

Paper summary: Recognition of single-parenthood in labour policy – towards an adaptive universalism?

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The article discusses how single parenthood is approached as a negotiated object throughout the agenda-setting¹ of the actors of diversity policy in the Brussels-capital region. In a perspective of a sociology of public action², we want to trace and question how a series of actors (public services, Ministers, the negotiation between unions and trade organizations, actors of civil society and research, etc.) participate in a long process of recognition³ of a new target group in various diversity⁴ and employment policies (and also urban development). The question is addressed how diversity has been understood between an intention to affirm and recognize the specificities related to this family form and social situation, whilst promoting in the same time a universalist approach⁵. We take account of the efforts and questionings of the policy-actors in relation to anti-discrimination and the promotion of diversity throughout their (promoted) research, discussions and negotiations through a collective set of actors coming from networks of several public policies (cf. Brussels technical platform of single parenthood).

As Brussels is a city-region, co-managed by French- and Dutch-speaking actors, we will discuss how the topic of single parenthood has been revised through the prism of two different approaches to social policies (which are themselves influenced by wider cultural and scientific contexts). Between the critic of a universalism that is struggling to offer the expected protection and an approach by quotas inspired by affirmative action, a debate was held on how to recognize a target group without stigmatizing them and to offer a panel of services that reach effectively the public in question (cf. targeting vs universalism).

More generally, one must locate these discussions within the broader framework of the creation at the end of the 1990s of a policy of anti-discrimination and the promotion of

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3 FRASER N., *Qu'est-ce que la justice sociale ? Reconnaissance et redistribution*, Paris, La Découverte, 2011(2005). FRASER N., HONNETH A. (2003), *Umverteilung oder Anerkennung ? Eine politisch-philosophische Kontroverse*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 306p.

4 OUALI, N., (2012), La Diversité, Usages et Enjeux Politiques et Idéologiques, in : *Conceptions du dialogue interculturel en Wallonie et à Bruxelles*, 250p.

5 CASMAN M.-TH., SIMAYS C., BULCKENS R., MORTELMANS D. (dir.) (2007), *Familles plurielles, politique familiale sur mesure ?*, Bruxelles, États généraux des familles, Ed. Luc Pire.

diversity in relation to the discrimination encountered on the labour market⁶. Emanating from more international considerations, this work was driven by the regional office of employment (Actiris) throughout its co-managed structure of labour- and trade unions. Discrimination based on the origin in access to employment and the implementation of diversity plans⁷ were the two central themes of the activities. More broadly, the service has worked in favor of a more global vision of anti-discrimination and the promotion of the diversity of several target populations (cf. gender, youth, experienced workers, people with disabilities, etc.). The Brussels institutional reality being complicated to describe in a brief summary, we will retain that the combination of an approach to combat discrimination combined with an approach that seeks to promote diversity has been integrated structurally in the employment policy. Single parenthood has been one of the important projects over the past 10 years and has passed from the stage of research to become a priority (among others) for public policies of employment and urban development⁸.

From an empirical point of view, we have to note that we will give priority to the construction of a new policy of diversity as a person who has taken different roles in this process these past ten years. We were first PhD-candidate which has conducted research based on longitudinal statistics and in-depth biographical interviews with single parents and who has written a phd-thesis on the thematic⁹, published a book¹⁰ that takes into account the results of this collective bargaining and which counselled and managed the concrete implementation¹¹ within the public employment service. The article is written based on a participant observation approach (or observative participation¹²) taking into account longitudinal statistics, personal notes, the meetings proceedings and other documents related to the negotiations¹³. In sum, the article will analyze the creation of a diversity policy that favors the recognition of a target group through participant observation, the literature review as well as data on the sector.

6 NAYER, A., ARRYN, P., & FELD, S. (1997). *Discrimination à l'embauche en raison de l'origine étrangère, Contribution belge à la recherche comparative internationale du BIT*, ASTC.

7 VALSAMIS, D., ZANONI, P., Evaluation globale des instruments de promotion de la diversité en Région de Bruxelles-capitale, Offre n°24-2016 Actiris, Idea Consult – UHasselt, 2016. ; ADAM, I., (2006), De impact op het beleid van het IAO-onderzoek naar etnische discriminatie bij aanwerving, *Ethiek en Maatschappij*, 9(2), 6-21.

8 Gouvernement de la région de Bruxelles-capitale (2010), *Pacte de croissance urbaine durable / New Deal* (2011-2014) ; Gouvernement de la région de Bruxelles-capitale (2015), *Stratégie 2025*. ; CONSEIL ECONOMIQUE ET SOCIAL DE LA RBC (2016), « *Avis du CNDD au CESRBC par rapport à la situation des familles monoparentales en RBC* ».

9 WAGENER, M. (2013). Trajectoires monoparentalité à Bruxelles: les femmes face aux épreuves de la parentalité. Thèse présentée en vue de l'obtention du titre de docteur en sciences sociales et politiques (option sociologie), UCLouvain, 554p

10 LEMAIGRE T., WAGENER M. (2013), *Monoparentalités à Bruxelles - Etat des lieux et perspectives*, Bruxelles.

11 WAGENER, M. (2017), *Etude de faisabilité – Mission Monoparentalités*, Brussel, Actiris, Conseil Economique et Social.

12 SOULÉ, B. (2007), Observation participante ou participation observante? Usages et justifications de la notion de participation observante en sciences sociales, *Recherches Qualitatives*, Vol. 27(1), pp. 127-140.

13 DAVID O., EYDOUX L., SECHET R., MARTIN C., MILLAR J., *Les familles monoparentales en Europe*, Cnaf Dossier d'études n°54, 2004.

Plan article

Introduction

Introduction and methodological considerations

1 - Emergence of an anti-discrimination and the promotion diversity policy

This part briefly traces back how the confluence between international initiatives (European Union and International Labour Organization) helped to create a space for discussion and regional action which brings together labour- and trade unions, governmental representatives as well as associations around a common issue: the fight against discrimination.

2 - Single parenting – from a research object towards a category of action of diversity policies

We will analyze how a series of actors - quite more diverse than in the first part - have undertaken for five years through the 'technical platform of single parenthood' different research work, collective discussion, lobbying and preparations of a public policy. This process is located between employment and family policy and social protection in the face of the (non-) recognition as a new target group of diversity policies.

3 - A located actor's game - between international influences and local bargaining

Two central issues question how to recognize single parenthood as a problem between the debate on the meaning of social policies referring to relations between recognition and redistribution, and on the other side, the co-presence of two cultural and socio-political perspectives that exceed Belgium. In fact, inside the Brussels Region two major visions of social policies co-exist: on the one hand it is inspired by more french(-speaking) and universalist traditions of social policy. On the other hand, we find more dutch-speaking tendencies that are more inspired by research and practice in English-speaking countries. They put more emphasis on quotas and a form of affirmative action in order to effectively reach the target group. Between some mono - and bi-cultural, as well as regional, policies, these influences have created a hybrid approach ('the Belgian consensus') to diversity and relationship between *wel-* and *workfare*¹⁴.

14 DAVID O., EYDOUX L., SECHET R., MARTIN C., MILLAR J., *Les familles monoparentales en Europe*, Cnaf Dossier d'études n°54, 2004.

4. towards an approach "universalism with some reasonable accommodations"?

The regional office of employment (Actiris) and the Economic and Social Council supports a hybrid and negotiated approach on single parenthood which recognizes them as a social group who is facing rather universal ("mainstreaming") issues and also fairly specific problems ('target single-parent families in their specific difficulties'). This creates a new space for exchange with actors more directly in charge of the accompaniment of individuals in search of employment and families or children. Here arise ethical questions related to the implementation of these more targeted new practices.

Conclusion

Taking the central elements of the analysis, the article will conclude on a perspective of this contribution and the related risks of this new approach of single parenting in anti-discrimination and diversity policies to combat discrimination and promote diversity.