

What can the municipality do? Roles of municipalities in a diversity management

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Integration policies that were implemented by Belgian municipalities in order to cope with the increasing level of diversity are often insufficient or inefficient. One of the reasons for this statement is the fact that most of the decisions are taken by regional, national or supranational authorities that are cut from the local reality. But it is usually up to the local authority to develop strategies to make these decisions operational. Nevertheless, integration policies elaborated at the local level, tailored to its specific needs, might not always be consistent with decision(s) taken at the other administration level(s).

How could be the local diversity management that would valorize cultural differences improved?

There are three factors that could be emphasized:

- 1) Development of national and supranational partnerships.

Local diversity management of inhabitants could be improved by the development of national as well as supranational partnerships. These partnerships would bring together various actors, responsible for the implementation of the integration policy, in order to exchange their views and experience.

- 2) Multidisciplinary approach.

The process of identification and exchange of good practices will involve cross-disciplinary joint efforts among various public and experts. Multidisciplinary approach will considerably enrich the debate.

- 3) Multi-context awareness.

It is important to take into account different socio-cultural realities that could be found either within the particular state, or in Europe. Diversity management strategies accepted at the national or supranational level have to be modified according to the local situation and its specific needs. This objective seems to be extremely difficult to meet.

Given the complexity of the issue, challenges that participants at the local level have to face are immense. It becomes necessary to acquire for elected officials as for the administrative staff, not only the new know-how, but also new competences, intercultural competences in particular. Intercultural competences would contribute to a creation of social cohesion in multicultural environment on the basis of the valorization of cultural diversity of all members. In-depth analyses that would promote intercultural understanding and interaction are also highly recommended. This would help to deal with diversity management issues without prevailing taboos and stereotypes.

What are strategies have to be developed to promote these intercultural competences and how would intercultural competences be maintained at the local level? Is a training of local staff sufficient to achieve this goal?

Existing research studies showed that forming a local staff is not sufficient in order to make diversity management efficient. Long-term political strategies that would engage and activate various partners have to be defined. These strategies should respect decisions taken by regional, national and supranational authorities as well as particular needs of the local people.

Methodology

Long-term strategies of diversity management at the local level could be developed on the basis of the collection of good practices and activation of a mutual cooperation among various partners.

Diversity management could be developed by:

- 1) Valorization of competences of the target group, association of immigrants as well as immigrants themselves (by means of “urban workshops”). Valorization of differences will bring more benefits than a simple compensation for socio-economic handicaps of migrants.
- 2) Incorporation of intercultural management into political strategies and the development of intercultural competences within local actors.
- 3) Learning international partnership to expand intercultural competences and didactic repertoires of trainers to improve their learning within heterogeneous groups of immigrants and natives.

Role of international partnership in the diversity management

The objectives of the international partnership would be to identify and exchange good practices of the diversity management at the local level with other foreign partners. This exchange would enrich the debate and would bring more ideas how to cope with the diversity at the local level.

Each international partner would also identify and activate a “local platform” composed of representatives of local politicians, social workers, educators, representatives of unions and employers as well as organizations of immigrants. Principal objective of the platform would be to exchange ideas about the diversity management at the local level. These exchanges of ideas will take place in the form of “urban workshops” and would lead to the preparation of a “Charter of citizenship beyond diversities”. Representatives of the local platform would then try to make the Charter integrated into local political strategies in order to improve the diversity management at the local level.

Evaluation procedure

In order to make diversity management efficient, the work and findings of partnerships will be regularly evaluated. During these evaluation procedures partners will be asked to examine following questions:

- *On what theoretical basis we analyze the efficiency of the local diversity management?*
- *What criteria should be fulfilled so as the local platform could be declared as good?*
- *What are the indicators of changes/results that could be observed at the local level?*
- *When could we expect these changes/results to happen?*
- *What could be done in order to make these changes/results to happen in a short-time or medium-time period? How could we help the local platform to achieve this goal in a short-time or medium-time period?*
- *How the evaluation procedure (internal and external) will be realized in practice?*
Information can be collected for example by means of questionnaires, statistics, and participant observation.