

INTERACT – RESEARCHING THIRD COUNTRY NATIONALS’ INTEGRATION AS A THREE-WAY PROCESS - IMMIGRANTS, COUNTRIES OF EMIGRATION AND COUNTRIES OF IMMIGRATION AS ACTORS OF INTEGRATION

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An overview of integration policies in Belgium

Jérémy Mandin

INTERACT Research Report 2014/20

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Immigrants, Countries of Emigration and Countries of Immigration as Actors of
Integration

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INTERACT - Researching Third Country Nationals' Integration as a Three-way Process - Immigrants, Countries of Emigration and Countries of Immigration as Actors of Integration

Around 25 million persons born in a third country (TCNs) are currently living in the European Union (EU), representing 5% of its total population. Integrating immigrants, i.e. allowing them to participate in the host society at the same level as natives, is an active, not a passive, process that involves two parties, the host society and the immigrants, working together to build a cohesive society.

Policy-making on integration is commonly regarded as primarily a matter of concern for the receiving state, with general disregard for the role of the sending state. However, migrants belong to two places: first, where they come and second, where they now live. While integration takes place in the latter, migrants maintain a variety of links with the former. New means of communication facilitating contact between migrants and their homes, globalisation bringing greater cultural diversity to host countries, and nation-building in source countries seeing expatriate nationals as a strategic resource have all transformed the way migrants interact with their home country.

INTERACT project looks at the ways governments and non-governmental institutions in origin countries, including the media, make transnational bonds a reality, and have developed tools that operate economically (to boost financial transfers and investments); culturally (to maintain or revive cultural heritage); politically (to expand the constituency); legally (to support their rights).

INTERACT project explores several important questions: To what extent do policies pursued by EU member states to integrate immigrants, and policies pursued by governments and non-state actors in origin countries regarding expatriates, complement or contradict each other? What effective contribution do they make to the successful integration of migrants and what obstacles do they put in their way?

A considerable amount of high-quality research on the integration of migrants has been produced in the EU. Building on existing research to investigate the impact of origin countries on the integration of migrants in the host country remains to be done.

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Abstract

The objective of the paper is to provide a brief review of Belgian migrants integration policies and actors. Three issues are addressed in this paper: the question of public discourses and the political agenda on integration in Belgium; the question of the structuring of integration policies in the country; and finally the question of non-state actors and integration policies and practices. Because integration is also a competence of subnational entities of the Belgian federal State, differences appear between integration conception and policies in Flanders (combining multiculturalist and more assimilationist stances) (Jacobs 2004), in the French community (more influenced by the French assimilationist approach), and in Brussels. However, several trends like the focus on language and socio-professional integration seems to be present in both Flemish- and French-speaking communities even if the policies to achieve those objectives are different. Finally, the paper will try to show the diversity of actors involved in integration practices in Belgium and more specifically the importance of local actors (cities, local associations, migrant associations, etc.).

Key words: Integration, immigration, Belgium

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Introduction

Belgium, as other EU countries has an important migration history. Belgium, long a country of emigration, became a country of immigration in the early twentieth century. Today, Belgium is characterized by many migrant communities, some of which have long been there.

For example, in 2012, Belgium recorded 124,717 immigrations of foreign people against 138,071 in 2001, which is the first important decrease in immigration in two decades (Centre fédéral Migration 2014: 20). Immigration concerns mainly EU citizens, 63% of the migrants in 2012. After Europe, Africa and Asia are the more important origin areas for migrants arriving in Belgium. Regarding the EU, data shows an important increase in migrants coming from new European countries which joined the EU in 2004 and 2007. Regarding the migration flows from Africa, Morocco is the main country of origin for migrants from north Africa and the Democratic Republic of Congo (RDC) is the main country of origin for migrants from sub-Saharan Africa (followed by Cameroon and Guinea) (Centre fédéral Migration 2014: 22). An interesting point is that in 2012, the decrease in the number of immigrants in Belgium relates mainly to the decrease in the number of migrants from third country nationals, while immigration from EU countries continues to increase (Centre fédéral Migration 2014: 23).

In terms of demographic representation, in 2012, 11% of the Belgian population held a foreign nationality and some research estimates found that around 19% of the population was foreign born (Centre fédéral Migration 2014: 29). The main nationalities of foreign population in Belgium in 2012 were Italian, French and Dutch. In terms of foreign population from non EU countries, Moroccan and Turkish nationals were the most represented (Centre fédéral Migration 2014: 33).

In this context, Belgium has to manage with the question of migrant integration. This brief report aims to provide information about Belgian integration policies and their implementation. Three issues are addressed in this paper:

- the way in which migrant integration are portrayed in public discourses and political agenda in Belgium today;
- the structuration of integration policies in the country and the tools used in order to implement those policies;
- and finally, the engagement of non-state actors in migrant integration process.

The focus was put on three types of actors: public authorities and agencies, public local actors and migrant associations or organizations, which were identified through scientific literature and documentation (including previous personal field research experience about integration), public and institutional documentation and institutional websites.

1. Integration in the Belgium political agenda

1.1 Integration in public discourses: a social representation of what is integration and for whom

Before speaking about integration and the Belgian political agenda, it will be interesting to focus on several tendencies present in public discourses on migrant integration. In fact, debates regularly emerge on the integration of migrants in Belgium. Ultimately, several events triggered political and media debates and reactions over integration. For example, the discovery of cases of young Belgian people fighting in Syria against Bachar el-Assad excited much comment: the enlistment of those young people was often seen as the result of a lack of integration and also as a security problem.¹ However, it is important to remember that Belgium is a federal state, in this context discourses about integration vary from one Region to another.

In general, it is possible to isolate several discourses on migrant integration.

- **The culturalization of social problems.** In a lot of discourses, difficulties with migrant integration are defined as a cultural problem. At a local level, topics like religious practices or the Islamic headscarf are often overrepresented in discourses about integration. On the other hand, problems faced by some foreign-born populations (higher rates of unemployment, urban marginalization, etc.) are sometimes interpreted as cultural characteristics, without questioning the economic and social structural dynamics which marginalize and exclude.

- **The crystallization of integration discourses around Muslims.** Since 11 September 2001, discourses about integration in Belgium have concentrated on Muslims. This tendency is strengthened today with the recent attack in Boston and the discovery of young Belgian fighters in Syria. In a more general way, public discourses often target Islam practices (clothes, ceremony, foodways etc.) when the question of integration is raised.

- **The relative invisibility of some migrant populations in the integration question.** If integration discourses often focus on some population categories, others are hardly mentioned even if important. For example, integration discourses focus mainly on non-EU nationals, while some EU nationals (like the French for example) are hardly mentioned. It also seems that integration discourses are often focused on populations from a poor socio-economic background. For example, in Brussels, the integration of the many foreign workers related to European institutions (often called “expat” for expatriate), who benefit from high education levels and better socio-economic resources, is rarely considered. In general, the integration of people with economic and cultural power is infrequently brought up even if some practices (tax evasion, etc.) seem to go against social cohesion and social participation.²

1.2 Integration on the political agenda

First of all, as Andrea Rea (2007: 124) notes, migrant integration became an issue in the 1980s: not least because of the migrant project of those arriving in the country then. In fact, unlike, say, migration toward America a lot of immigrants arriving in Belgium considered their presence as temporary. On

¹ For an example of a link between this case and discourses about integration, see the interview of the minister of foreign affairs Didier Reynders: http://www.rtbf.be/info/belgique/detail_integration-il-y-a-une-perversion-des-valeurs-dit-didier-reynders?id=7974129 [Accessed 14 August 2014].

² This point of view was developed for example by Andrea Rea in a radio broadcast for the RTBF: http://www.rtbf.be/info/belgique/detail_andrea-rea-ceux-qui-detiennent-la-richeesse-font-defaut-d-integration?id=8009382 [Accessed 14 August 2014].

the immigrant side, the idea of return was often present in families. On the host society side, immigration was seen in economic terms, without imagining a permanent stay of migrants in the country. In this context, no real integration policy was implemented. This does not mean that no measures or initiatives exist but there was no global reflection and action on integration. As Rea shows, the first support for integration were often the fact of intermediary groups as labor unions or organizations built by migrants themselves on the model of the country of origin (political, social or cultural associations) (Rea 2007: 124).

The creation of a real integration policy started in the 1980s with a 1984 law reforming the nationality code and the creation of the Royal Commission for Immigrants Policy (*Commissariat royal à la politique des immigrés*). According to Rea, the federal integration policy was built on three dimensions: easing Belgian nationality acquisition; fighting racism and implementing a social policy for pacification in the cities; and, finally, combatting social disadvantages suffered by immigrants (Rea 2007: 131).

In parallel, integration became a community competence in the 1980s. In 1994, the French-Belgian Community transferred this competence to the Walloon Region and to the French Community Commission of Brussels-Capital Region. Therefore political discourses and integration policies were historically different between Wallonia, Flanders and the Region of Brussels. As a matter of fact, since the 1990s, Flanders promoted integration policies based on the recognition of ethnic minorities according the idea that the defense of ethnic identity is an important factor in emancipation (Jacobs 2004: 7). In Wallonia and in Brussels, ethnic minorities are not recognized. Integration is tackled through more general socio-economic policies targeting not only migrants but large segments of the population. In the last ten years, this orientation partially evolved in Flanders with the *inburgering* (Dutch word for “Citizenisation”) policy which promotes higher cultural conformity through an integration program including Flemish courses, social orientation courses and information about the values and norms of the Flemish society. In the same way, discussions exist in Wallonia and Brussels about the implementation of integration programs based on: a first contact meeting, language training, “citizenship” training and socio-professional orientation.³ Finally, beside differences in political discourses, similarities can emerge at the practical level of public policies. For example, both parts of Belgium finance cultural activities for minorities (even if Flanders does so in a more explicit way) (Rea 2007: 137).

In conclusion, we can see that integration has progressively entered the political agenda in Belgium and is the subject of political and public debate.

1.3 Measures, target groups and integration policies

According to the objective of the *inburgering* policy and of the recent project of integration program in Wallonia and Brussels (called *Dispositif d’Accueil des Primo Arrivant* or DAPA), Belgian integration policies focus on social integration (through language courses or information about right and duties) and socio-economic integration (with socio-professional orientation) but also on the fight against discriminations (with the creation in 1993 of the Centre for Equal Opportunity and the Fight against Racism).⁴

Always in the context of this integration policy, the French and the Flemish Communities target migrant newcomers. In Flanders, integration programs are compulsory for third-country nationals of

³ For more information, see: <http://www.wallonie.be/fr/actualites/accord-sur-le-parcours-daccueil-en-wallonie> [Accessed 12 August 2014].

⁴ The DAPA is still not officially implemented (ordinance still have to be published) and is still under discussion. However, several Walloon Regional Center for Integration have organized themselves to provide this integration program.

18 years or more recorded in the National Register, living in a Flemish city and having a first-time residence permit of more than three months. Even if the *inburgering* policy target some people in Brussels, the integration program is not compulsory for them. For Wallonia and Brussels, the target group would be smaller. The integration program project concerns third country nationals living in Belgium for more than three months but less than three years: it not targets asylum seekers.

In addition, the Flemish authorities have identified several “special groups” in terms of integration: the Roma, irregular migrants and nomadic populations.⁵

2. Public policies on integration

2.1 The structuring of integration policies

Public policies on integration are structured at different levels in Belgium: the federal level, the community level and, for the French community, the regional level. It is possible, then, to distinguish integration policy structuring in Belgium, in Flanders, in Wallonia and in Brussels.

At the federal level, two main instruments exist to support integration policies. The first is the Impulse Fund for Migration Policy (FIPI) which aims at funding public or private initiatives for improving migrant population’s participation.⁶ The second is the Urban Policy (*Politique des Grandes Villes*), which supports urban renovation in important cities and also supports policies focused on migrant integration.⁷ There are also agencies like the Centre for Equal Opportunity and the Fight against Racism (CECLR) which is active in the struggle against discrimination.

In Flanders, the authorities carry out integration policies through several agencies. First of all, eight reception desks (*Onthaalbureaus*) are responsible for first contact with migrants and for the coordination of their integration program. These desks work with other institutions like: the Flemish office of Employment and professional training (*Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling*); the Dutch House (*Huis van het Nederlands*); adult education centers; basic education centers; and linguistic university centers (Agence de l’Administration Intérieure 2010: 12-13). The work of these eight reception desks is supported by the Flemish Centre for Minorities renamed “Intersection Migration-Integration” in 2010. This agency promotes harmonious cohabitation in a context of diversity, equality of opportunities and respect of fundamental rights through information, trainings or policy recommendations.⁸ In addition, contacts with minority groups, targeted by integration policies, are supported by an Ethnocultural Minorities Forum (*Minderhedenforum*).⁹ Finally, it is important to note that a new integration Decree was approved by the Flemish Parliament in May 2013. This Decree set out the creation of an Integration Agency gathering diverse organizations working on integration.

In Wallonia, migrant integration is a competence of the General Direction of Social Action and Health (DGASS). This agency supports integration policies by financing the Regional Centers for Integration (CRI), associations involved in integration actions, and projects focused on integration.¹⁰

⁵ See: <http://www.kruispuntmi.be/thema/bijzondere-groepen> [Accessed 12 August 2014].

⁶ See: <http://www.diversite.be/fonds-dimpulsion> [Accessed 14 August 2014].

⁷ For example, Urban Policy provides a subvention for the Public Centre of Social Action of cities with important populations of regularized migrants acceding to social security benefits. Those subventions finance projects like language training, professional accompaniment, etc. For more information, see: <http://www.mi-is.be/be-fr/politique-des-grandes-villes/mesures-transversales> [Accessed 14 August 2014].

⁸ See: <http://www.kruispuntmi.be/>

⁹ See: <http://www.minderhedenforum.be/>

¹⁰ See: <http://socialsante.wallonie.be/?q=action-sociale/integration-personne-origine-etrangere> [Accessed 14 August 2014].

At the local level, integration measures and policies are implemented and consolidated by seven Regional Centers for Integration (CRI). These centers, created by decree in 1996, are located in seven Walloon cities with important migrant populations: Charleroi, Liège, Namur, La Louvière, Mons, Tubize and Verviers.¹¹ The CRI have numerous prerogatives: implementing integration activities in fields like work, social life, housing and health; promoting the training of foreign populations; producing relevant data on foreign populations; orienting people in integration processes; evaluating local initiatives; promoting foreign people cultural, social and economic participation; and promoting intercultural relations. Beside these general missions, the CRI have a relative autonomy in project development or support. It is important to understand that the actions of the CRI are deeply linked with local associations. It is not possible to provide an exhaustive list here. We must content ourselves with the point that the local associative webs constitute a crucial component of integration in Wallonia, providing an important part of field work. The Integration Regional Centers are supported by a platform (the DISCRI) created to ensure good communication and transversality of actions.

In Brussels-Capital Region, integration policies are supported by the two regional community institutions:¹² the Flemish Community Commission (VGC), on the one hand, and the French Community Commission (COCOF) on the other hand. The VGC objective is to implement the Flemish policy in Brussels about integration and to adapt this policy to the city context. The COCOF contributes to integration policies through the support of local initiatives. The objective is to promote partnership and networking based on existing associations and organizations.

2.2 Policy tools and orientation

After this brief overview of Belgian integration actors, the next part will consider the main integration tools used in the country. First of all, since 1989 and the first report of the Royal Commission for Immigrants Policy (CRPI), the Belgian authorities adopted a complex definition of integration based on the respect of migrant cultural diversity (at least in the private sphere) and on the attention to migrant social integration. In this context, integration is seen in a wide perspective. In the report, the CRPI made some policy proposals in several fields including housing, education, employment, youth, etc. (Vinikas 1993: 139). Today, with the progressive recognition of the multicultural aspect of Belgian society, integration is generally seen as a transversal question regarding economic, social, but also cultural and political participation. Observing the local action of associations and agencies, integration activities or programs emerge as many-faceted, ranging from artistic participation to language training, professional orientation or citizenship education. However, as well as the question of nationality acquisition, it is still possible to identify several integration tools.

Finally, we will mainly focus here on policies that concern migrants or population with a foreign origin directly. In this context, we will leave general socio-economic policies (urban policies, social security, education policies, etc.) to one side, important as they are in migrant integration.

a) The importance of socio-economic and cultural integration policies

Several tendencies seem to guide integration policies in Belgium. The *inburgering* policy in Flanders is based on specific tools. The recent project of an integration program in Wallonia and in Brussels also flags up the importance of socio-economic and cultural integration. Several tools might be usefully mentioned here.

¹¹ See: <http://www.fecri.be/index.html#lescri> [Accessed 14 August 2014].

¹² Beside the Brussels-Capital Region government, Flemish and French Communities have their own political and administrative institutions in Brussels. The Brussels-Capital Region government competences are: urban development, environment, economy, transport, public works, energy policy, local authorities, external relations, and scientific research. Integration is a competence of the Brussels-Capital Community institutions.

- **First contact.** In the Flemish *inburgering* policy or in the Wallonia and Brussels project of integration program, meeting migrant people is a priority. This first contact with migrants is designed to inform newcomers about integration resources (Brussels and Wallonia project) or as the moment when the “integration contract” is signed: this is established between the migrant and a personal counselor and specifies the content and the organization of the program (Flemish integration program).¹³ In *inburgering* policy this first contact with the authorities is compulsory. A compulsory first contact has also been proposed for the Walloon and Brussels program.

- **Language courses.** In Belgium, the knowledge of one of the official languages is seen as an integration priority. The *inburgering* policy makes Dutch courses compulsory. In Wallonia and Brussels, language courses are also an important part of the integration program discussion, not to mention of integration policies. However, those languages courses are not compulsory and are often supported by local association networks.

- **Professional orientation** is another important tool in Belgium integration policies. The *inburgering* program organizes compulsory career guidance based on the wishes and qualifications of migrant participants. In Wallonia, professional orientation is also important, but it is not compulsory. This orientation can be provided through specific language courses (aiming at employment), specific programs with employment agencies, etc.

- **Information about society** “values and norms”. This policy orientation characterizes the *inburgering* program conception of integration. Indeed, the compulsory integration program provides a course on the “values and norms” of Flemish society (Autorité flamande 2010: 6). For now, this policy in the favor of cultural conformity does not exist in the French-speaking part of Belgium.

- **Citizenship and social participation.** Both in the Flemish Community and in the French Community, integration policies also provide some tools in order to enforce the social participation of migrants. These tools might include information about public institutions or the provision of resources and contact for socio-cultural and leisure activities. At the local level, some actors organize initiatives in order to enforce migrant political participation. In Verviers, for example, the Regional Center for Integration provided information about voting processes in anticipation of the 2012 communal election.¹⁴

b) Fighting discrimination and diversity enforcement

As seen before, the struggle against racism and discrimination can be considered as part of a comprehensive integration policy. In this context, the Center for Equal Opportunity and Fight against Racism (CECLR) is a central actor at the federal level. The Center has several missions: promoting equal opportunities; fighting discrimination; supporting the respect of rights of non-natives; informing public authorities about migration; and developing dialogues on migrant reception and integration. In order to fight racism and discrimination, the CECLR provides information about jurisprudence and legislation. But it also supports victims. For example, the Center collects reports of racist or

¹³ The “integration contract” is established by the personal counselor at the beginning of a migrant’s integration program (this program is not mandatory for citizens from the EU, EEA and Switzerland) taking into account the personal situation of the migrant. This contract determines the modality of the migrant integration program (courses, etc.). The migrant has to follow at least 80% of the courses planned in the contract to receive an “integration certificate”. The non-respect of the contract can be sanctioned by an administrative fine (Autorité flamande 2010).

¹⁴ See: <http://www.crvl.be/2011-agenda-99/181-permanence-l-elections-communales-r-2012.html> [Accessed 20 June 2012].

xenophobic acts. The Center also organizes campaigns against discrimination,¹⁵ and provides advice and policy recommendations.¹⁶

c) Externationalization of integration: the question of pre-departure training

In 2011, the European Commission proposed a European Agenda for third-country nationals and their integration. In this communication, the Commission noted the possibility of supporting integration policies in countries of origin before the departure of migrants (European Commission 2011: 12). This Agenda opens the way to policies based on migrants' "pre-integration". Belgium has not applied this model as far as some countries (like France which organizes language evaluation in some country of origin in the case of family reunification). But it still supports policies for pre-departure preparation, even if our brief research failed to find bilateral agreements framing this policy.

This pre-departure preparation is mainly built around information. The best example is a "starters kit" (*Starterspakket*) designed by the King Baudouin Foundation in collaboration with a consulting firm from the Netherlands and an institute from the Louvain University for the Flemish part of Belgium. Its objective is to prepare migrants arriving in Flanders. This starter kit is available in different languages (Dutch, French, English, Turkish, Arab, and Russian).¹⁷ It includes a brochure about Flanders, a language guide, a list of requested documents, a movie with migrants' testimonies. The creation of this kit raised a lot of criticism. In fact, the brochure presents a highly simplified portrayal of Flanders. Sometimes the portrayal is even infantilized: for example, it is specified that "Flemish people do not live in the streets, but principally live in their house." Beside some interesting information (about the Dutch language for example) the document might be summed up as a description of "good behaviour" with a description of the "good migrant".

Pre-departure information is also available on a lot of official websites. For example, social security services provide online applications allowing a future migrant to verify potential social rights in Belgium.¹⁸ In the same way, the Belgian public services website presents information about immigration in Belgium and provides links with several agencies (employment, social security, education, etc.).

Finally, it is important to consider that, if Belgium has not implemented policies of pre-departure training, the legislation objectively promotes certain individual characteristics as a guarantee of better integration. For example, well-paid, highly-qualified workers can obtain a working permit more easily. In other words, Belgium does not implement a direct integration policy but favors migrants with resources (economic, education, etc.) seen as integration facilitators.

d) The question of nationality-based integration policies

If Belgian integration policies do not seem, in general, to focus on particular nationalities, some exception exists. Take, for example, the Learning of Native Languages and Cultures (LCO) now named Openness to Languages and Cultures (OLC) and based on several bilateral agreements. From the 1960s, agreements were signed with countries of origin organizing the learning of native language for migrant workers' children. At the beginning, the objective of these courses was to anticipate the return of migrant families to their home countries. Progressively, this objective changed and

¹⁵ For more informations, see: <http://www.diversite.be/campagnes> [Accessed 14 August 2014].

¹⁶ The CECLR consider all kind of discrimination (including discrimination on grounds of gender, medical condition, philosophical or sexual orientation, etc.) and not only discriminations against migrants.

¹⁷ For a web version of the kit: <http://www.migreren.inburgering.be/> [Accessed 14 August 2014].

¹⁸ See: https://www.socialsecurity.be/CMS/fr/coming_to_belgium/index.html [Accessed 14 August 2014].

integration was placed at the center of the program.¹⁹ The OLC program is based on two types of courses open to schoolchildren from all backgrounds: language courses provided outside the school schedule for children whose parents have requested it; and a course on openness to languages and cultures, which is given during the school time. Schools that implement this program host teachers lent by the partner country. According to the website of the French Community, for the period between 2012 and 2017, eight agreements were signed with: China, Greece, Italia, Morocco, Portugal, Turkey, Romania and Spain.²⁰

It is also interesting that, in accordance with European Union. Belgium is currently working on a national integration strategy specifically targeting the Roma.

2.3 The role of local authorities in integration policy

Local authorities play an important role in the integration process and in the implementation of integration policies. As noted before, regional integration policies are based on local institutions (“reception desks” and “Dutch Houses” for the Flemish part, CRI for the Walloon Region). These institutions develop the major part of the regional integration policy, carrying out the regional authorities program. In addition, city authorities also play an important part in integration by implementing policies we will now describe. There are many different approaches. The brief research transcribed in this report certainly does not allow an exhaustive presentation. However, it is possible to underline several examples of local integration policies. During our brief research it was not possible to find specific local policies targeting a particular origin or nationalities.

a) Diversity valorization

Today, several Belgian cities have what one author called “super-diversity” (Vertovec 2007): ethnic, social, economic and cultural diversification. In this context, local authorities often try to present this diversity as an asset for their city or region. In many Belgian cities, campaigns “selling” the multicultural aspects of their population are produced. Several years ago, the Walloon city of Verviers launched a campaign called “Verviers proud of our colours” (*Verviers fier de nos couleurs*). One aspect of this campaign were big posters around the city with a mosaic of portraits of local people from different backgrounds. It is quite difficult to measure the consequences of such actions. However, in the case of Verviers, the campaign led to criticism but also debate, particularly when the new city council started to remove the posters.

Another example comes from Liège, where the city council launched, in 2012, a campaign called “Martin’s dream”. Even if integration was not an explicit topic of this initiative, the project, referring to Martin Luther King, promoted social cohesion, peaceful cohabitation and respect of diversity.²¹

If this kind of local policy does not target the question of migrant integration directly, the symbolic recognition of diversity is still important in the integration process.

b) Enforcing social cohesion and intercultural practices

Local authorities also develop policies in order to facilitate social cohesion and intercultural cohabitation. For example, the city of Antwerp developed a coaching project focusing on foreign

¹⁹ For a better description of the evolution of the LCO program see Florence 2007.

²⁰ See: <http://www.enseignement.be/index.php?page=24436&navi=1933> [Accessed 14 August 2014].

²¹ The campaign was built on several medias: for a web page with information, posters and postcards with Martin Luther King pictures and quotes, see <http://www.liege.be/culture/interculturalite/le-reve-de-martin-le-feuilleton2012> [Accessed 14 August 2014].

newcomers. The coach is a local inhabitant who helps the migrant discover the city. It is also a way for practicing Dutch. By focusing on relaxed interaction (through cultural activities for example) the objective is both to discover the city, its culture and its customs, and to develop an intercultural relationship.²²

Another example is the implementation of services of “intercultural mediation” in some local institutions (like hospitals, etc.). The objective of such services is to prevent or solve tensions or conflicts, where a lack of knowledge of culture or language has created misunderstandings. In Liège, for example, these kind of services are implemented in the local hospital.²³

c) Minorities' participation

Local authorities also develop policies aimed at a better participation of minorities and at taking into account minority interests. One example is the event organized by the city of Antwerp with the Flemish Forum of Ethnic and Cultural Community. These put together different community associations in an event, called “Speak up”, providing workshops and discussions to give a better voice to minority communities. The event took place in 2011 with the rise of the far right and of debates about cultural practices (in particular the wearing of Islamic headscarfs). The event included several projects in order to implement communication between minorities and city authorities, and a better dialogue about intercultural issues.²⁴

In the Walloon part of Belgium, cities have, from the 1970s, implemented consultations with migrants. In 1971 for example, a Local Consultative Comity of Immigrants (CCCI) was implemented in Liège. These first initiatives no longer exist. In fact, the right of migrants to vote at the local level effectively replaced them.

d) Socio-economic integration

As seen before, the *inburgering* policy in Flanders and the recent integration program in Wallonia and in Brussels give an important place to socio-economic integration. At the local level, some initiatives target the migrant population in particular.

In Wallonia local partnership have been built between employment public agencies (FOREM) and local integration agencies (CRI). These partnerships can take the form of specific formation creating, for example, an association.²⁵

In Flanders, the local employment public agency (VDAB) provides specific language training for the workplace.²⁶

²² For more information, see: <http://www.antwerpen.be/eCache/ABE/82/08/173.Y29udGV4dD04MTgwOTAy.html> [Accessed 14 August 2014].

²³ See: <http://www.chrcitadelle.be/fr/accueil/le-chr-c-est-aussi/services-de-mediation/index.html> [Accessed 14 August 2014]

²⁴ For more information, see: http://citiesofmigration.ca/good_idea/lhotel-de-ville-tient-compte-des-interets-minoritaires/?lang=fr [Accessed 12 August 2014].

²⁵ See, for example, the partnership in Charleroi: <http://www.cricharleroi.be/2012/11/formation-creation-et-gestion-dasbl/> [Accessed 12 August 2014].

²⁶ See: <http://www.vdab.be/werkinzicht/nederlands.shtml> [Accessed 12 August 2014].

3. Engagement of non-state actors

In the Flemish Community of Belgium, immigrant associations are more institutionalized than in the French Community in the sense that they are explicitly recognized and supported by authorities as representative of an ethno-cultural minority: hence the Forum of Ethnocultural Minority Organizations (*Minderhedenforum*), created by the Flemish authorities, as a way to communicate with minority organizations. According to the forum website, the main populations represented through these associations are: Turkish, Sub-Saharan African, Latin American, Moroccan, Italian and Russian-speaking population.²⁷

In Wallonia and in Brussels, even if there are many migrant-run associations, they are not explicitly recognized as “migrant” or “minority” associations. Their activities are often open to any person even if persons with specific background or origin can be overrepresented in some of these associations.

These non-state actors develop many kind of activities linked with migrant integration. The objective of their action might include the development of cultural life through community celebration or open events. It might also be providing information through conferences, seminar or documentation or offering some resources and support such as: driving license lessons, language training, computer courses, school support for children, etc.

Religious institutions (like churches or mosques for example) can also provide integration resources (social relation networks, information, socio-cultural activities, etc.). As an example, several cultural centers linked with Walloon mosques provide activities for children.²⁸ Even if these kinds of services do not particularly target migrant population, they constitute a resource for newcomers.

It seems, in general, that the actions of all these actors are compatible with the state actor’s aims about migrant integration. However, it is interesting that the institutionalization of minority associations in the Flemish community also contributes to give a voice to an alternative conception of integration. In fact, the Forum of Ethnocultural Minority Organizations is able, for example to point to the lack of political effort in terms of education, political representation and discrimination.

In some cases, actors from the country of origin can participate in integration initiative. This is the case for the Openness to Languages and Cultures program (OLC) which focuses on foreign language and culture courses and which is seen as a way of opening children to diversity and linking migrant children and native culture. This program is organized through bilateral agreements between the French Community in Belgium and countries of origin (China, Greece, Italia, Morocco, Portugal, Turkey, Romania and Spain).²⁹ The courses are provided by special teachers selected by the country of origin.

²⁷ See: <http://www.minderhedenforum.be/over-ons/leden> [Accessed 12 August 2014].

²⁸ This is the case for the Educative and Cultural Islamic Complex of Verviers (CECIV) which is linked with a mosque and provides several services as Arabic language courses, and activities for youth and children.

²⁹ See: <http://www.enseignement.be/index.php?page=24436&navi=1933> [Accessed 12 August 2014].

Conclusion: A few words of assessment

It is difficult to provide an assessment of integration policies for the complex concept of integration. Regarding the *inburgering* policy in Flanders, the integration program seems to show positive effects in some fields like workplace insertion. Other aspects of this policy seem to be less successful such as the enforcement of intercultural relations (Boulet 2012: 10). Regarding Wallonia and Brussels, the recent implementation of an integration program has also been criticized. One of the limits seems to be the French-learning aspects. Indeed, the major part of the language training is provided by associative actors and the offer of language training is quantitatively insufficient (there are many more migrant candidates than course places).

Finally, by way of a conclusion, it is interesting to note that non state actors have an important role in Belgian integration policies. In Wallonia, the associative network is certainly one of the main actors in terms of integration field work.

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Bilateral agreements about integration

This brief research allowed identifying one kind of bilateral agreements between the French community of Belgium and other country regarding the Openness to Languages and Cultures program (OLC). According to the education services website, the French community has signed agreements with 8 countries: China, Greece, Italia, Morocco, Portugal, Turkey, Romania and Spain.

For information about the program: <http://www.enseignement.be/index.php?page=24435>

For the list of bilateral agreements: <http://www.enseignement.be/index.php?page=24436&navi=1933>

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- Ethnocultural minorities' forum: <http://www.minderhedenforum.be/>
- Social action and health in Wallonia: <http://socialsante.wallonie.be/>
- Regional Centers for Integration (support platform): <http://www.fecri.be/>
- French Community education: <http://www.enseignement.be/>