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From Multicultural to Diversity Policies. Tracing the Demise of Group Representation in a Local Urban Context

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Abstract

This article deals with the question of how and why urban governments have implemented diversity policies in the context of a broader backlash against multiculturalism. The starting point of our analysis is the conceptualization of multiculturalism as a set of institutional arrangements for ethnic minority group representation and recognition. While scholars have largely focused on normative critiques of multiculturalism, arguing that it is unable to respond to the super-diversity in contemporary cities, this article focuses on the empirical complexities of diversity policy-making in a local context. More specifically, we investigate the changes in the policy practices and discourses regarding the representation and recognition of ethnic minorities in Antwerp, the largest city of the Flemish Region in Belgium. The minority policies in Antwerp had taken a multicultural turn by the 1990s, most evident in two strategies for group representation and recognition: the establishment of a migrant council to address the interests of ethnic minorities and the recruitment of an ethnically diverse city staff. We analyse how these measures became contested in the context of a wider backlash against multiculturalism. When multicultural policies became diversity policies, the migrant council was disbanded and a dress code prohibited minorities from displaying religious or other symbols in front-office public functions. With these cases, we argue that diversity discourses can be politicized in the governance of cities, with far-reaching consequences, such as the demise of ethnic minority representation and recognition, eventually reinforcing a neo-assimilationist focus urging migrants and their descendants to adapt to the cultural majority.

Introduction

In the last two decades, multiculturalism has been increasingly under attack both as a political philosophy and as a model for actual policy-making in Europe and elsewhere (Alexander, 2013; Vasta, 2007). This article contributes to the literature on the backlash against multiculturalism and the rise of diversity policies. Rather than analyzing multiculturalism as a political philosophy, we look empirically at multiculturalism as an actual policy practice. For this purpose, we think of multiculturalism primarily in terms of minority group representation and recognition. In particular, we address the question

why measures of ethnic group representation and recognition have been abolished at the urban level in the multi-scalar (albeit uneven) shift from multicultural to diversity policies. The focus of our analysis is whether and how forms of group identity have been recognized by and represented in urban policy-making and public services. What makes this research particularly relevant is the question why ethnic minority group members need to be represented in urban decision-making bodies and employed in public services. Since European cities are increasingly characterized by a super-diverse population, the participation of all urban citizens, including minority group members, in the political decision-making processes and their access to employment in municipal services seems crucial to the legitimacy of democratic urban governance.

More particularly, we will analyze how the representation and recognition of ethnic minority groups developed in the municipal institutions of Antwerp, the largest city of the Flemish Region in Belgium and containing a highly diverse population in terms of ethnocultural, linguistic, religious and socio-economic differences (see Oosterlynck, et. al. 2017). As the city where the Flemish far-right gained landslide electoral victories during the 1990s and 2000s with an anti-immigrant rhetoric, Antwerp plays a crucial role in public debates about multiculturalism and diversity in Belgium and across Europe.

Because we study the long-term evolution of diversity policies in Antwerp, and also take into account evolutions at other policy scales (national, global), we start from the notion of multiculturalism and analyze how cultural and ethnic minorities are recognized and represented (or not) by government institutions. We trace how minority group representation actually evolved in a local and multi-scalar context from the eighties onwards and pay attention to the multiple alternatives (including mainstreamed diversity policies) that have been formulated to address the perceived limitations of multiculturalism. While in the late 1980s and 1990s, multicultural policy narratives inspired the Antwerp city council to introduce a range of policy measures aiming at representing ethnocultural minorities at the city level, these multicultural policy recipes have lost traction and given way to alternative policy frameworks during the late 2000s. By carefully tracing the emergence and evolution of official policies regarding minorities in Antwerp, we aim to contribute to scholarly debates on how official multicultural policies evolved (and eventually withered away) at the local level, but within a multi-

scalar policy-making configuration, and how within this context a new and broader understanding of diversity beyond ethnocultural differences emerged out of the backlash against multiculturalism.

Our interest here is not in normative philosophical arguments, but in an on-the-ground empirical analysis in order to inform theoretical discussions about how the urban governance of diversity is moving beyond multiculturalism. Rather than a normative-philosophical debate defending or rejecting multiculturalism, we analyze from an empirical point of view how local policy implementations dealt with the more general backlash against multiculturalism. In the first section we discuss multiculturalism both as a normative political philosophy and as an actually existing policy and join calls for a more sociological analysis of the phenomenon. In the second section, we will discuss two cases of multicultural policy practices and how they developed in the city of Antwerp following the backlash against multiculturalism on various spatial scales of policy-making. We focus on two cases that we consider as turning points in the urban policies regarding ethnic minorities: the dissolution of the urban advisory board for ethnocultural minorities and the introduction of a municipal dress code. Our aim is triple. In the first place, we want to shift the focus from normative arguments about multiculturalism to an empirical analysis of local policy practices. In the second place, we argue that there needs to be a stronger awareness of the spatial divergence of diversity policies than commonly found in the literature. Finally, we aim to contribute to broader conceptual debates about how the use of the term diversity in urban governance affects the making or unmaking of minorities as political groupings.

Multiculturalism as Minority Group Representation and Recognition

Since the 1971 introduction of a formal multicultural policy in Canada, directing all parts of the federal government to respect the diversity of all ethnic groups in their policies and practices, multiculturalism has diffused worldwide as policy model to deal with ethnic and cultural diversity (Gutmann, 2003). As an alternative to the idea that minorities have to assimilate to the dominant culture of the majority population, multiculturalist ideas inspired public policies to deal with cultural minorities as well as with immigrant integration (Kymlicka, 2007). Also countries that officially continued with a different model of immigrant integration introduced some multicultural

provisions. For instance, even in France, known for its assimilationist integration policies, some specific accommodations like supporting migrant self-organizations have been provided (Withol de Wenden, 1994). Underlying the distinct national models of integration (Brubaker, 1992; Favell, 1998; Soysal Nuhoğlu, 1994), many commentators thus saw a more fundamental congruence that we had 'all become multiculturalists', to repeat the words of Glazer (1997).

As an umbrella term, multiculturalism primarily refers to a set of institutional arrangements for the recognition of cultural minorities and the development of group-differentiated rights (Kymlicka, 1995; Taylor, 1994; Young, 1990). Although there is significant disagreement about how institutions should publicly recognize and respect different groups and cultural identities, we argue that multicultural arrangements presuppose some form of minority group representation. Different groups can only have political standing or become included in the democratic public sphere if they are recognized by the state and its public institutions. It is true that cultural groups or minorities are symbolically and contextually constructed and can therefore not be seen as sealed and internally self-consistent wholes. For our purposes, however, what is important is whether and how forms of group identity are recognized by and represented in governmental institutions. Minority representation can take multiple forms (Mansbridge, 1999), including the (preferably visible) inclusion of minority group members in public institutions and collective decision-making bodies (see e.g. the principle of 'statistical proportionality' (Prewitt, 2002)), ensuring that issues with which minorities are specifically concerned get a place on the political agenda or guaranteeing the presence of minority group members in the public debate.

In this article, we hence want to study the actual social process through which the representation (and hence recognition) of minorities is conceptualized and practiced. This enables us to trace evolutions in time with regard to how ethnic differences are constructed within specific policy practices and discourses and can help to advance our empirical understanding of actual debates concerning multiculturalism, especially when it concerns the interaction between minority groups and public institutions. Rethinking multiculturalism in terms of group representation also forces us to critically assess how political institutions co-create minorities as social groupings (or fail to do so) and express a form of public recognition of minorities (or fail to do so). Minorities never

exist independent of the social and political classifications through which they are defined (and define themselves). Minorities of immigrant origin, for example, can be classified on the basis of their geographical origin. Yet, whether and how (post)migrants organize as a social group, and which identities and interests they can legitimately defend, cannot be read from their geographical origin in any transparent way. Discussions about multiculturalism can therefore not do without an analysis of minority group representations and how these express a form of public recognition (or not)

Our main research question here is to what extent measures of group representation and recognition have been retained despite a shift from multicultural to diversity policies at the urban level. Our approach of multiculturalism broadly aligns with a sociological perspective, as proposed by Kivisto (2012), for example, who stated that “what is needed is a decidedly sociological account of multiculturalism, an account that is different from philosophical accounts, policy positions, and polemics (...) A theory of multiculturalism seeks to treat multiculturalism as a social fact, in the Durkheimian sense of the term, attempting to provide a means for analyzing this phenomenon” (p. 4-5). We also pay attention to how diversity policies get implemented at different spatial scales and whether or not there exists convergence between policy narratives at these different scales. Many debates about multiculturalism have been conducted from a political philosophy perspective in which multiculturalism has been approached as a coherent ideology or policy model at the level of the nation-state (Kymlicka, 1995; Taylor, 1994; Parekh, 2000). Although there are some studies on the practices of local policy making around diversity, for example in the UK (Jones, 2013), the number of studies about the actual implementation of multicultural provisions for minority groups in urban contexts remains limited in comparison to the literature on multiculturalism as a concept and as a national policy.

The Demise of Multicultural Policies and the Emergence of ‘Diversity’ Discourses

Ever since its introduction, multiculturalism was met with resistance, first and foremost by conservatives who defended the primacy of national traditions and cultural homogeneity, an approach that has appropriately been labelled ‘neo-assimilationism’ (Baubock, 2002; Brubaker, 2001; Joppke, 2004). As Christian Joppke recently argued, it is not cultural pluralism in general that is put in question here, “but mostly the ethnic or

religious variant that stems from international migration. Here a closer look reveals that not any migration, but particularly Muslim migration, is central to the crisis of European multiculturalism.” (Joppke, 2017: 1-2) Over time, multiculturalism also became criticized by progressive commentators, who argued that actually existing multicultural policies ignored socio-economic inequalities, prioritized cultural traditions over individual freedom and reified cultural differences as timeless facts overlooking processes of cultural adaptation (Barry, 2001; Benhabib, 2002; Blommaert & Verschueren, 1998). In recent years, policy-makers and commentators in Europe and beyond have gradually withdrawn from multiculturalist positions (Alexander, 2013; Vasta, 2007), leading many scholars to adopt a ‘post-multicultural’ stance that highlights the limitations of multiculturalism while steering clear of neo-assimilationism (Kymlicka, 2010). The backlash against multiculturalism was not limited to countries that officially declared to have multicultural policies (Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010).

While the limitations of multiculturalism were increasingly highlighted, a slightly different model to deal with ethnic and cultural diversity emerged first in the United States. From the 1990s onwards, human resource departments reframed anti-discrimination measures as ‘diversity management’, which implied the positive appreciation of difference, a tendency to stress interpersonal relations and an emphasis on opportunities rather than on problems (Michaels, 2006). Concerns with a population and a workforce that is increasingly seen as ‘super-diverse’ (Vertovec, 2007; Crul, 2016), have led to the proliferation of managerial and organizational discourses in which diversity is considered to bolster the productivity and competitiveness of corporations, organizations and communities. In this framing, differences between humans are primarily viewed as economic and cultural resources to be cherished. At the same time, what counts as relevant categories of diversity has vastly broadened, introducing an ever-growing number of group differences beyond the original attention paid to gender, race and ethnicity. Over time, diversity came to include an increasingly wide range of target groups, from black and minority ethnic [BAME] communities to women, the disabled, LGBT people and the elderly, which led diversity as a concept away from an exclusive focus on racial and ethnic minorities.

In this sense, the diversity discourse also called into question the legitimacy and validity of the parameters that were previously accepted in multiculturalism, such as the idea

that the social and political world is primarily made up of ethnic groups, each of which is distinguished by a shared culture (Wimmer, 2013: 19-20). The proliferation of diversity discourses added to the various aforementioned criticisms and alternatives to multiculturalism that circulated in the field of policy-making, where multicultural arrangements set up to regulate the relation between ethnocultural minorities and state institutions were increasingly, albeit uneven, rolled back and replaced with other policy strategies. Next to a resurgence of strategies tending towards neo-assimilationism (Brubaker, 2001), the rise of neo-liberalism, the growth of ethnocultural diversity through migration, the popularity of the 'diversity' paradigm informed a shift away from policies concerned with anti-discrimination, structural disadvantage and rights (culturally differentiated or not) to policies focused on nurturing intercultural competences and seeing migrants as one of many categories to be considered (Faist, 2010). Although on a conceptual level these approaches – post-multiculturalism, neo-assimilationism and diversity – are in certain regards incompatible, they often exist cheek by jowl in actually existing policy configurations (Schiller & Çağlar, 2016). Moreover, the aforementioned changes unfold unevenly across space and various spatial scales, leading to complex policy configurations around living together in diversity. In the table below, we illustrate the shift from multiculturalism to the proliferation of diversity discourses by listing key documents on three levels: the national citizenship policies in Belgium, regional Flemish policies and local Antwerp policies. While this is of course not an exhaustive overview, we aim to highlight the spatial variabilities and similarities in the shift from multicultural to diversity policies.

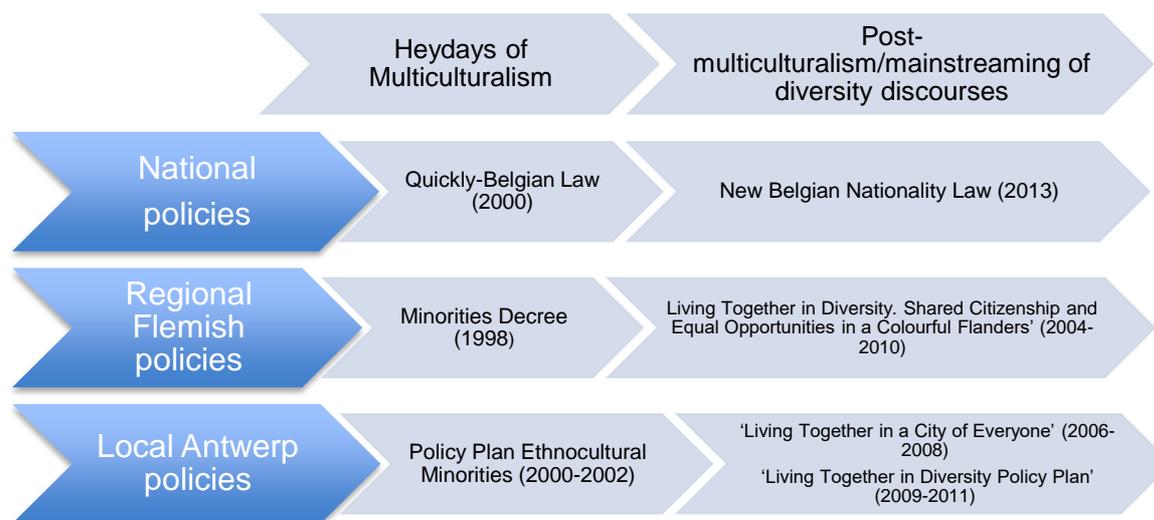


Figure 1: The shift from multiculturalism to diversity discourses in academic and local policy documents

Data and Methods

As will become clear from our analysis, the shift from 'multicultural' to 'diversity' policies can also be witnessed in Antwerp. When the official integration policies of Antwerp took a multicultural turn in the 1990s, this was translated into two strategies for group representation: the ethnically mixed recruitment of city staff to make the municipal services reflect the population and the establishment of a Migrant Council to defend the interests of ethnic minorities. After the turn of the century, however, multicultural policies became increasingly blamed for encouraging segregation and deterring the integration of immigrants. The analysis will show that the use of the term 'diversity' has opened up broader questions over the existing logics of minority group representation by 'broadening' what counts as minorities. We focus on two cases that we consider as turning points in the urban diversity policies: the dissolution of the Urban Advisory Board for Ethnocultural Minorities and the introduction of a municipal dress code.

This research is based on a qualitative methodology that involves a discourse analysis of relevant policy documents and semi-structured interviews. The analysis of policy documents draws on municipal publications dealing with diversity, annual reports,

newspaper articles and other academic research on the topic. 18 semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected actors from different levels of the public administration responsible for diversity policies or related matters, as well as with representatives of non-governmental organizations in the field of diversity and integration policies. The data on which this article is based were collected as part of a larger inquiry on the governance of urban diversity. The fieldwork was carried out over a relatively long timeframe from Autumn 2013 till Spring 2016. Although we mainly draw on documents and interviews with policy-makers for the purposes of this article, the main findings that emerge from these interviews with policy-makers, were confirmed in our interviews with representatives of minority organizations as well (for more details, see Saeys et al., 2014).

The analysis of how minority group representation evolved from multiculturalist to diversity discourses and practices in Antwerp does not pretend to be representative of debates on multiculturalism in all European cities. Indeed, the struggle over the representation of minority groups constitutes a highly contextual affair, shaped by local, regional, and (trans)national political power distributions and policy configurations (Nicholls & Uitermark, 2013). As such, we aim to inspire further theoretically driven research on the relevance of these conditions for the understanding of other European cities dealing with diversity, looking at how group representation has been brought into practice in local urban policies, as well as the process of urban diversity policies moving beyond multiculturalism.

The Demise of Group Representation and Recognition: Broadening Diversity

In order to answer our main research question why measures of minority group representation and recognition have eventually been abandoned at the urban level in the shift from multicultural to diversity policies, we will first briefly discuss the multi-scalar developments of policies regarding ethnic minorities in general. While immigration and citizenship laws are the responsibilities of the Belgian federal government, integration policies depend on the regional Flemish government and are implemented by local institutions at the urban and provincial level. During the heydays of multiculturalism, the Belgian citizenship law of 1 March 2000, nicknamed the 'quickly-Belgian law' (*snel-Belg-wet*), was one of the most flexible citizenship regimes in

Europe as residence alone was sufficient to acquire citizenship¹. On the regional level, the Flemish government officially took a multiculturalist stance with the Minorities Decree (*Minderhedendecreet*) of 1998, recognizing and funding ethnocultural self-organizations in order to stimulate the group-based emancipation of immigrants (Van Puymbroeck, 2011). In 2002, the emancipation policy led to the creation of the Minorities Forum (*Minderhedenforum*), a subsidized organization that brings together federations of migrant self-organizations, giving them a collective voice to advocate their interests as a recognized discussion partner of the Flemish government. Around the same time, the Minorities Decree also institutionalized public integration services at the local level. The decree requested the municipal integration services to develop a local policy plan regarding ethnic minorities. The first target group policy regarding ethnic minorities developed by the city of Antwerp, the 'Policy Plan Ethnocultural Minorities 2000-2002', clearly exemplified the multicultural ideology of the time in its recognition of cultural minorities and the promotion of group-differentiated rights, with policy measures like the migrant council and the recruitment of an ethnically diverse city staff.

In the context of a wider backlash against multiculturalism and the persisting electoral success of the far-right in the late 2000s, especially in Antwerp, many multicultural policy arrangements were transformed and renamed under the banner of 'diversity'. Rather than privileging ethnic minorities, diversity policies broadened their scope to include other social groups. A first step towards this inclusive policy was taken in 2004, when the Flemish government launched a strategic minorities policy plan for 2004-2010, titled 'Living Together in Diversity. Shared Citizenship and Equal Opportunities in a Colourful Flanders' (*Samenleven in diversiteit. Gedeeld burgerschap en gelijke kansen in een kleurrijk Vlaanderen*). The aim of this strategic plan was to stimulate a shared citizenship that privileged 'the common values of an open, tolerant and democratic Flanders' (p. 3). The emphasis on 'shared citizenship' can be read as a response to the criticisms that multiculturalism divided Flemish society. In this and future policy plans, the post-multicultural need for social cohesion would become increasingly prominent. In Antwerp, local policy-makers also advocated this idea. In 2005, the city council

¹ From 2013 onwards, however, Belgian citizenship laws have been tightened with formal integration requirements like knowledge of one of the official languages and proof of economic participation.

launched the 2006-2008 policy plan 'Living Together in a City of Everyone' (*Samenleven in een stad van iedereen*). The policy priority of making diversity the starting point of all urban policies illustrates the shift from categorical to broad diversity policies.

The Antwerp city council further elaborated these broad diversity policies in the 2009-2011 'Living Together in Diversity Policy Plan' (*Samenleven in diversiteit beleidsplan 2009-2011*). This new understanding of diversity led to several institutional changes. For example, the specialized integration service directed towards migrants was dissolved and became in 2008 part of a new, more generic unit called 'Living Together in Diversity', later simply called the 'Living Together' unit. While the shift from a categorical ethnic minorities policy towards broader diversity policies had several institutional consequences, we focus in the following sections on two policy measures that were considered as watershed moments by our interviewees: the dismissal of the Urban Advisory Board for Ethnocultural Minorities and the introduction of a municipal dress code. While the first case illustrates well how local policy-makers deal with political minority group representation, the second case is more focused on minority group recognition and illustrates how statistical proportionality in employment policies was challenged by the dress code in the context of a more general backlash against multiculturalism.

The Dismissal of the Urban Advisory Board for Ethnocultural Minorities

In this section we discuss the representation of ethnic minorities in the local government of the city of Antwerp through a council of migrant organizations. We argue that the idea that ethnic minority members themselves are best placed to voice and defend minority interests and concerns has increasingly been called into question. As we will explain in more detail different criticisms were voiced. In the aftermath of the very polarized 2006 electoral campaign in Antwerp, the ruling Mayor Patrick Janssens and the social-democratic party won the local elections with 35 % of the votes, only slightly more than the Flemish far-right that obtained 33,5% of the votes in the city. In a context where the far-right persistently criticized what it called 'multicultural privileges for ethnic minorities', policy-makers of the ruling left-wing coalition questioned whether the logic of representation would still work in an urban society that had become increasingly diversified. In this context, the existing migrant self-organizations were no

longer seen as representative of the migrant populations. The fate of the Urban Advisory Board for Ethnocultural Minorities in the city of Antwerp illustrates how these criticisms eventually led to the dismissal of the multicultural model of group representation.

In its recognition of ethnocultural minorities and the promotion of group-differentiated rights, the first Antwerp 'Policy Plan Ethnocultural Minorities 2000-2002' embodied the multicultural ideology of its time. One of the key multicultural elements of the policy plan was the proposal to support migrant self-organizations with structural funding and actions to involve these organizations in local policy-making. While migrant self-organizations often just engaged in socio-cultural activities, the policy plan foresaw a political role for them (Van Puymbroeck, 2014). Because migrants did not have voting rights, the migrant self-organizations were seen as the representatives of migrant communities in Antwerp and were expected to act as interlocutors in negotiations with the municipality. As migrant self-organizations were little known among municipal services, the municipal integration service would appoint contact officers among the communities and, most importantly, install an advisory board of ethnic minorities. In 2002, the city council introduced the 'Urban Advisory Board for Ethnocultural Minorities' (*Stedelijke overlegraad voor etnisch-culturele Minderheden*). The members of this advisory board were not elected by migrant communities, but two-thirds of the representatives were appointed by migrant self-organizations (while one third were selected based on their expertise with regards to ethnic minorities). The members of the council were supposed to represent the largest ethnic minorities in the city. The Moroccan community, for example, was represented by the Moroccan umbrella organization, while the Turkish community was represented by the Turkish umbrella organization. It was argued that these umbrella organizations would be best suited to voice and defend the interests of all people in their respective communities.

While the advisory board allowed migrant organizations to participate in the policy-making of the city, critical voices in the municipality argued that migrant umbrella organizations actually were not representative of the whole migrant population in Antwerp. In the 2006-2008 policy plan, the municipal integration service stated:

'Just like the local citizens, most migrants in Antwerp are not active members of an association. Or if they are, they only participate very

sporadically in activities. The simplistic idea that migrant self-organizations would represent their community does not make sense.

(‘Living Together in a City of Everyone 2006-2008’, p. 57)

In the 2006-2008 policy plan, the municipal council no longer assigned a political role to migrant self-organizations. While the legitimacy of the Urban Advisory Board for Ethnocultural Minorities was put into question, the 2006-2008 policy plan proposed the creation of a broader council that would consist of representatives of not only migrants but also other social groups, in order to reflect all diversity in society. This shift was in line with the policies of the Flemish strategic minorities policy plan for 2004-2010, which emphasized the post-multicultural need for social cohesion and a broad understanding of diversity. In Antwerp, local policy-makers followed this policy shift and abandoned arrangements that only focused on ethnic minorities. The Urban Advisory Board for Ethnocultural Minorities was turned into a ‘Deliberation Council for Diversity and Equal Opportunities Policies’ (*Overlegraad voor diversiteit en gelijke kansenbeleid*). Over time, however, the president of the deliberation council felt that the municipality did no longer take the concerns of migrant organizations seriously (Kif Kif, 2007). According to him, the broad diversity policies were creating too much fragmentation. Disenchanted with the diversity policies of the municipality, he resigned and within one year the Council was dissolved. In addition, the municipality convinced the Flemish government to no longer oblige the city to organize such a diversity council.

There were various reasons why the municipal government no longer wanted to continue with the Deliberation Council. Firstly, in that period the municipal diversity policies in general shifted from a categorical policy that focused on ethnocultural minorities towards a broadened and inclusive policy that dealt not only with the concerns of ethnic minorities but also with those of other social groups like the socio-economically disadvantaged, women, the disabled, LGBTs and the elderly. As the new Deliberation Council was supposed to include all possible diversity in the city, the municipality saw it as problematic that the deliberation council was still based on the categorical representation of ethnic minorities by umbrella federations of migrant self-organizations.

Secondly, there was the problem that the representatives in the council were concerned with different issues. As all members had different priorities, the diversity of the council made it difficult to reach agreements. According to a policy advisor of the municipality, it was the diversity of the council that made it impossible to reach an agreement because all members had different priorities:

"The mistake we made was that we actually brought these various diversities together around the table asking them to give just one advice to the city. [...] All those around the table had different priorities. I can tell you I have been banging my head against the wall with all that diversity".

Thirdly and most importantly, as we already mentioned, the city council argued that umbrella federations of migrant self-organizations actually were not representative of the diverse minority populations in Antwerp. For these reasons, the Mayor of Antwerp during that period preferred a more informal way of dealing with ethnic minorities. When we interviewed him, he stated:

"After 2006 we reduced the role of [migrant deliberation councils]. We might have thrown out the baby with the bathwater, but we felt that we were talking to people who did not represent their respective population groups. [...] So we started to work more pragmatically and where necessary we worked with bilateral contacts, which actually was much more time-consuming."

This more pragmatic approach of informal and bilateral contacts with minorities fit into the managerial vision of the Mayor of Antwerp who preferred a direct hands-on approach to policy-making. Not only was the importance of ethnic minority concerns and interests questioned, but the complex process of a deliberation council in which migrant umbrella organizations were supposed to represent minority groups in the city was considered as inefficient by the municipality. Because the Flemish government held

on to a multicultural approach for a longer period of time than the Antwerp city council, the city was obliged to organize representation of ethnic minorities in urban policy-making of some sort. They hence needed a formal organization that represented the interests of migrant groups after the Deliberation Council was abolished. In 2008, a local platform of the national Minorities Forum was created in Antwerp to represent ethnic minorities. Among others, the Turkish and Moroccan umbrella organizations became associated with this local platform. Contrary to the Deliberation Council, however, the local platform of the Minorities Forums was not a stage for direct interaction between the migrant organizations and the city council. Soon the relation between the Antwerp city government and the migrant organizations deteriorated. In theory, this local platform could defend the interests of migrant groups but because of the lack of contact with the city council, there was no structural space where their interests could be heard. By 2014, the local platform of the Minorities Forum was also abandoned. Rather than targeting ethnic minorities as distinct groups that need to be represented categorically by a separate council, the city increasingly aimed at creating a shared identity in which people of diverse backgrounds could be incorporated as citizens. In this sense, the dismissal of the Urban Advisory Board for Ethnocultural Minorities has to be understood in the context of a multi-scalar shift from multicultural to diversity policies.

Statistical Proportionality and the Municipal Dress Code

In our second case-study, we look at minority group recognition in the municipal employment policies. In the 1990s, civil society and migrant organizations criticized the municipal services for not being diverse enough. In particular, these organizations claimed that there was racism against migrants by the Antwerp police force. In response, the then Mayor of Antwerp saw the fact that only three persons of migrant origin were working in the Antwerp police force in 1996 as one of the causes of the tensions between the police and migrant communities. For this reason, the new government agreement proposed that the municipal services had to reflect as much as possible the existing urban population. This proposition implicitly employed the principle of 'statistical proportionality' (Prewitt, 2002), indicating whether the share of a certain social group in a given sector is lower than its proportional size in the total population. Such an underrepresentation can be seen as an indication of discrimination

that has to be rectified. In this sense, the visible presence of minorities in all municipal services was seen as an important step to improve the relationship between the municipality and the migrants. In addition, the unemployment rate among people with a migration background was higher than among the native population, so the municipality felt a socio-economic responsibility to improve the position of ethnic minorities in the labor market. The Antwerp 'Policy Plan Ethnocultural Minorities 2000-2002' (*Beleidsplan etnisch-culturele minderheden 2000-2002*) launched a specific target group policy for ethnic minorities. The plan aimed to diversify municipal services and to make them more representative and accessible for the urban population of which 13% was of non-Belgian origin. More specifically, the aim was to raise the percentage of non-Belgians working for the municipality from an estimated 1.5% to 6% over a period of 5 years. By striving for a statistical proportion of non-Belgians in the municipal services, the municipality aimed to mirror the ethnic diversity in the city. To achieve this aim, it was proposed to abandon the requirement of having the Belgian nationality in order to work for the municipality². In practice, the municipality organized several promotion campaigns to encourage people of migrant origin to apply for a job in the municipality and the police force. In addition, special trainings were organized for applicants of migrant origin to prepare them for the police entrance exam. Despite all these efforts, the number of municipal employees of migrant origin merely rose to 4.43% in 2004, while the number of people of migrant origin in the police force only reached 1.73% in 2004 (Stad Antwerpen, 2005, p. 73-74).

As employees of migrant origin remained underrepresented in municipal services, the 2007-2012 government agreement held on to the aim of raising the number of employees with a migrant background in the municipal services. A turning point in the municipal policies towards ethnic minorities, however, was the dress code introduced by the city council in 2007. Because of the subsequent electoral victories of the far-right (*Vlaams Blok/Belang*) that had been growing in Antwerp from 17.7 % of the votes in 1988 to 28 % in 1994 and to 33% in 2000, local policy-makers feared that the far-right would obtain a majority of votes in the 2006 municipal elections. Being aware that about

² This requirement remained in place for statutory functions though.

one third of the voters in Antwerp endorsed the far-right in the previous municipal elections, the social-democratic Mayor in power then reflected upon the question whether he would allow women with an Islamic headscarf in municipal front-office positions. In a book he wrote during the electoral campaign, the Mayor argued that the neutrality and secularity of the state should be guaranteed in public services in order to create a shared identity (Janssens, 2006). This idea was put into practice when the city council decided to introduce in the 2007-2012 government agreement a prohibition to wear outward signs of personal beliefs in municipal front-office positions (Stad Antwerpen 2007, p. 46).

The dress code in Antwerp echoed the 2004 French law on secularity and conspicuous religious symbols that banned religious signs, such as the Islamic veil, from public schools. Unlike France, with its long history of "laïcité" and strong state secularism, the Belgian constitution allows "two different regimes of dealing with religious and philosophical pluralism in society, i.e. that of republican neutrality and that of state-supported religious accommodation" (Coene & Longman, 2008, p. 317). Even if the Islamic veil also caused heated public debates in Belgium and Flanders, this had not yet led to a national or regional ban on religious signs³. In this sense, Antwerp was the first Flemish city to introduce a dress code prohibiting religious symbols, which meant a significant break with the multicultural policies not only at the municipal level but also at the Flemish level, where the Minorities Forum called the dress code a form of 'indirect discrimination'⁴.

More specifically, while previous multicultural policy plans encouraged the recruitment of ethnocultural minorities in the municipal services, the dress code seemed to contradict and to counteract efforts to employ ethnic minorities. Against the critique that the dress code would impede ethnic minorities to be employed in municipal services, the Mayor argued that the prohibition to wear religious symbols would make civil servants with an ethnic minority background 'more acceptable to the general public', and thus more likely to be employed (Van de Perre, 2007). This statement was paradoxical: on the one hand the Mayor held on to the aim that the municipal services

³ In 2015, Belgium eventually introduced a ban on face-covering clothing, such as the Islamic niqab or burqa.

⁴ www.korta.info/met-een-hoofddoek-achter-het-loket.html

should mirror and recognize the visible diversity in the city, but on the other hand the dress code implied that (part of) this diversity should be made invisible to be acceptable to the general public. What we can observe here is a retreat from multicultural policies and a move towards neo-assimilationism, as an attempt is made to reduce cultural (religious) differences, at least as they are expressed in visible symbols, with the proclaimed aim to facilitate living together in diversity. This, however, backfired, also politically, as members of ethnic minorities perceived it as a lack of cultural recognition. When we interviewed officials in charge of implementing the city's diversity policy, they saw the introduction of the dress code as a breaking point that deteriorated to a great extent the relationship between the municipality and ethnocultural minorities in the city. A high-level policy-maker of the city stated:

"The dress code has haunted us enormously. [...] While we based our argument on the neutrality of the state, we also legitimated a headscarf ban in the front-office positions of a bank and so on. Of course, the saliency of the headscarf increased enormously because of this. It became more important rather than less important, while the latter was actually our goal".

Although the dress code was formulated in general terms, in the media the municipal dress code was referred to as 'the headscarf ban'. It caused an outrage among some Muslims in the city and led for example to the creation of the action group 'Boss Over Own Head' (*BOEH! Baas Over Eigen Hoofd*). The far-right party Flemish Block applauded that the policy measure would help to stop 'the rise of Islam' in Antwerp. Nevertheless, the municipal dress code also implied a prohibition for Jewish people to wear a yarmulke and for Catholics to wear a cross. These communities, however, stayed largely out of the debate.

In the following years, the municipal dress code soon became an example for other public and private institutions. In schools with an ethnically diverse school population, for example, a dress code would make this diversity less visible, a shift that was explicitly supported by institutions on the Flemish level. In 2009, the direction of the

Royal Athenaeum in Antwerp, a school with a large number of Muslim girls, imposed a prohibition to wear religious and other symbols to students, teachers and anyone charged with pedagogical tasks within the school. Even if this ban caused again lots of protests among migrant communities and civil society organizations, the Board of Education of the Flemish Community (GO!) extended the dress code to all its schools. Given the virulent resistance against the dress code, many of our interviewees saw this policy measure as a miscalculation of the municipal government and argued that the municipality underestimated the effects of the dress code on the diverse population in Antwerp. Many people with an ethnic minority background felt that the municipality did not recognize or accept them 'the way they are' and turned against the Mayor in the following election (Swyngedouw, 2012).

The case of the dress code illustrates how the municipality of Antwerp was struggling with the recognition of ethnocultural diversity in the municipal services. The introduction of a municipal dress code determined which visible features of minority identities were acceptable in the municipal services and which were not. In this sense, the dress code actually indicated a move away from multicultural policies that recognized the visible expression of minority group identities. In the wake of the headscarf debate, the municipality published policy plans that focused on the question 'how to avoid that the growing diversity in the city would undermine the social cohesion'. Downplaying cultural differences, the policy plans gradually replaced specific provisions for ethnic minorities with a much broader understanding of 'diversity', including not only ethnic minorities but also diversity on the basis of socio-economic status, age, gender, sexual preference and disability.

The mainstreaming of diversity policies is often presented as an indication of the success of diversity policies and as a positive evolution towards more inclusive policies. In the case of Antwerp, however, the broadening of the diversity concept appears to be an attempt to counter the widespread perception amongst the Antwerp population (see the share of far-right voters in Antwerp) that the categorical policy arrangements for ethnocultural minorities were an unfair form of privileging migrant communities over

the native Flemish population⁵. By broadening the diversity concept, the municipality arguably tried to reduce special provisions for ethnic minority groups and to make their representation in the municipal structures less visible.

While we already discussed how this contributed to the dismissal of the Urban Advisory Board for Ethnocultural Minorities, we can also observe how the broadening of diversity shifted the attention away from group-differentiated efforts to employ ethnic minorities in the municipal services towards a responsabilization of individuals to adapt to the rules and norms of the secular mainstream society. In this context, a high-ranking civil servant claimed that the broadening of the diversity concept was strategic. In the following quote, he argued that the broad concept of diversity paved the way for the demise of multicultural group representation in the municipal policies:

“In that period, [the municipality] was surprised by the headscarf controversy. Therefore, they came up with the following trick. They opened up diversity from ethnocultural minorities to everybody: disabled people, older people, women, etc. Almost everybody became a target group except we ourselves [...] They were drowning everything into this broad diversity concept. I tell you, this has been the end of diversity policies. What does a disabled person have to do with an Algerian migrant? [...]”.

When a new Flemish nationalist party won the elections in 2012 and came to power in Antwerp, they went further discarding the representation of ethnic minorities in policy discourses and urban governance structures. The Flemish nationalist Councilor for Diversity and Integration announced several reforms in the Living Together municipal unit. By 2013, the Office for Diversity Management was dissolved and became the Poverty and Welfare Cell. Despite the radical transformation of the municipal service, a

⁵ The Flemish far-right not only opposes immigration but also pursues a culturally homogeneous Flemish nation-state, independent from the French-speaking part of Belgium. The ‘native Flemish’ are imagined as citizens born to families who are inhabitants of Flanders since many generations.

civil servant argued that the city still dealt with diversity and ethnocultural minorities, even if there is no longer a specific unit concerned with diversity. She stated: "*We did not lose [diversity], it only is turned invisible in our organization*". The argument used by the city council to abolish the Office for Diversity Management was that the responsibility for diversity could not be in the hands of just one department. Because diversity is important for all municipal services, all departments were expected to take over the tasks of the Office for Diversity Management. In reality, however, our interviewees feared that by dissolving the Office for Diversity Management the attention for diversity eventually would fade away and, hence, that the issues of minority groups would no longer be represented and dealt with by the city at all.

Conclusion

This article aimed to empirically analyze how measures of group representation and recognition have evolved following a shift from multicultural to diversity policies in a multi-scalar urban setting. Against the background of a general backlash against multiculturalism, we have decided to focus on how the diversity discourse that emerged internationally over the past decade was strategically mobilized both by the Antwerp city council and Flemish policy-makers and led to the undermining and abolishing of local multicultural settings for minority group representation and recognition in Antwerp. We investigated two cases of governance arrangements that implemented multicultural group representation in Antwerp since the early 2000s: the migrant council and the recruitment of ethnically diverse people in the municipal services. Our two cases have illustrated how the global proliferation of discourses promoting a broader understanding of diversity beyond ethnic minority groups challenged the multicultural approach of group representation and recognition. The vicissitudes of our two cases illustrate how the broadening of the concept of diversity does not necessarily serve a 'progressive' objective of inclusion through mainstreaming diversity but can also benefit more 'conservative' agendas opposing multicultural arrangements for marginalized groups. When multicultural policies became diversity policies in Antwerp, the migrant council was disbanded and a dress code prohibited minorities to display religious and other symbols in front-office public functions.

Our analysis provides three important contributions to the literature on the governance of diversity and the policy-making process around it. Firstly, our focus on the vicissitudes of concrete urban diversity policies and the trajectories of specific policy ideas and measures shows the added value of approaching multiculturalism as a 'social fact' that has to be analysed empirically rather than as a philosophical idea that has to be normatively justified. When doing so, one clearly observes that policy models such as multiculturalism and diversity exhibit a significant amount of political ambiguity and that due attention needs to be paid to the actual implementation of multicultural or diversity policies at the local scale and the actors involved in it (of course, alongside public discourse and national integration policies) as well as the complex dynamics of politicization and de-politicization of the governance of diversity at the urban scale.

Secondly, our analysis shows the need to take into account different spatial scales of governance when analysing diversity policies and narratives. On the one hand, we cannot assume that the evolution of diversity policies and policy ideas necessarily converges on a single trajectory, as the late adoption of multicultural policy ideas that have been circulating internationally for several decades in Antwerp (and Flanders) shows. On the other hand, the establishment of multicultural policies and the shift to diversity policies on the Antwerp-urban scale and the Flemish-regional scale mutually reinforced each other, albeit that policies at both scales moved at their own speed, determined by scale-specific political developments.

Thirdly, our study highlights the evolution of policy agendas and political responses to urban diversity. In the case of Antwerp, multicultural local policies appeared relatively late – compared to international evolutions – and mainly as a result of Flemish policies. It was also particularly short-lived, with local political forces taking an active role in challenging multicultural arrangements through the broadening of the concept of diversity. The strong electoral presence of the far-right in Antwerp made it politically very receptive to resurgent neo-assimilationist tendencies and the backlash against multiculturalism. In Antwerp, the mainstreaming of diversity in the local policy discourses seemed to serve as a divideand-rule strategy leading to the demise of group representation and recognition, increasingly urging people with a minority background to adapt to the cultural majority. The local use of a discourse of 'broad diversity' diminished the political power of multiculturalism at the city level through the demise

of collective actors that are best placed to address structural inequalities between minorities and the majority population. At the same time, broad diversity discourses also served to obscure the idea that a measure such as the dress code would target specific ethnic minorities. Due to their broad scope, diversity policies neglect the hierarchies and power relations in the representation of different social groups. By consequence, we can conclude that disbanding multicultural provisions can be understood as a resurgence of assimilationism under the header of 'diversity' in this urban context. Whereas multiculturalism defended group rights, diversity policies rather focus on the insertion of individuals into mainstream society, serving a neo-assimilationist agenda that has come to replace the forms of minority representation and recognition typical of the multicultural approach.

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