Adult education practices for immigrants in Flanders

An analysis of the concept ‘citizenisation’

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1 Introduction

Despite the facts and figures on migration, a zero-immigration discourse, with the main focus on immigration restrictions, border control and closure, has dominated the debates and policy initiatives in several European countries and the EU. The discourse is also popular in Flanders and Belgium, and is used especially, but not only, by the extreme rightwing and anti-migrant party ‘Vlaams Belang’. In every discussion concerning asylum seekers, family migration and the regularisation of undocumented migrants, the discourse appears and is used to show that the Belgian immigration policy is much too open and goes in the wrong direction.

The zero-immigration discourse is not realistic. Europe is an ‘immigration society’ (Niessen, Schibel et al. 2003) and the same is true for Belgium and Flanders (Loobuyck and Jacobs, 2009a). This means that Europeans not only have to be aware that they live in a multicultural society with several migrant communities; they also have to realise that they live in a society in which newcomers and a first generation of migrants with a different culture, religion and language, are a normal part of society. Knowing immigration will not stop, implicates that there are lasting structural measures needed to cope with immigration (a policy with fair, just and transparent procedures) and integration (a policy which focuses on equal citizenship and optimal participation). Since 2003 the Flemish Community has formalised an integration policy for newcomers. This so-called ‘citizenisation’ (inburgering) has an ambitious and ambiguous goal: living together in diversity. This paper gives an analysis of how the policy of citizenisation tries to establish its goal and how the concept of citizenisation is formalised in decrees and policy notes.

2 Multi-level governance in Belgium

After several state reforms, Belgium has a peculiar and complex system of federalism that reflects a mix of territorial and cultural autonomy (Farrell and van Langenhove, 2005). Belgium is built out of three Communities (Dutch, French and German speaking Communities) and three Regions (Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels-Capital). The Regions have jurisdiction over ‘space-bounded’ matters, the Communities over ‘person-related’ matters. In this complex multinational state, there is also a division of labour on jurisdiction over migration and integration policies. The Belgian government is responsible for immigration, anti-discrimination and the nationality law. The integration policy is mainly a local competence of the Communities, Regions and cities. Education, integration, language, housing, and matters pertaining to the religion of migrants, are all competences handled at the level of the Regions and/or Communities. This division of labour is also clear when we look at the list of ministers on the different political levels: on the Belgian level there is since 2008 a coordinating minister of migration (since July 2009, this is the prime minister himself), while in the Flemish
governments (2004-9, 2009-14) there is a minister of so-called ‘civic integration’ who has the central and final responsibility for the entire minority policy.

In line with other European countries, Belgium has chosen for ‘integration’ as a central concept within the immigration policy. Integration is seen as the insertion of migrants into Belgian society according to three guiding principles: (i) assimilation where the public order demands this; (ii) consistent promotion of the best possible fit in accordance with the orientating social principles which support the culture of the host society and which are related to ‘modernity’, ‘emancipation’ and ‘true pluralism’ – as understood by a modern Western state; and (iii) unambiguous respect for the cultural diversity as mutual enrichment in all other areas. Furthermore, integration also entails promotion of structural involvement of minorities in the activities and aims of the government (KCM 1989; KCM 1993). This concept of integration has been criticized for its vagueness on the underlying model of society. Some critics argue that the concept is too much in line with the prevailing Flemish orthodoxy concerning multiculturalism (Martiniello, 1995: 140), other critics argue that the Belgian policy and integration discourse is ethnocentric and results in assimilation and ‘homogenesim’ – a fundamental non-acceptance of diversity (Blommaert and Verschueren, 1991, 1994, 1998).

Moreover, and maybe most important, due to the state reforms, Belgium has little power over integration issues, except for the nationality legislation and the anti-discrimination law. Since the state reforms of 1980, the Communities have autonomous jurisdiction over the reception and integration policies of migrants. This makes it possible for the different Communities to put some specific accents in their approach to migrant policy and to tailor their minority policy in accordance with the national history and sensitivities (Loobuyck and Jacobs, 2009b&c; Martiniello, 2007).

3 The Flemish Integration Policy

3.1 The Flemish Minority Policy

The first policy statement on migrant policy was accepted by the Flemish government in March 1989. This policy was inspired by the Anglo-Saxon and (former) Dutch multicultural model. The main aim of the policy was ‘a multicultural society with intercultural exchange’, through the creation and enlargement of a categorical integration sector. In the course of the 1990’s the categorical vision was replaced by an inclusive one, with the possibility of temporary categorical measures. In 1998, the Flemish government further formalised this through the acceptance of the ‘Minority Decree’. In line with the ambitious ‘strategic plan for minority policy’ (Flemish Government, 2004), the Flemish parliament accepted a new decree on integration in April 2009 (amendment April 30, 2009).

The key concepts in this updated decree are: emancipation and equal participation of certain target groups, accessibility of regular services, and living together in diversity. It is striking that the decree has not only the immigrant population as subject, but also the whole society. One of the main aims for the near future is to promote the coexistence in diversity by all citizens and to further the intercultural competence of political and social institutions. Living together in a diversified society is every citizen’s responsibility. The minority decrees focus on three levels: an emancipation policy for target groups, a social policy on the domains of welfare, health care and education, and a reception policy for newcomers. The latter is specific for Flanders (because absent in the French Community) and was formalised with the citizenisation decree in 2003.
3.2 Citizenisation (inburgering) in Flanders

Since the end of the 1990s, there have been various local experiments and projects related to reception policy in Flanders. However, we had to wait until February 2003 for the acceptance of the official legislation about the so-called citizenisation trajectories. The citizenisation trajectories, consisting out of two main parts, are compulsory for a target group and set up under de guidance of adult educators. The primary trajectory consists out of three pillars: acquiring Dutch as a second language (Nederlands als tweede taal - NT2), orientation in the Flemish/Belgian society (Maatschappelijke Oriëntering - MO) and orientation in the labour market (Loopbaanoriëntatie - LO). In the secondary trajectory the newcomer is referred to regular social services.

The idea of ‘citizenisation’ (inburgering) is copied from the Netherlands but has provoked a lot of discussion. Most of the time, the political discussion was about the compulsory character of the trajectories. Right-liberals, nationalists and conservatives stressed the importance of ‘obligation’ and ‘sanctions’, while more progressive politicians said that obligation is only fair when there is sufficient availability of tuition and the waiting lists for lessons have been eliminated. Citizenisation was also controversial in the migrant communities, because people usually discussed that policy in terms of ‘assimilation’ and ‘obligations’, while that policy could actually be legitimised in terms of qualification, empowerment, emancipation and capabilities. Although much has been said about the obligation, it is worth mentioning that the target group is much larger than the group that is obliged to undertake tuition. The target group has been broadened and further specified by amendments in 2006 and 2008. Most remarkable is the fact that the citizenship policy does not longer aims at ‘newcomers’ only, but so-called ‘oldcomers’ are included too. In this target group, five priority groups\(^1\) can be distinguished, which are entitled to a primary trajectory. All have an equal right to a qualitative citizenisation trajectory, one group is obliged\(^2\).

4 Conceptual analysis of ‘citizenisation’

In what follows, citizenship will be discussed, using the decrees, explanatory memoranda (EM) and policy notes as a starting point\(^3\). The central decree is the Flemish citizenship decree (B.S.8.V.2003, changed by B.S.9.XI.2006 and B.S.21.II.2008). Another decree of importance, is the earlier mentioned Minority Decree (B.S.19.VI.1998, changed by the decree of April 30, 2009, see 3.1). The two available policy notes are from the former minister of civic integration, Marino Keulen (Keulen, 2004), and the present one, Geert Bourgeois (Bourgeois, 2009).

The definition of citizenship, as stated in the citizenisation decree (Flemish Government, 2003, art. 2), will be used as a framework in this conceptual analysis.

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\(^1\) (i) People younger than 65, established more than a year, and living of an income provided by social services; (ii) parents of school going children; (iii) candidates for social housing (Flemish Community); (iv) newcomers; (v) asylum seekers, who filed their request more than four months ago.

\(^2\) This group can be further divided into four categories: newcomers, ministers of recognised religions from non-EU countries (especially imams) (since 2007), newcomers with the Belgian nationality (established less than a year) and unemployed ‘oldcomers’ (established more than a year) (not yet into operation).

\(^3\) This paper is part of a doctoral research on citizenship in immigration societies, which started November 1\(^{st}\), 2009. This research will focus on central concepts used in citizenship-debates and will take experiences and ideas of adult educators in citizenisation trajectories (Flanders) into account.
An interactive process, in which the government provides a specific program to migrants\(^4\), that, on the one hand, gives them the opportunity to empower, and on the other hand contributes to the recognition of those persons as full citizens of the society, with the objective of a full, active participation and a shared citizenship of each one and the creation of social cohesion.

Central concepts in this definition are citizenisation as an interactive process (see 4.1), which offers a specific program aiming at empowerment and recognition (see 4.3). This will be analysed and discussed, to get a clearer picture of what measures are used to reach the objective: active and shared citizenship. In the conclusion, the concept of citizenship as it is intended within the Flemish citizenisation decree, will be analysed and discussed.

### 4.1 Citizenisation as an interactive process

Citizenisation is an interactive and reflective process and works in two directions: both the interests of the target group as of the host society are taken into account. It is a learning process in which all parties can learn from each other. But it is also a negotiation process to which everyone, individual or on the different levels of group associations, can give its own realization, provided that the fundamental rights and duties, established democratically and part of the constitution, are not negotiable (Flemish Government, 2003 – EM, p. 6).

In the policy notes there is attention for interactivity on different levels: between ‘newcomers’ and ‘oldcomers’ (in the MO-course), between ‘newcomers’ and regular services, concerning accessibility (to facilitate the communication\(^5\)) and interculturalisation of these services, and between ‘newcomer’ and society. For the latter part, the Flemish Minority Centra (VMC) functions as a participating organization and works in two directions. It has to inform the public opinion correctly about integration issues and the diversity in society and, at the same time, ensure active, public participation of the allochtonous society when co-operating at shaping the integration policy.

In the most recent policy note, the current minister of citizenisation Bourgeois, announces the organization of a States General of Citizenisation and Integration in 2010, a debate that will try to discuss the problems of a multi-cultural society. It has the purpose to discuss and to find answers to cope with this complex reality, and this without further polarization between ‘us’ and ‘them’. To stimulate interactivity, the Minister also intend to increase the civil effect of the citizenisation certificate.

**Discussion**

The decrees and policy notes are vague concerning the distinction between interactivity and negotiation. Most of the proposed initiatives seem to narrow this down to interactivity as a mutual learning process. On the one hand, everyone, newcomer and the host society, have to realize that diversity can be an enrichment, but that it also can cause problems. On the other hand the newcomer gets informed about his new environment, while the government ensures that the regular

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\(^4\) The decree of 2006 changes the term ‘foreigners’ to migrants, with the purpose of also including ‘oldcomers’ (established migrants, with or without the Belgian nationality).

\(^5\) Responsibility of the ‘Babel Tolkentelefoon’, a social interpretation service.
services are accessible and prepared for the newcomer (interculturalisation). The role of the VMC can be seen as interactive (informing), but also as the creation of negotiation space for minorities, when taking part in the shaping of the integration policy. It will be interesting to look if the creation of negotiation spaces makes a sporadic democracy\(^6\) is possible (Biesta, 2009). This discussion has similarities with the discussion over the difference between empowerment and emancipation (see 4.2).

A second point of discussion is about the group who joins this interactive process. The citizenisation decree aims at a certain target group, but research has shown that the government does not succeed in this goal (Lamberts, De Cuyper et al., 2007). The report states that (in the period 2004 – 2006) 60% of the target group, who arrives at a city, finds its way to the reception office. 70% of that group actually engages in a trajectory, from which 60% eventually finishes the primary trajectory. This creates a rather large group of new citizens who is not included in this process.

4.2 A specific program: citizenisation trajectories

The primary trajectory in the citizenisation process is designed to increase empowerment. The three parts of the trajectory (MO, NT2 en LO) all contribute to this, by supporting newcomers in the construction of a ‘life career’(levensloopbaan)\(^7\) and providing in a basic knowledge of the Dutch language. The citizenisation decree distinguishes three dimensions of empowerment: a social, professional and educational dimension. The primary trajectory of citizenisation gives priority to the educational and professional perspective and offers a basic social empowerment, which is situated in MO. The means to achieve this goal are through education and work, but the decree also stresses the importance of socio-cultural participation in the spare time and the creation of social networks (Flemish Government, 2003 – EM, p. 9; Bourgeois, 2009). The primary trajectory is set up under the guidance of an adult educator, who works with an integral approach (a simultaneous focus on education, welfare, culture and employment, in line with the earlier mentioned ‘life career’), and is custom made. The final responsibility of the primary trajectory lies with the reception offices (categorical), connected to a network of regular (inclusive) services.

The secondary trajectory logically aims at the finality the citizenisation decree (i.e. full participation). In this trajectory there is a transfer to the regular services, which also entails a shift from a categorical to an inclusive approach. The adult educator, in cooperation with the integration sector\(^8\), has the duty to ensure a ‘warm transition’ (warme overgang): the trajectory has to be custom made as well and follow-up on the primary trajectory as best as possible. The policy notes acknowledge the

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\(^6\) Biesta looks closer to the relationship between democracy and inclusion. The deliberative turn in democracy (overcomes ‘external inclusion’) and the work of Iris Young (overcomes ‘internal exclusions’) are laudable, but still based on a colonial conception of democratization, where the ones inside a certain sphere include the ones outside. For Biesta democracy is rather ‘a claim of equality’. It is not simply the inclusion of a group, it is also the creation of new, political identities. This creates opportunities for the democrtisation of education that lie beyond the inclusion of excluded people into the existing democratic order.

\(^7\) The entire trajectory that an individual, natural person may go through during his life and in with different roles such as among others child, student, citizen, working, leisure man, spouse, family caregiver, parent or retired, can alternately be covered (Depreitere, 2008).

\(^8\) Especially since the citizenisation sector now has its own rules that are no longer included in the legislation on the integration sector, (…) the coordination of the secondary integration policy is assigned to the integration sector. By being responsible for a smooth transfer between the primary and the regular services, the integration sector continues to keep a task within the reception policy (Flemish Government, 1998)
fact that the secondary trajectory has a well developed professional perspective, but only a minimal educational perspective and completely no social perspective.

However, the decree stated a two-folded mission for the citizenisation trajectories: not only does citizenisation offer greater empowerment, it also aims at recognition of the persons, undertaking the trajectory, as full citizens of society. In the new policy note, this is called ‘the civil effect of citizenisation’. The main focus is the valorization of the citizenisation trajectory with a ‘citizenisation certificate’. Nowadays, this is granted for made efforts; in the future this has to evolve to the achievement of certain results. Therefore, the VMC is developing an integrative objective framework. This will also be used to create an intake test, as an aid for more custom made trajectories. Other initiatives concern the visibility of citizenisation in the public space.

Discussion

An interesting point of discussion is the analysis of the concepts ‘emancipation’ and ‘empowerment’. The citizenisation decree considers itself as an ‘emancipatory’ policy. The strategic plan for Minorities defines emancipation as (i) fortifying available competences and (ii) influencing structures and taking the own responsibility (Flemish Government, 2004). This interpretation is vague and has an overlap with how empowerment is shaped in the citizenisation decree. Much clearer is the distinction offered by Tom Inglis (Inglis, 1997):

Empowerment involves people developing capacities to act successfully within the existing system and structures of power, while emancipation concerns critically analyzing, resisting and challenging structures of power. (...) Education and training for empowerment center on helping individuals attain greater economic, political and social power. This form of learning is a classical example of what Freire terms ‘banking education’; people making greater commitments and investments as a means towards obtaining greater rewards. Despite Freire’s hopes and expectations, most people may want to learn to read and write as a means of getting on in the world, rather than changing it.

Empowerment, as defined in the citizenization decree, can be seen as ‘banking education’. The steps taken towards the valorization of the citizenisation certificate and the development of a uniform manual for MQ, seem to confirm this. Still, the citizenisation process also stresses the importance of interactivity and negotiation (see 4.1). The question remains if this is enough to label citizenisation as emancipatory and not just as a policy that helps to empower individuals. Of course, and this is important to note, the overarching Minorities decree also aims at emancipation, so this is not solely the responsibility of the citizenisation. The adult educators are said to be the central actors in reaching empowerment and emancipation: in building up the custom made trajectories, they have to take actual competences and personal preferences into account. This individualization seems to acknowledge the fact that emancipation is narrowed down to individual empowerment. To reach emancipation however, there will have to be a strong focus on structures and not only on individuals.

An additional aid to further personalize the trajectory, is the development of an objectives mainframe. Reaching these objectives will be honored with a certificate. This recognition is positive,

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9 Important to note is that the overarching Minorities Decree also aims at emancipation, so this is not solely the responsibility of the citizenisation.
although research has shown that only 60% of the persons who start a trajectory, successfully finishes it (Lamberts, De Cuyper et al., 2007), which creates a large group of drop-outs that have ‘failed’.

Another point of attention is the secondary trajectory. The central concept in this trajectory is lifelong learning and therefore covers an unlimited period. The main problem here is the lack of educational and social perspective and a strong focus on labour.

5 Conclusion and discussion: what kind of citizenship?

It is generally accepted that all models of integration depict the acquisition of citizenship as a crucial step for individuals who enter and wish to be integrated in a society. The same is true for the Flemish integration policy. In general we can notice a shift from a collective idea of integration towards an individual one, where the responsibility to integrate lies with the minorities, combined with a more compulsory approach. Originally citizenisation was seen as a process with mutual rights and obligations, between the government, which has the duty to provide a qualitative citizenisation trajectory, and the newcomer, who agrees to an active participation. Nowadays, this has changed into a policy that focuses on empowerment, as a base principle for social emancipation.

*Shared and active citizenship implies taking up individual responsibility, showing loyalty and solidarity to the Flemish society and thus implies an active involvement in the organization of society. It presupposes participating in society with respect for others, contributing to welfare by work and own effort, showing respect for fundamental rights and not exclude or discriminate against people because of their ethnic, religious or cultural background. More participation is to leverage the emancipation, fighting discrimination is just not enough: all citizens must work together* (Keulen, 2004).

A two-fold metaphor to look at conceptions of citizenship in integration can be useful: citizenship as tool or as reward (Jurado, 2008; Kymlicka, 2003; Bauböck, 2006). In the assimilationist integration model, citizenship is viewed as a reward, handed to citizens who have ‘proven’ their loyalty to the state. Citizenship as a tool is used in multicultural models, where rights and responsibilities are a factor encouraging further integration.

We could say that Flanders has combined a rather multicultural Minorities Decree, with a rather assimilationist citizenisation decree. To become a new Flemish citizen, immigrants must learn the language and agree with the ‘Flemish’ values of pluralism, democracy, the rule of law, freedom, equality, solidarity, respect and citizenship. Cultural distinctiveness, in particular language, serves as a relatively straightforward criterion for defining the Flemish national community, that is, for specifying who should be included and excluded. Together with the formalisation through the integrative objectives mainframe and the uniform manual for MO, one could conclude that citizenship in the Flemish integration policy can be seen as a reward. However, this is not entirely true, because there is no such thing as a Flemish nationality: the nationality legislation remains a federal policy, as an instrument to stimulate political participation. This is an example of the multi-level governance in Belgium and the difficulties it causes. While Belgium leans towards an approach of citizenship as a tool, Flanders goes into the direction of citizenship as reward. Another problem is
that Communities have to provide in the reception and integration of migrants (also financially), but have no control over immigration, which is a federal issue. In the recent policy note for example, the Flemish minister of civic integration criticizes the federal policy concerning migration and refers to marriage migration. He argues that this is one of the most common forms of migration to our country, but at the same time it is also largely responsible for a vicious circle of social deprivation and exclusion.

Both accounts of citizenship can pose challenges for adult educators who guide citizenisation trajectories. If citizenship is used as a reward, they have to be aware of the risk that adult education is reduced to a technical profession to produce a desired outcome. Citizenship as a tool offers the challenge to see citizenship as an open concept with unpredictable outcomes and so becoming a public sphere and a cultural forum to express, experience and exchange.

6 References

6.1 Policy documents

Decrees


Policy notes


Strategic plan


6.2 Other references


