yet) the case for disability. These differences could be due to the more recent introduction of an OMC cycle on disability. Only in 2014 the OMC process became mandatory for DM, six years after the OMC for gender (and nearly two decades after the introduction of GM in Flanders). Some differences between DM and GM policy initiatives may also be due to a different size of the group concerned compared to the total population of Flanders, and a distinct history of activism.

This article is the first exploration of DM in the Flemish policy making process. Since new phenomena raise interesting questions and effects can be sharply observed, this is an ideal moment to carry out research on the effects of DM. However, it is too early to make definitive statements beyond our initial observations on the success of DM, and we look forward to future research with more measurable effects to complement our findings hitherto. Future studies on the implementation of policies, both from the perspective of actors implementing policies, and from that of the target groups of DM policies are needed.

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