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Urban Multicultural Festivals: Spectacles of Diversity or Emancipatory Events?

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Introduction

Urban multicultural festivals like *Notting Hill Carnival* in London, *Karneval der Kulturen* in Berlin, and *Zomercarnaval* in Rotterdam have proliferated in European cities despite a political backlash against multiculturalism in recent years. Nevertheless, in political and academic debates, multicultural festivals are often brushed off as superficial feel-good spectacles of cultural diversity. In response to these criticisms, we examine to what extent multicultural festivals have an emancipatory potential for immigrants and minorities. In the heart of Europe, the Belgian city of Antwerp currently hosts more than 160 different nationalities, making it one of the most diverse cities in the world. Apart from its immigrant neighbourhoods, the city is known for the electoral victories of right-wing parties opposing immigration and multiculturalism. In recent decades, there has been a growing backlash against multiculturalism among a wide range of policy-makers and commentators (Alexander, 2013; Vasta, 2007; Vertovec and Wessendorf, 2010). Nationalist and conservative politicians in Belgium and other countries depicted multiculturalism as a threat to the nation's identity, shared values, social order and the welfare state, leading to moral panics and fears of ethnic segregation, social breakdown, radicalism and even terrorism. In the context of the negative framing of superdiverse neighbourhoods as a problem or even as a threat to the city, the positive representation of cultural differences in festivals stands out as an ideological emblem of multiculturalism.

According to progressive academics, however, multiculturalism – as a set of institutional arrangements for the recognition of cultural minorities and the accommodation of group-differentiated rights – cannot be reduced to a show that treats cultural markers like cuisine, music, clothing as authentic practices of ethnic groups to be preserved by their members and safely consumed by others (Benhabib, 2002; Kymlicka, 2012: Taylor, 1994). In the first place, this celebratory model of multiculturalism would shift the attention away from political and socio-economic inequalities (Barry, 2001; Berrey, 2005; Michaels, 2006). A second critique is that the 'Disneyfication' or trivialisation of cultural differences would ignore real challenges and conflicts concerning religious and cultural traditions (Bissoondath, 1994). Thirdly, representing ethnic groups through folklore and cultural traditions conceives of ethnic groups as closed and unchangeable entities, each reproducing their own cultural practices and claims (Benhabib, 2002). Defining cultures as bounded to groups and territories, the folklore model of multiculturalism would compartmentalise humanity into a global mosaic of distinct cultural islands (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992; Soysal, 2009). This way of representing ethnic groups might strengthen prejudices and stereotypes. Fourthly, promoting multiculturalism in terms of cultural traditions would lead to the reproduction of power inequalities and conservative restrictions within minority groups.

Beyond these criticisms, we argue that festivals can be the active agents of 'pleasure-politics' (Sharpe, 2008), fostering social change even if their leisure qualities are more prominent than direct social action. Contrary to national events that commemorate the cultural heritage of the dominant majority, multicultural festivals celebrate cultural practices of multiple, often disfavoured, minorities (Dawson, 1991). In this sense, Duffy (2005) claims that 'multicultural festivals complicate any simple relationship between place and identity, because such festivals demonstrate the heterogeneous state of both identity and place' (p. 677). In a political climate where national membership is often defined by 'us versus them' distinctions, multicultural events have the potential to overcome ethnic, geographical and economic segregation in the city by bringing all kinds of people together in a positive atmosphere, countering overly dramatic discourses about the failed integration of minorities.

In this article, we will analyse to what extent multicultural festivals can be considered as events that contribute to the emancipation of immigrants and minorities. Multicultural festivals do not necessarily announce grand revolutions of structural change and social justice. As temporary and local events, they rather fit into the microsociological interest in 'everyday multiculturalism', with a bottom-up focus on the everyday practice and lived experience of diversity in specific situations and spaces of encounter (Wise & Velayutham, 2009). Although structural change at the national level can be an important goal, the local urban level is the place par excellence to study how people of diverse origins come together and how the politics of difference have their effects (Amin, 2002; Young, 1990). In this context, a much-debated thesis is Putnam's (2007) claim that solidarity and social capital tend to be lower in ethnically diverse neighbourhoods. In response to such issues, urban planners have become more sensitive to social diversity and equal rights to the urban space (Fainstein, 2005; Sandercock, 1998; Wood and Landry, 2008). As a result, multicultural festivals are often part of urban redevelopment strategies aimed at improving the image of neighborhoods and stimulating social cohesion (Lee, Arcodia and Lee 2012). As places of encounter, multicultural festivals can be expected to, albeit temporarily, blur ethnic boundaries, counter prejudices, social exclusion and segregation, constructing 'new civic and political relations to overcome deeply entrenched inequalities' (Kymlicka 2012, p. 8). In order to investigate the emancipatory potential of multicultural festivals, we compare two events in Antwerp, *Toer de Nord* and *BorgerRio*, considering how top-down and bottom-up approaches affect the recognition of identities, cross-cultural encounters, and the distribution of resources in deprived neighbourhoods.

From Spectacle to Just Diversity

When it comes to multicultural festivals, the question arises who benefits when ethnocultural diversity is deployed within festival programs. While multicultural festivals are a relatively recent field of investigation, there is an extensive literature on urban festivals in general (Chatterton & Hollands, 2003; Gotham, 2005; Hiller, 2000; Roche, 2000). On the one hand, there exists a tradition of scholarship that sees festivals as tools of hegemonic control. From this perspective, festivals are seen as 'bread and circuses', a form of ideological control that shifts the attention away from the 'real problems' of social inequality and exclusion. In a 'society of the spectacle', dominant groups would create seductive events where hegemonic ideologies are reinforced and the power of the dominant class is naturalised (Debord, 2002 [1967]). More recently, festivals have been described as 'contemporary urban regeneration tools of neoliberal governance' (Waitt, 2008), used by municipal authorities to promote urban areas as unique places in the global economy (Hughes, 1999; McClinchey, 2008; Pugh & Wood, 2004; Yeoh, 2005). In the same vein, urban festivals have been employed within the context of entrepreneurial policies aimed at uplifting economically deprived urban spaces (Schuster, 2001).

Alternatively, there is an oppositional view that sees festivals as emancipatory or even revolutionary events. Some scholars have highlighted the emancipatory potential of festivals and carnivals to suspend and even invert everyday hierarchies and routines. Following Rancière, emancipation should be understood as an attempt 'to actualise equality through creating a dissensus which interrupts the order of the sensible' (Huault, Perret & Spicer, 2014). Henri Lefebvre (2014 [1958]), for example, conceptualised the festival as a revolutionary event that would enable social change. According to Lefebvre, capitalism has turned the everyday life of urban citizens into fixed rhythms and passive routines leading to alienation. By participating in festivals, urban citizens are said to experience un-alienated and authentic forms of encounter beyond the taken-for-granted routines of everyday life. In the same vein, Manuel Castells argued that major innovations in the city tend to be the outcome of grassroots mobilisation and demands (Castells, 1983). Also the philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) praised the power of carnivals to subvert everyday norms and rules, and to turn established hierarchies upside-down. Bakhtin described how carnivals allow familiar and free interactions between people, unlikely alliances, eccentric and even sacrilegious behaviour without the need for punishment. During festivals and carnivals, people would no longer be confined to prescribed identities and be able to explore other roles in an event that unites what is normally separated. This is relevant with regards to ethnic groups. Rather than considering ethnic groups as self-evident units possessing a distinctive culture, we can think of ethnic boundary making as a process shaped by the institutional framework that encourages the drawing of certain kinds of boundaries over others, the distribution of power in a social field, and the reach of established networks (Wimmer, 2013). In this sense, we expect that multicultural festivals have the potential to, maybe just briefly, blur ethnic boundaries and overcome spatial, cultural and economic segregation in diverse neighbourhoods.

In order to analyse the emancipatory potential of multicultural festivals, we need to take into account who is organising the festival and how these social actors deal with urban diversity. While festivals planned by the authorities or dominant corporations can be expected to reinforce hegemonic ideologies and ethnic boundaries, bottom-up events fuelled by grassroots movements and citizens would rather challenge the rules and norms of everyday life. Festivals, however, are complex and ambiguous events that can be understood in both ways. Rather than categorising them as either hegemonic spectacles or emancipatory events, festivals can be seen as 'governance arrangements in which public as well as private actors aim at solving societal problems or create societal opportunities' (Kooiman, 2000: 139). Even when festivals are orchestrated to serve the political and economic interests of dominant groups, participants are not just passive recipients of the hegemonic meanings of the spectacle, but can actively produce their own meanings, and even critiques that are unintended by the organisers of the event. Alternatively, the revolutionary festivals of grassroots movements can be rationalised and appropriated by dominant groups to fit their interests, for example by controlling the image of the festival as a tourist-friendly and marketable experience space to be consumed (Johansson and Kociatkiewicz, 2011).

In the case of multicultural festivals, it is important to be aware of the hegemonic discourses about migration and diversity that prevail in society. In the context of growing right-wing populism (Maly, 2012; Wodak et al., 2013), national policies across Europe have been converging towards a civic integration agenda with a neo-assimilationist stance towards immigrants (Alexander, 2013; Vasta, 2007; Vertovec and Wessendorf, 2010). Although cities would be less affected by the backlash against multiculturalism, Ambrosini & Boccagni (2015) found that urban initiatives have become constrained by anti-immigrant positions, budgetary restrictions and the search for new political discourses regarding the de-legitimisation of multiculturalism. Celebrating diversity, multicultural festivals take a counterhegemonic position against far-right nationalism and xenophobic discourses. Beyond the view on festivals as 'bread and circuses', we aim to rethink how festivals can contribute to social justice and the emancipation of minorities.

In order to develop a deeper understanding of how festivals can contribute to social justice, we refer to the work of Nancy Fraser (1995), who advocates combining cultural politics of difference with socio-economic politics of equality. According to Fraser (2003), 'justice requires social arrangements that permit all (adult) members of society to interact with one another as peers' (p. 36). She proposes a 'parity of participation' based on two conditions: 'First, the distribution of material resources must be such as to ensure participants' mutual independence and 'voice' […] The second condition requires that institutionalised patterns of cultural value express equal respect for all participants and ensure equal opportunity for achieving social esteem' (p. 36). Drawing on Fraser's ideas, Fincher & Iveson (2008) claim that a progressive striving for a 'just diversity' in urban planning is based on three social logics: recognition, respecting all identity groups as equals; redistribution, aimed at redressing socio-economic inequalities between groups; and, encounter, through which the interaction of individuals is facilitated. Arguing that the mere pursuit of recognition might lead to essentialist identity politics, Fincher & Iveson add 'encounter' as a third goal for a just diversity. Encounters would ensure that 'people have opportunities to explore those aspects of themselves and their relationships with others which are not fully contained within any one identity category' (Iveson & Fincher, 2011). Encounters have been studied for a long time in research on the psychology of prejudice. Gordon Allport (1954) developed the 'contact hypothesis', claiming that interpersonal contact is one of the best ways to reduce prejudice between majority and minority group members. This hypothesis is based on the idea that contact ‘lessens feelings of uncertainty and anxiety by producing a sense of knowledge or familiarity between strangers, which in turn generates a perception of predictability and control’ (Valentine 2008: 324).

The potential of multicultural festivals to remedy prejudices and exclusion, therefore, can be analysed in terms of the recognition of identity groups, the encounters they facilitate between majority and minority group members, and the distribution of resources. In the first place, multicultural festivals can contribute to the public recognition of minorities by displaying ‘narratives of self-identification that would be more determinant of one’s status in public life than would designators and indices imposed on one by others’ (Benhabib 2002: 80). Secondly, multicultural festivals can provide opportunities for encounters between different ethnocultural groups and stimulate social cohesion in segregated neighbourhoods. Finally, multicultural festivals can contribute to a redistribution of resources in the city by attracting funding and enhancing local economic development in deprived neighbourhoods. In what follows, we use these three logics of just diversity to analyse the emancipatory potential of two multicultural festivals in the city of Antwerp, Belgium.

The Context

Because of its political history and demography, Antwerp is an interesting place to investigate multicultural festivals. After decades of urban governance by a left-wing coalition, the city became known for the landslide electoral victories of the far-right party Flemish Block (*Vlaams Blok*). Although the far-right remained excluded from power, a right-wing Flemish nationalist party combining neo-assimilationist policies towards ethnic minorities and a neoliberal economic agenda came to power in the Antwerp City Council from 2013 onwards. While the City Council is in charge of most responsibilities in the city, the lower District Councils are responsible for local Culture, Sports, Youth and Seniors policies. Our case-studies are located in two distinct districts: Antwerpen-Noord and Borgerhout. Whereas the Antwerp District Council is led by the ruling nationalist party, the Borgerhout District Council is led by a left-wing coalition. Our case-studies reveal the impact of these divergent political contexts on the staging of multicultural festivals.

The political salience of ethnic diversity in the city has much to do with the superdiverse demography of Antwerp. As 51,1% of its 530,104 inhabitants have at least one parent born abroad, Antwerp can be called a ‘minority-majority city’. The people living in Antwerp have origins in various parts of the world. Most citizens of foreign origin have their roots in North-Africa (14%), but there are also a lot of people from West-Asia (8,6%), East and West-Europe (8,4% and 7%)[1]. The festivals under investigation take place in two different areas with many non-European immigrants: Antwerpen-Noord and Borgerhout Intramuros. These two neighbourhoods are both socio-economically deprived compared to other parts of the city. Compared to the average annual income of 15,859 € per person in the city as a whole, Antwerpen-Noord and Borgerhout Intramuros are among the poorest areas with annual incomes of respectively 10,810 € and 11,560 €[2]. Both areas also host the highest ethnic diversity in the city. Antwerpen-Noord is the most ethnically diverse area. More than 60% of the people living here are of foreign origin. The diversity of the population is also reflected in the entrepreneurial activities in the neighbourhood like shops and teahouses. Borgerhout Intramuros is located south of Antwerpen-Noord. Based on the first nationality around 55% of the people living here is of foreign origin around, of which 30% are from North-African origin. In sum, the neighbourhoods are known as diverse and deprived.

Methods

While there are many festivals taking place each year in the city of Antwerp, we selected two festivals that explicitly deal with ethnocultural diversity and attract a substantial number of visitors. We chose two opposite cases in terms of organisation: the first festival (Tour of the North) was initiated by the municipal authorities; the second festival (BorgerRio) grew from local civil society associations. We assume that the different social actors behind each festival influence the emancipatory potential of these festivals. In the context of neo-assimilationist policies towards minorities, we expect that a festival grown from civil society activities will be more emancipatory than a festival implemented by the local authorities.

Methodologically, we draw on different qualitative methods in order to gain a deeper understanding of the events and their social dynamics. Qualitative methods are appropriate in the context of event environments, where the use of surveys may interrupt the flow of the event experience, or be made impossible by the structure of the event (Mackellar, 2013). We triangulised our data sources by conducting semi-structured interviews with the organisers and local entrepreneurs, participant observation during the festivals, and short street interviews with visitors. We interviewed the organisers of both festivals about the history and organisation of the festivals. In addition, we invited the organisers for a focus group on urban

[1] Source: https://stadincijfers.antwerpen.be/databank/, consulted in July 2020
[2] Source: idem

diversity initiatives in July 2014 at the University of Antwerp (see Saeys et al., 2014). Participants read and signed informed consent forms and data were anonymised unless otherwise agreed upon. NVivo was used to code and to analyse the transcripts. Participant observation was first carried out at both festivals in Spring 2014. In 2016, we also conducted short street interviews with a random sample of 53 visitors at the BorgerRio festival. It was not possible to conduct a similar survey with the visitors of the Tour of the North festival due to the fact that the festival was discontinued in the year 2015. The fact that one festival was suspended is of course meaningful for our analysis. Based on the information we gathered, our analysis starts from the question whether these festivals are spectacles that reinforce existing inequalities or emancipatory events that contribute to a just diversity. Given the fact that both festivals take place in socio-economically deprived neighbourhoods with a high number of immigrants, we evaluate to what extent each festival contributed to the recognition of diversity, encounters across ethnic boundaries and the redistribution of resources across the city.

Tour of the North (Toer de Nord)

Our first case-study concerns a street fair initiated by the Work and Economy Department of the Antwerp municipality. Tour of the North (*Toer de Nord*) was organised annually between 2010 and 2014 in the poor and ethnically diverse Antwerpen-Noord neighbourhood. At its height, the festival attracted around 20,000 visitors (Stad Antwerpen, 2014). Financed by the European Regional Development Fund, the primary goal of the street fair was to improve the local economy in the deprived neighbourhood. In what follows, we analyse to what extent this street fair contributed to a 'just diversity' in terms of recognising diversity, stimulating encounter and redistribution of resources in the neighbourhood. The vicissitudes of the event illustrate the importance of public support and the impact of the political backlash against multiculturalism on local initiatives.

With regards to the recognition of diversity in the neighbourhood, the street fair originated in 2004 as 'The Shopping North' ('*t Winkelend Noord*). In line with the multicultural policies at that time, the municipality highlighted the exotic culinary traditions of immigrants who moved into the neighbourhood. By organising an annual street market with a culinary tour along the ethnically diverse food shops and restaurants in the neighbourhood, the municipality aimed not only at boosting the economic performance of local shopkeepers but also at recognising the cultural practices of immigrant groups in the neighbourhood. As there were more than 160 different nationalities living in the neighbourhood, the festival had to be broad and diverse, without neglecting the native Flemish population. Through the promotion of exotic food and other products, the municipality saw the neighbourhood's ethnocultural diversity as an asset for the economic development of the area. As the marketing and consumption of culinary traditions was put central, the recognition of diversity actually was limited to authentic practices of ethnic groups to be preserved by their members and safely consumed by others (Van der Horst, 2010). By creating a positive image of diversity in the neighbourhood, the festival aimed to attract young families living in wealthier parts of the city to discover the shopping streets and to stimulate the local businesses in the deprived neighbourhood. While the culinary diversity was praised, the municipal coordinator of the Work and Economy Department struggled with the diversity of entrepreneurs in the neighbourhood and stated:

> It is very difficult to get them united as one commercial area. We are trying to make it clear that we are stronger together, but it is still very difficult, especially because of the diversity of nationalities and religions.

Immigrant entrepreneurs noted that the event was organised top-down by the municipality and did not address the needs of entrepreneurs in the neighbourhood. An immigrant entrepreneur complained about the lack of support from the municipality:

> They told us they would give us a very low budget while we would have to provide the tables and chairs and to contact the municipal services ourselves. As a shopkeeper, I have to take care of my own business. I can't close my shop to work for their fair.

Even if the entrepreneurs did not feel recognised as equals by the municipality, the street fair created an opportunity for encounters. Transforming 'The Shopping North' into 'Tour of the North' in 2010, the municipality set up a collaboration between immigrant entrepreneurs, cultural organisations and neighbourhood associations. Besides promoting local food shops, the festival provided a cultural programme with live music, animation, theatre, dance, fashion and design exhibitions. According to the municipal coordinator, 'the interaction between all the cultures, inhabitants and entrepreneurs of different backgrounds made it a great food and music festival.' In terms of encounter, the municipality promoted bridging connections between people of different origins. Nevertheless, during our participant observation in 2014 we observed that the ethnic composition of the visitors did not differ much from the daily public in the neighbourhood. Most visitors were of immigrant origin and few native people from wealthier parts of the city. Most interactions were between shopkeepers and visitors. The Flemish cultural activities did not attract many visitors. For this reason, the cultural organisations no longer wanted to participate in the festival because they felt that the audience of the street fair was not really interested in their arts. Despite various activities during the street fair, we did not witness many encounters between the native Flemish and immigrants.

With regards to redistribution, the question is to what extent the street fair addressed socio-economic disadvantages. Tour of the North was not a self-contained event but part of a wider urban development program. The Work and Economy Department of the Antwerp municipality aimed to develop the commercial zones of a deprived area outside the city centre. In financial terms, Tour of the North has been funded since 2010 with a budget of around € 50,000, mainly provided by the European Regional Development Fund and smaller contributions by the Antwerp municipality and the Flemish government. The annual street fair depended heavily upon the European funding. In 2013, however, the European funding came to an end. From now on, the festival was only supported by the Work and Economy Department. No other municipal services like the Department of Culture or the Department of Social Affairs had been involved in Tour of the North. From 2014 onwards, the new right-wing municipal government with a critical view on immigration and a neo-liberal stance on economic development (Maly, 2012) reduced the financial support and decided that the entrepreneurs had to organise the street fair by themselves. According to the municipal coordinator of the event, however, the local business associations were insufficiently united to take over the coordination of the street fair. While the local business associations actually were in need of more support, the municipality nevertheless diminished both financial and logistic support. The loss of subsidies and the lack of a public-private partnership jeopardised the future of the festival. After the authorities withdrew their financial and logistic support, the local entrepreneurs did not succeed in organising Tour of the North by their own means.

After 2015, the festival dissolved into a small and less organised annual market. Despite good intentions to contribute to recognition, encounter and redistribution, the top-down organisation of the festival, the lack of collaboration between diverse groups and dependency on external funding did not emancipate the local entrepreneurs. Ultimately, the festival did not develop into a strong event contributing to a just diversity.

BorgerRio

Our second case-study concerns a festival that grew from a grassroots initiative to become an annual event supported by the local district authorities.

A local business association composed of native Flemish citizens initiated the festival in 2007. As the neighbourhood had a bad reputation and was often depicted in the media as the scene of urban riots, crime and decay, the business association felt not enough customers from elsewhere came shopping in the neighbourhood. In addition, the business association noticed that most shopkeepers of immigrant origin did not participate in the Holiday Street Fair they organised in the previous years. Therefore, the business association launched a multicultural parade as a way to counter the negative image of the neighbourhood and as a way to involve shopkeepers of diverse origins in the street fair.

At the same time, municipal policies in Antwerp were moving towards a neo-assimilationist model urging immigrants to adapt to the way of life of the cultural majority, for example through the municipal ban on the Islamic headscarf in 2007 (Saeys et al., 2019). The colourful parade of ethnic groups at the festival can be seen as a counterhegemonic stance against neo-assimilationist tendencies to reduce the visibility of cultural differences in the city. When the festival was launched, a spokesman of the business association praised the diversity of the neighbourhood:

> We want to create an added value to our traditional Holiday Street Fair. Something with many colours, just like the people of Borgerhout. Besides a street fair, a joyful parade will march through the streets. We are looking for Moroccan, South American, African and other groups that can bring exotic music and dance (Gazet van Antwerpen, 2006).

The recognition of diversity, however, requires more than just a colourful display of exotic music and dance. Participants in our focus group argued that the spectacular prominence of Brazilian samba dancers in the parade did not reflect the predominantly Moroccan population of the district. The organisers responded to this criticism by referring to the Moroccan musical bands in the parade and the Arabesque animation. Nevertheless, a radical Islamist group called Sharia4Belgium demonstrated in 2012 against the parade, which was in their eyes immoral because of the scantily clad dancers. While this is an extreme reaction, it indicates that not all inhabitants in the neighbourhood feel recognised by the parade. In our street interviews, a resident of immigrant origin felt that by showcasing stereotypical elements of foreign traditions the parade displayed an image of diversity as ‘intriguing alien objects different from the host society’. Bringing into practice a categorisation of ethnic groups as pre-existing units with shared authentic traditions, the parade exemplifies a group checklist approach to recognition, overestimating differences between groups and underestimating differences within groups (Fincher & Iveson, 2008).

Beyond the staged diversity in the parade, we analyse as well the recognition of immigrant entrepreneurs as equals in the organisation of the festival. Community involvement in the governance of public space can lead to tensions between ‘active’ and ‘passive’ citizens (Loopmans, 2006). In our case, tensions arose between the Flemish board of the business association and some immigrant entrepreneurs. Although immigrant entrepreneurs paid membership fees, it was the Flemish board of the business association that took all decisions about the festival. Denouncing this power imbalance, a small group of Moroccan entrepreneurs founded their own business association in order to organise events like a celebration of the Islamic Sacrifice Feast. This rivalry urged the longstanding Flemish business to overcome ethnic boundaries. The Flemish business association changed its name from *Voorstad* to BoHo 2140 and included an entrepreneur of Moroccan origin in its board. In the following year, the business association also organised a Sacrifice Feast to reach the Muslim population in the neighbourhood. Soon afterwards, the rival business association was dissolved and the renewed BoHo 2140 remained the main representative of around 140 entrepreneurs in the area. Despite the complaints about the fees and its democratic functioning, interviewees of diverse backgrounds applauded the many efforts of the business association to recognise the diverse groups in the neighbourhood. According to a respondent from the Borgerhout cultural department:

> The biggest success factor comes from organising the event not 'for' them but 'with' them. […] If you see that there are so many Moroccan people living here, then you should listen to those people.

This illustrates how the festival organisers developed a relational form of recognition through dialogue and collaboration that gradually replaced the mere group checklist approach as seen in the parade. In this sense, we can conclude that the BorgerRio festival is more than a spectacle and contributes to the needs and identities of diverse groups in the neighbourhood.

Secondly, we investigate to what extent the festival stimulates encounters across ethnic boundaries to strengthen the social capital in the neighbourhood. The social capital literature distinguishes between bonding and bridging, whereas, in short, bonding refers to intra-group connections and bridging to between-groups connections (Putnam 2000; Schuller, 2007). For immigrants in particular, having bridging connections with natives is expected to help their integration in the host society. As events that interrupt daily routines and hierarchies, multicultural festivals can be expected to provide opportunities for bridging connections. Due to the fact that the festival has free entry not only people of diverse ethnic origins but also people from all kinds of socio-economic backgrounds are able to join. According to a survey, the festival is well known in the city of Antwerp (Stad Antwerpen, 2014). The media reported that the free-entrance festival attracted around 35,000 visitors in one day (Het Nieuwsblad, 2012).

In order to gain an insight in the encounters taking place at the festival, we conducted short street interviews with a random sample of 53 visitors. Standing on the main street of the festival on May 21, 2016, a researcher asked random passers-by short and closed questions about their residence, nationality, age and social relationships at the festival. In our random sample, we encountered 28 males and 25 females. Most respondents indicated they were living in the city of Antwerp (45), among which the majority lived in the Borgerhout district (28). Only 8 respondents came from outside Antwerp to visit the festival. This indicates that the festival mainly attracts locals and to a lesser extent tourists. Most people knew the festival because they lived in the neighbourhood or they heard about it through acquaintances living in the neighbourhood. Only a minority learnt about the festival through the media. For these reasons, we can conclude that the festival mainly attracts local people. Among our respondents, we encountered people of all ages, from teenagers to elderly people. In terms of nationalities, the majority of the visitors we met were Belgians (33). Other nationalities included Moroccans (11), Polish (4), Ghanaian (2), Spanish (1) and Dutch (2) people.

With regards to the question 'whom they meet at the festival', we found that a large group (16 respondents) only knew one other person at the festival, namely their partner with whom they were visiting the festival. Besides couples, there were also families and larger groups of friends at the festival. Eleven visitors were meeting with two to five people at the festival, while around the same number (12) were meeting five to ten people at the festival. Only six visitors were meeting more than ten people at the festival. Eight persons came alone and did not know anyone at the festival. In addition to these numbers, our participant observation showed that most respondents stayed with people they already knew at the festival. In this sense, the festival seems to strengthen intra-group bonding rather than bridging diverse groups. With regards to intergroup contacts, a visitor confirmed that people do not necessarily talk with ethnic others:

> At small neighbourhood events, it is always the same white audience. While here, it is more mixed, although that does not necessarily mean that you are now going to have conversations with them.

While our participant observation confirmed that most visitors stayed within their own groups, we nevertheless noticed encounters across ethnic boundaries between visitors and local street sellers. Interethnic encounters can be meaningful if they 'actually change values and translate beyond the specifics of the individual moment into a more general respect for others' (Valentine 2008, p. 325). While the festival brings diverse groups together, our fieldwork shows that the mere presence of others does not necessarily imply meaningful interethnic contact.

With regards to the redistribution of resources, the question arises to what extent the BorgerRio festival does address socio-economic inequalities. Launched by a business association, the BorgerRio festival aims at stimulating the local economy. Situated outside the economic heart of Antwerp, the district of Borgerhout has a lower average income and higher unemployment rates than Antwerp in general. Compared to the large shopping centres in Antwerp, many small entrepreneurs in Borgerhout felt that they did not receive enough support from the local government (Saeys et al., 2016). Some even believed that the Antwerp municipality introduced measures against them, e.g. a controversial tax discouraging businesses that were said to cause nuisance and to lower the image of the neighbourhood. The busy traffic lane that crosses the Borgerhout district is not only the main site of the BorgerRio festival but also the commercial heart of Borgerhout. With a high commercial density of 75%, the street hosts a broad array of retailers, pubs, restaurants and services, but also has a vacancy rate of 12%. While individual entrepreneurs felt insufficiently supported by the Antwerp City Council, the local business associations play an important intermediary role between the entrepreneurs and the municipality. Against prevailing prejudices about their neighbourhood, the local business association promotes through the BorgerRio festival the diversity of the area as a positive asset in the hope to attract more customers and new businesses.

Although BorgerRio was initiated by private organisations, the left-wing local authorities of the Borgerhout District eventually became the main financial supporter of the event. In the first place, BorgerRio was organised by the local business association and an environmental organisation. While the environmental organisation was a crucial sponsor during the first editions of the BorgerRio festival, the Borgerhout District became the most important financer of the festival in the following years. Over a timespan of thirteen years, the contribution of the District rose from 3,000 € in 2006 to 22,000 € in 2014 and 50,000 € in 2019. In addition, the business association financially contributed with its own means. Besides financing the event, the District of Borgerhout facilitated the joining of these bottom-up private initiatives around a common objective. In particular, the Cultural Department of the Borgerhout District took on a coordinating role in the organisation of the festival. With project subsidies, the District organised cultural events and provided stages with performing artists to fill the spatial gaps in the street festival.

The increased support by the Borgerhout District sharply contrasted with the contribution from the Antwerp City Council that diminished its support from 15,000 € in 2013 to 7,500 € in 2014. This illustrates a decentralisation of financial support in the city districts. The increased support of the District, the local entrepreneurs and the many volunteers from local associations turned the festival into a landmark event in the neighbourhood for more than a decade. Although it is difficult to point out the effect of the festival on the local economic development, the organisers succeeded in attracting high numbers of visitors annually. In our street interviews, many visitors indicated that they learnt to know food stores, clothing shops and supermarkets in the area. Asked whether they planned to come more often to the shops in the future, more than half of our respondents answered affirmatively. In this sense, we claim that the festival contributed to the marketing of the neighbourhood and improving its image. Even if the festival might not have a direct impact on diminishing poverty in the neighbourhood, the public support for this event counts as a redistribution of resources. The financial support from the local authorities makes that such a large-scale festival can take place in a deprived neighbourhood outside the touristic centre of Antwerp where most large events take place. Therefore, we conclude that the festival contributes to the redistribution of resources in the city stimulating the economic development of this deprived neighbourhood.

Conclusion

In the context of a wider political backlash against multiculturalism, urban governments have gradually withdrawn their support from multicultural initiatives and shifted increasingly to neo-assimilationist policies towards immigrants. Despite the rise of right-wing populism and nationalism, we have seen that multicultural festivals hold a more positive approach towards ethnocultural diversity. In order to improve the bad reputation of diverse neighbourhoods as places of high poverty and crime rates, the organisers of multicultural festivals highlight what they considered the positive aspects of the neighbourhoods, namely the ethnocultural diversity of the immigrant communities living there. From a critical perspective, it could be argued that the festivals are nothing more than 'spectacles of diversity', promoting consumable aspects of cultural diversity like food, dance and music, shifting the attention away from real problems and socio-economic inequalities.

Rather than superficial feel-good celebrations of diversity, we have argued that multicultural festivals can be emancipatory events contributing to a 'just diversity' offering all urban inhabitants the right to full participation in urban life as equals. Multicultural festivals highlight the right of immigrant groups to the urban space, showing that living together in diversity is possible despite political discourses that frame ethnic differences as a cause of social conflicts and tensions. As Soysal (2006) argues, '[t]he time is ripe for new beginnings and recognizing immigrant populations for what they are: civic participants in the everyday economies, politics, and public stages of the new Metropolis' (p. 53).

Comparing two different festivals in diverse and deprived neighbourhoods in Antwerp, we argued that the extent to which a festival contributes to recognition, encounter and redistribution largely depends on the organisational forces behind the event. While the first festival was an initiative that grew from the grassroots mobilisation of various local associations, the second was the result of an urban regeneration project funded by the EU and the municipality. Although the BorgerRio festival started as a grassroots initiative, it received increasingly financial and logistic support from the local District authorities. Thanks to this public-private partnership, BorgerRio developed into an annual event that became strongly embedded in the neighbourhood. The combination of support from the authorities and a bottom-up mobilisation where different partners had the opportunity to launch their own ideas turned out to be crucial to the recognition of diversity in the neighbourhood. The local associations contributed to the success of the BorgerRio festival because they know best what are the needs and the interests of diverse groups in the neighbourhood. On the other hand, the top-down coordination and lack of collaboration between diverse groups eventually led to the dissolution of the Tour of the North street fair.

In the end, we conclude that there is more to multicultural festivals than feel-good spectacles of diversity. While improving the image of the neighbourhood is important, multicultural festivals have an emancipatory potential in terms of recognising diverse groups, enabling encounters and economic redistribution. In order to become more than spectacles of diversity, we learnt at both festivals that recognition requires dialogue and collaboration identifying the needs and identities of diverse communities. With regards to encounters, we found that participating in multicultural events does not automatically lead to bridging social and cultural boundaries. In terms of redistribution, we saw that multicultural festivals can attract funding in deprived neighbourhoods and stimulate the local economy outside the city centre. To keep the emancipatory potential of multicultural festivals alive, a bottom-up mobilisation from civil society and sustained public support are crucial, particularly in times of austerity and reviving anti-immigration populism.

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