Different Regional Approaches to Cultural diversity Interpreting the Belgian Cultural Diversity Policy Paradox

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Abstract :

In Belgium, the authority over cultural diversity policies resulting from immigration has been devolved from the central state to the regions since 1970. Consequently, Flanders and Francophone Belgium have progressively developed divergent policy tools. By describing the divergent evolution of Francophone and Flemish cultural diversity policies, our paper demonstrates the existence of a "Belgian Cultural Diversity Paradox", namely the existence of more multicultural minority rights in the region that has most experienced electoral success by an extreme-right anti-immigrant party (Flanders), and a more colour blind and radical secular approach in the region where anti-immigrant politicization is barely a factor (Francophone Belgium). This finding is counter-intuitive because an important strand of immigrant policy research has emphasized the relationship between the politicization of immigration and restrictive immigrant citizenship rights. Our paper demonstrates that the different degrees of politicization of immigration in Flanders and Francophone Belgium cannot fully account for divergent cultural diversity policies. By insisting on the historical path dependency of the linguistic and religious cleavages in Belgium and their overlap, this paper offers an addendum to the politicization approach. The historical linguistic and religious differences of the Belgian regions clearly mediate the impact of the politicization of immigration on both sides of the linguistic border.

Keywords : Belgium, Federalism, Immigration, Cultural Diversity Policies, path dependency

1. Introduction

In a few decades, Belgium has been transformed from a unitary to a fully-fledged, although particularly complex, federal state. Few other states have undergone such major reforms. Six overlapping regional authorities (three regions and three cultural communities)[1] have been created, and all have full legislative and executive powers over the competencies that have been assigned to them. The Belgian Regions were assigned a considerable policy portfolio, amongst others the policy areas that are the focus of this article: language use, religion and almost the entire range of cultural (artistic) policies. Immigrant integration policies, which also impact the ways in which regional authorities manage linguistic, religious and artistic diversity, have also been partly devolved. Devolution from central-state to meso-level authorities opened the path towards policy divergence. Since the 1980s, different policy approaches have developed in the French and Flemish speaking parts of the country[2].

The policies relating to immigration and cultural diversity have been developed in very different

political climates in Flanders and Francophone Belgium. Since the end of the 1970s, all traditional political parties (i.e., Christian Democrats, Liberals and Socialists) have split into two unilingual parties. As a result, the electorate of one linguistic community cannot vote for political parties of the other – except in bi-lingual Brussels – even though the federal government is composed of political parties from both communities[3]. As a result, Belgium has two party systems, in which Francophone parties are not in competition with Flemish parties and *vice versa*. In recent decades, these two political landscapes have evolved differently. In the framework of this article, one particular difference between the two party systems is very relevant. While the Flemish party system has had to deal with an electorally successful extreme-right party (Vlaams Blok, later renamed Vlaams Belang), the Francophone extreme-right party, Front National, has always remained very weak[4]. As a consequence, and as electoral research shows, immigration and migrant integration have become more determining issues for voters during elections in Flanders than in French-speaking Belgium[5]. This is the case even when this factor is checked against the major socioeconomic variables which constitute electoral behaviour. Extensive comparative research[6] has shown the importance of electoral factors, in particular the presence of a successful extreme-right party, in explaining the type of immigrant integration policies. We can therefore legitimately assume that the different degree of party polarization on immigration in Flanders and Francophone Belgium has had an impact on the Flemish and Francophone regional policies towards immigration related cultural diversity.

While this paper will demonstrate the impact of regional party politics, it will also show that this explanation does not allow us to understand fully regional policy divergence with regard to immigration related cultural diversity in Belgium. Our analytical description of regional cultural diversity policies will demonstrate the existence of a "Belgian cultural diversity policy paradox"[7], namely the existence of more multicultural minority rights in the region that has most faced electoral success by a radical right-wing populist party (Flanders), and a more colour blind and radical secular approach in the region where anti-immigrant politicization is not a major factor (Francophone Belgium). The existence of this "cultural diversity policy paradox" encourages analysis beyond the party politics explanation. Beyond the different political climates in which regional cultural diversity policies are developed, the different historical pasts of Flanders and Francophone Belgium with regard to religion and language also seem to strongly influence the ways in which these regions deal with immigration related cultural diversity. This paper will clearly demonstrate how historical path dependency clearly mediates the impact of the politicization of immigrant policies.

This paper will analytically describe the evolution of Francophone and Flemish regional policies towards immigration related cultural diversity (linguistic, religious and artistic), particularly with regard to their underlying policy frames. We will do so by referring to a two-dimensional categorization of cultural immigrant integration policies that we will describe in the next section. The second section explains the history of the linguistic and religious cleavages in Belgium, and their overlap. This historical section serves to demonstrate the role of path dependency for explaining divergent cultural diversity policies in Flanders and Francophone Belgium. The three following sections (3, 4 and 5) analytically describe the divergent minority language, religious and artistic policies in Flanders and Francophone Belgium. The conclusion and discussion section focuses on the main results of our comparison and invites the reader to interpret this divergence by the interaction of historical path dependency and party politics.

2. Categorizing policies towards cultural diversity

In the tradition of the discussion of the existence of "national models of immigrant integration"[8], the Belgian literature classically operated a difference between an assimilationist or an individual integration approach in the French-speaking part of the country, resembling the French immigrant integration model, in contrast with a multiculturalist approach, closer to the former Dutch immigrant integration policies, in Flanders[9]. The assimilationist and multiculturalist models can be distinguished from each other by the way in which the objectives of equality and social cohesion are achieved: by promoting the reduction of differences (assimilationism) or by recognizing, celebrating or even promoting those differences (multiculturalism)[10]. More recently, Adam[11] stated that this typology does not allow a full grasp of the difference between regional integration policies in Belgium. In order to appreciate this diversity, beyond the classical categorizations of assimilationist/ multiculturalist, another dimension focussing on the degree of state (or in Belgium, regional) intervention with regard to cultural integration must be added[12]. Does the region actively intervene, by means of public policy, to promote cultural homogeneity (interventionist assimilationism), or to foster the survival of cultural diversity (interventionist multiculturalism)? Or do public authorities not explicitly intervene on the cultural dimension of the integration process, thereby relying on the fact that cultural differences will fade (laissez-faire or colour-blind assimilationism) or continue to exist (*laissez-faire* multiculturalism)?

3. The overlapping linguistic and religious cleavages

Belgian politics and policies are often analysed with reference to the three main cleavages[13] that divide Belgian society: the religious cleavage, dividing Catholics and non-believers, the linguistic cleavage, dividing Francophones and Dutch-speakers and the socioeconomic cleavage, opposing employers and workers. Aside from the mere existence of these cleavages, it is important to consider their overlap when interpreting Belgian politics or policies. In Belgium, the linguistic divide coincides with the secular-religious divide as well as the socio-economic divide. The Flemish are, historically, the more Catholic, and the Walloons, the more secular and anti-clerical. Wallonia was industrialized early in the 19th century, while Flanders was still a poor and agricultural region. This accounts for the fact Wallonia has more and stronger defenders of the workers' movements. Of course this is an over-simplified picture; there is variation within each region and there have been changes over time, but in the end, it is the general picture that emerges from most indicators of attitudes towards workers' issues and trade unions, religious practice and voting behaviour. As a consequence, the Christian-democrat party and the Christian workers movement have always been major political forces in Flanders, and the socialist party and workers' movement are even today the major political party and stronghold of labour unions in Francophone Belgium. These overlapping cleavages also translate into more frequent parental preference for catholic schools (although subsidized by the state) in Flanders and for state schools in Francophone Belgium, and in the existence of a stronger anticlerical secular movement (the "free thinkers") in Francophone Belgium.

3.1 The linguistic cleavage

Language clearly marks the "meaning and identity" of Belgium. Without its linguistic cleavage between the (mainly) Francophones in the South and the Dutch-speakers in the North, Belgium would not be Belgium. The origins of the linguistic cleavage can be traced back to the creation

of the Belgian state in 1830. The exclusive use of French in public affairs in a country with a majority Dutch-speaking population very rapidly led to the mobilization of what would become the "Flemish Movement". While the first grievances of the Flemish Movement were mainly linguistic and cultural, social issues were soon added to the mix because of the class cleavages fomented by language policy: the bourgeoisie across Belgium spoke French, while the masses in Flanders spoke only Dutch. Because of the choice of French as the public language, the Flemish masses were excluded from social, economic and political opportunities. Demands for the use of Dutch in the public domain, including the courts, schools, and military, were not merely symbolic; improving the status of the Dutch language was considered a means to the end of social and economic emancipation for the lower classes. It was only after World War I that Flemish mobilization, constituting demands for cultural and linguistic equality, was transformed into a nationalist movement in support of political autonomy. The "Flemish Movement" succeeded, first, in obtaining linguistic rights for Dutch speakers in Flanders (with the Equality law of 1898), and later, Dutch unilinguism in Flanders and Dutch-French bilingualism in Brussels. As a consequence, all public services and official communication (including education and media) in Flanders is in Dutch only, and in Wallonia in French only. In Brussels, citizens are granted services in Dutch or French. This right of individuals in Brussels to services in the language they speak is guaranteed through the existence of parallel monolingual networks, consisting for example of monolingual Dutch or French schools, universities and theatres.

Due to the perceived threat of the disappearance of the Dutch language in Brussels and its surroundings, along with the perceived ease of integration for migrants in the French-language community, Flemish immigrant integration policies could be expected to emphasize language assimilation to a greater degree. However, due to the interpretation of the history of the Flemings in Belgium as one of "forced cultural oppression" by the Francophones, certain parts of the moderate Flemish nationalist elites and policy-makers have considered immigrants as "fellow minorities"[14] who should not be forced to assimilate either. The choice for (although modest) multiculturalist policies towards linguistic and artistic diversity must thus be interpreted in that vein. We will show that despite a strong politicisation of immigrant integration issues due to the electoral rise of an extreme-right anti-immigrant party (the Vlaams Belang,) minority language and artistic policies were not completely abandoned.

3.2 The religious cleavage

The Belgian Church and State system is the result of an historical agreement: the Catholic Church gave up its insistence to play a direct political role but the state recognized its social significance and took the decision to financially support its existence in the public sphere. However, the religious cleavage was soon institutionalized through the creation of the liberal and later, the catholic parties after independence in 1830. The strongest politicization of the religious cleavage is best placed, however, in the 1950s during the "school wars", setting the catholic against the socialist and liberal parties regarding state versus church control over schools. Again, one should bear in mind that defenders of the role of the church in providing education were far more numerous in Flanders, and the defenders of state schools in Wallonia. The Belgian secular movement or "free thinkers" is however also divided on how to interpret state-church relations. There are differences between defenders of a strict separation (political secularism or exclusive neutrality), excluding, for example, every religious sign in public services, and defenders of inclusive neutrality or what is, by Dutch and Flemish scholars and politicians called "active pluralism". This latter approach allows different

religious expressions in the public sphere. This division amongst free thinkers is posed differently at both sides of the linguistic border. Whilst the defenders of secularism in Flanders, traditionally a minority in relation to the majority Catholics, seem more to favour inclusive neutrality, the francophone secularists, the majority in relation to the Catholics, seem more to favour exclusive neutrality[15]. In the following parts of this article we will demonstrate that this "inclusive" versus "exclusive" neutrality approach, and its different dominance on both sides of the linguistic border not only impacts on how the state or regions deal with the majority religion (Catholicism) but also on minority religions resulting from immigration. The article will show that, despite the far stronger politicization of immigration in Flanders, due to a strong extreme right anti-immigrant party, and its absence in Francophone Belgium, minority religious accommodation for minorities is stronger in Flanders.

4. Minority language policies in Flanders and Francophone Belgium

Political authority on how to deal with minority languages has been devolved from the state to the regional authorities. In this section we shortly describe the different approaches towards language diversity in the French-speaking and Flemish parts of country.

4.1 The French Community and minority languages

In Francophone Belgium, minority language courses for adults (as well as minority cultural expression) were modestly supported until the end of the 1980s[16] by a cultural diversity friendly administration of the French Community[17]. However, after the elections of 1988, when immigrant integration policies attracted the attention of politicians, these light interventionist multiculturalist policies were considered as unable to achieve better socio-economic inclusion of immigrants. Consequently, they were progressively abandoned and replaced by a more general discourse of fighting against social exclusion. In this "social inclusion policy frame", the cultural dimension of immigrant integration is deliberately absent and expressed through a colour-blind immigrant integration policy. Any insistence on cultural integration measures, whether multiculturalist (publicly recognizing or supporting minority cultures, or assimilationist (publicly stating the need for cultural homogeneity or state intervention to promote cultural homogeneity), is thought to reify cultural differences[18]. One dimension of the Walloon integration policy – the "local initiatives towards social development" (*les initiatives locales de développement social*) – does however support immigrant organizations for cultural projects and especially for the promotion of languages of origin, although the scheme is very poorly financed[19]. Even if this is not well known, the French-speaking education system does support minority language courses. The number of schools organizing these has tripled between 2006 and 2013, from 70 to 221 schools[20], involving 152 teachers. Courses are organized in 8 languages, with Italian, Arabic and Turkish in the top 3. While teaching in these 3 languages exists since the guest worker era of the 1960s and 1970s, new minority language courses such as Chinese and Romanian meet demands from more recent migrants. While the dominant policy frame towards immigrant minorities and language minority languages seems to be colour blind assimilationism, this does not seem to exclude the existence of a lightly interventionist multiculturalist policy tool in the education sector.

Recent policy evolution also seems to indicate a change from a colour-blind integration policy frame to a very slightly interventionist assimilationist policy frame. In Brussels, the Francophone Brussels

authority (COCOF) and the Walloon Region, decided to organize integration trajectories for new migrants (parcours d'accueil) including French language assessment and courses[21]. However, the features of the future "*parcours d'accueil*" in Francophone Brussels and Wallonia show that these integration policies are still much less interventionist than in Flanders. The compulsory dimension of the courses is lighter than in Flanders and the budget for the language courses is only a small fraction of that allocated in Flanders. Immigrants are expected to learn French. However, in Francophone Belgium, a greater confidence exists than in Flanders, that immigrants will learn the regional language without state intervention. This means that little public effort is invested into French language courses.

4.2 The Flemish Community and minority languages

Flanders has since the end of the 1980s, invested much more time and resources in Dutch language courses for immigrants than the Francophone authorities, and language is central in all integration policy documents and institutions. This is especially so since the implementation of the *inburgering* policy, which obliges new migrants and unemployed old migrants to follow a Dutch language and an integration course[22]. This policy focus on language assimilation has been strongly intensified during the time of the former and current legislature during which Flemish nationalist ministers (Geert Bourgeois and Liesbeth Homans) were responsible for immigrant integration.

Nevertheless, and although this is far from the dominant policy focus, Flanders also publicly finances minority language courses in schools, albeit very modestly. As in the French Community, this policy originates in the guest worker era of the 1960s when minority languages were taught with the objective of allowing immigrant children to continue their education in their country of origin once parents returned. Later, the policy continued with a new goal, *i.e* stimulating integration. This minority language teaching has always been very modestly financed in Flanders, and was reformed in 2011. Previously, the policy was project-based and only concerned a limited number of schools. Now, the teaching of languages other than German can be offered as a fourth language by all (albeit only secondary) schools[23]. These include Italian, Spanish, Russian, Arabic, Turkish and Japanese. This policy decision seems to be both guided by language skills' necessities encountered in certain high skill job market sectors (Japanese and Russian) and the recognition of immigrant communities and the possibility, endorsed by the Flemish region, for them to develop their own cultural life.

5. Policies towards minority religions

Regarding relations between Church and State (and even if this typology is now considered to be obsolete since the circulation of strongly mediatized debates regarding the regulation of religious pluralism in European states)[24], Belgium can be considered as both a "separation state" and a "Concordat" country. Indeed, even if political and spiritual life are separated, Belgium inherited its regulation between Church and State from the French Concordat. Consequently, the Catholic faith remains in a dominant position and public authorities have made arrangements with other religious faiths alongside the existing inherited Concordat with the Catholic Church.

The policy authority for dealing with minority religions is divided between the state and regional level. The federal state publicly recognizes religions, subsidizes them and pays the salaries of the clergy. Since 2002, the recognition of the local places of worship (local churches, temples,

mosques, etc.) has been regionalized. Different approaches towards the accommodation of religion in the public sphere are also visible in the regionalized education policies and in regional and local administration.

Besides the Catholic Church, several religions were recognized and institutionalized in the first decades of the newly created Belgian state: Judaism in 1832, Protestantism and Anglicanism in 1870. Moreover, two faiths linked to immigration trends were added to the system of recognized worship: Islam in 1974 (Moroccan and Turkish immigration) and Orthodox Christianity (Russian and Greek immigration) in 1985. Finally, in 1993, and in order to benefit from the tremendous financial and institutional consequences of recognition, the atheist world decided to enter into the system of church-state relations as a non-confessional faith. It has also to be noted that Buddhism was recognized in 2008 but its *de facto* institutionalization is still in question due to the planned reform of the system of state-church relations.

The different regional approaches towards religious diversity in Belgium can be best understood by the following regionalized competencies: the recognition of local places of worship, and second, the acceptance or ban of religious signs in the regional public sphere.

5.1 The regional recognition of local places of worship

When the policy authority over the recognition of local places of worship was regionalized in 2002, the Flemish Region was the first to publish legislative measures (in 2004, entry into force the 1st of February 2006[25]). An interventionist assimilationist policy frame seems to clearly inspire these policies. Indeed, in order to be recognized mosques must introduce several written documents expressing their intention to respect the use of Dutch in all their contacts with the faithful (with the exception of the *khutba per se*). They also must state their intention to respect the Constitution, fundamental rights (amongst them individual freedom) and, finally, to not be involved in potential terrorist activities[26]. The aim of the regional minister of Interior Affairs, Marino Keulen, was clearly to subordinate the recognition of mosques to their commitment to the denial of any extremist idea, their use of Dutch in their daily communication and their openness and tolerance to women and homosexual rights[27]. The Flemish regional recognition process insists on the social representativeness of the mosque (*maatschappelijke relevantie*), meaning the contribution of the mosque to local social cohesion. Consequently, each mosque wanting to be recognized and then financially supported needs to prove its commitment to these principles and the way it organizes its relationships with local public authorities[28]. Such an interventionist assimilationist perspective is absent in the French-speaking part of the country. The legal texts recognizing the local religious communities in Brussels[29] and in Wallonia[30] have only introduced administrative conditions[31]. Finally, it has to be noted that the Belgian state and church system leaves a certain leeway to local authorities for them to intervene and develop more or less interventionist policies towards the regulation of Islam on their territory[32]. When these local authorities implement public policy relating to religious diversity, local electoral and other political interests seem to better explain the content of these policies than the multiculturalist/assimilationist policy frames of the local decision makers[33]. In the French-speaking public space, this same possibility for local actors to develop their own approach towards religious diversity is also observable at the sub-regional level. Each of the seven publicly financed Walloon Regional Integration Centres (*Centre régional d'intégration – CRI*) is free to determine to what extent they decide to engage in cooperation with religious associations. Their divergent approaches can be categorized by means of a continuum going from a

strong denial of cooperation with minority religious (and especially Muslim) organizations to more openness[34].

While these policy developments with regard to the recognition of mosques reveal a clear interventionist assimilationist trend in the Flemish policy, and a colour-blind feature of the Francophone policy, the complete policy picture with regard to minority religions is, again, more complex, as we will describe below.

5.2 The regional recognition of minority religious holidays

The Flemish policy towards minority religions also shows a slight multicultural touch. Pupils in Flemish public schools following religious education are granted special vacation days in order to allow them to respect their main religious festival[35]. This opportunity does not exist in French-speaking Belgium, where there is a clear opposition to this policy of accommodation towards minority religions[36]. In this vein, the Francophone public education system refuses, in a principled way, to grant vacation days for pupils or teachers from minority religions, as school has to be a "sanctuary of neutrality"[37].

5.3 Headscarfs in regional public spheres

The inclusion of Islam in the public sphere is a highly politicized and controversial issue both in the French-speaking and Flemish public spheres. The recent controversies about religious signs in the public sphere almost exclusively concern Islam, and in particular the headscarf issue. The regional responses in Flanders and Francophone Belgium have been relatively similar, although for different reasons[38].

For a long time, a consensus seemed to exist in Belgium, and on both sides of the linguistic border, that Belgium does not need or want a general law banning or allowing the wearing of religious symbols in the public sphere, whether it is for pupils in schools or personnel in public administration. This Belgian approach, different from France, has been characterized as "laissez-faire"[39] or "pragmatic multiculturalism"[40] "clear-cut decisions are avoided" and local authorities and schools can choose whether "to ban or allow manifestations of religion from their buildings". However, since 2004, several public disputes regarding the headscarf have emerged and, following the French Stasi Commission, two Francophone French senators (liberal and socialist) proposed a ban on religious signs in official schools and public services. This legislative proposal was largely rejected and not even discussed *in extenso*[41]. However, despite this disapproval of a general law, headscarf prohibitions are said to be on the rise "throughout the various regions of the country"[42] both for pupils in public schools and for civil servants in (mostly local) public administration. Moreover, since the writing of the paper by Coene and Longman[43] on the rise of prohibitions in 2008, general regional bans appeared in Flanders and Francophone Belgium. In Flanders, religious signs have been banned from public schools run by the Flemish Community[44]. In Francophone Belgium, the debate about the headscarf in public schools returned to public attention in September 2009 when the President of the French-speaking centre-right party (Mouvement Reformateur, MR) Didier Reynders, declared himself in favour of the ban for pupils under the age of 16. However, since most democratic political parties remain internally divided on this issue, no political decision has still been taken regarding the wearing of religious signs in public schools, leaving the choice whether to ban or not to each school[45]. Finally, in March 2014, the French Community Parliament

voted a resolution banning religious signs (mainly targeting the headscarf) for people working in their administration when they are in contact with the public (RTL info, 25 March 2014). The same general ban is applicable in the Brussels regional administration since 2007[46]. In the Flemish administration, no such general rule has (yet) been promulgated. Decision-making is left to the different heads of unit in the different Flemish ministries. This absence of a general rule has been questioned by the radical-right party Vlaams Belang and the Flemish liberals, and more recently also by the Flemish nationalist party N-VA[47]. One important Flemish agency, the Flemish Employment agency VDAB (Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling) has however practised the principle of "inclusive neutrality" in its labour standards[48]. This means that all employees are allowed to wear religious signs and that the neutrality of their performance on the job has to be judged by their behaviour and not on the wearing of religious symbols VDAB also developed a special headscarf for participants in vocational training, when security devices would not allow for a headscarf brought from home. The Brussels regional employment agency, Actiris, introduced a ban on religious signs for its employees before the Brussels regional government decided to promulgate a general rule for the whole regional administration.

Despite an increasing tendency towards general bans of religious signs in Flemish and Francophone Belgium, Flanders still (for the time being) has some advocates of inclusive neutrality managing to defend minority religious expression. This approach seems absent in Francophone Belgium. The explanation for the interventionist assimilationist approach towards Muslim religious expression in the Flemish and Francophone public spheres is however divergent: while in Francophone Belgium, it can be explained by the historical dominance of the anti-clerical elite favouring French secularism, in Flanders it should be interpreted in the light of the strong politicization of immigration and Islam.

6. Cultural policies and minorities

In 1970, cultural policies were devolved towards the regions (*i.e*,to the Flemish, French- and German-speaking Communities). These policies rapidly started to diverge. A particular focus in policies on cultural diversity resulting from immigration only appeared in Flanders, and is absent in Francophone Belgium because of the colour-blind approach towards cultural diversity.

In Flanders, the policy regarding cultural diversity in the arts consists in trying to adapt general rules for cultural diversity. This process is called, in Flanders, *interculturalisering* (interculturalization) and can be associated with a policy of mainstreaming cultural diversity[49]. The goal of this interculturalizationprocess is to guarantee an equal access for immigrant origin groups to mainstream institutions and services. In order to guarantee this access, these institutions have to adapt what they offer and practice and implement diversity in their recruitment and personnel policies, in their programmes and spread their activities to a wider diverse public. The former Centre-Left Flemish Nationalist Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport, Bert Anciaux introduced in 2006 the Action Plan Interculturalization (*Actieplan Interculturaliseren)* in order to stimulate intercultural dialogue in his field of responsibility. This action plan gave an opportunity of introducing criteria of "interculturality" in the Arts Decree of 2nd April 2004(*Kunstendecreet*)[50]. In this Decree, Flemish cultural institutions asking for public financial support are obliged to set out a strategy to promote public and cultural diversity in their programmes and in their recruitment policy.Consequently, the Ministry is a central actor in the politics of recognition of cultural differences[51]. In addition, since the mid-1990s, federations of migrant and ethnic associations can be financially supported in order

to promote cultural activities linked to the cultural and ethnic identities of migrants[52]. In Flanders, this possibility is still sustained by the idea that ethnic associations, like the Flemish associations in the past, might contribute to the emancipation of their public[53]. However, a research led by Van Dienderen[54] regarding the practices of cultural diversity in the field of culture and arts revealed the many challenges remaining in the implementation of the interculturalizationpolicy.

In the French-speaking part of Belgium, again, the colour-blind approach is dominant[55]. Indeed, it is commonly said that explicitly targeting particular groups (and then promoting specific policy) helps reify cultural differences, and that is not what is desirable. On the contrary, the ideal to be sought seems the "melting pot" concept, in which the heterogeneous society becomes more homogeneous, each group melting into each other, creating a new public culture. The objective of "social cohesion"[56] is used as a colour-blind framework of inclusion of immigrants and their descendants in cultural policy. This "social cohesion objective" allowing access to culture for the underprivileged, is followed by attributing 35% of the overall "Culture" budget to the department of Youth and Permanent Education. Cultural institutions other than those financed by Youth and Permanent Education are not obliged to implement particular strategies or actions regarding the participation of the underprivileged, or towards cultural diversity[57]. However, one exception exists to this rule. Since 2005, the Socialist Minister of Culture Fadila Lanaan (PS) has included the obligation to promote participation and diversity in the objectives of public theatres[58]. However, the paradigm that guided the *Assises du développement culturel territorial* launched in 2011 remained in line with this colour-blind approach. Indeed, the goal of the Assises was to provoke deep discussion about the diversity of cultural practices[59] and access in terms of geographic proximity to cultural institutions[60]. Classical socio-demographic characteristics of the general public (gender, class, economic status, etc.) are advanced in support of the policy; cultural origin or ethnicity are not mentioned[61]. The approach in terms of social cohesion still euphemizes the issues of origin and ethnicity under general categorizations such as "the fragile public" or "the public of the proximity"[62].

Finally and concerning Brussels, we can also observe that the Flemish Community Commission (*Vlaamse Gemeenschapscommissie* – VGC) of the Brussels Region supports a project called*Cultuurlijn salon* aimed at offering new migrants privileged access to cultural activities proposed by the main Brussels institutions at a modest price[63]. In addition, on 13th of September 2011, the RAB-*Réseau des Artsà Bruxelles* (Brussels Network of Arts) and the BKO-*Brussels Kunstenoverleg,* which are made up of more than hundred Brussels artistic associations (both French-speaking and Flemish) signed a convention with *Actiris*, the Brussels public employment service, in order to implement a diversity plan[64]. This plan aspires to improve the representation of diversity in the personnel of nine cultural institutions. Diversity in this context, is widely understood as aiming at cultural diversity, but also gender, handicap and age issues.

7. Conclusion and discussion

In Belgium, the authority over cultural diversity policies resulting from immigration has been devolved from the central state to the regions since 1970. Consequently, Flanders and Francophone Belgium have progressively developed divergent policy tools. This raises the question how these differences can be categorized and explained. This paper has shown that categorizing the difference between the minority language, religious and artistic policies of Flanders and Francophone Belgium is not a straightforward exercise. Moreover, important differences can be detected through our

analytical description. Francophone policies towards minority cultures are dominantly colour-blind and assimilationist. Public recognition of minority cultures is seen as reifying cultural differences, which, it is hoped will disappear one day in a melted, homogeneous new public culture. Flemish policies towards minority cultures are never colour-blind, but colour conscious. Flanders explicitly intervenes with regard to minority cultures, albeit in a multiculturalist as in an assimilationist sense. Assimilationist policy seems to be far more dominant this last decade, particularly with regard to language and increasingly also for religion. However, some multiculturalist policy tools seem to survive, with regard to language, religion and artistic policy. These are completely absent in Francophone Belgium.

To date, an important strand of immigrant policy research has emphasized the relationship between the politicization of immigration and restrictive immigrant citizenship rights[65]. This paper has shown that the different degree of politicization of immigration in Flanders and Francophone Belgium do indeed play a role in explaining certain features of the Flemish versus Francophone cultural minority policies, and in particular the increasing interventionist assimilationism in Flanders. However, this explanatory variable cannot fully account for the regional policy divergence with regard to immigration related cultural diversity policies in Belgium. Politicization of immigration is of little help in interpreting the "Belgian cultural diversity policy paradox", namely the existence of more multicultural minority rights in the region that has most faced electoral success by an extreme-right anti-immigrant party (Flanders), and a more colour blind and radical secular approach in the region where anti-immigrant politicization is barely present (Francophone Belgium). By insisting on the historical path dependency of the linguistic and religious cleavage and their overlap[66], this paper offers an addendum to the politicization approach. The linguistic and religious histories of Belgium clearly mitigate the impact of the politicization of immigration on both sides of the linguistic border.

Notes

[1] To keep this text on the Belgian state structure as readable as possible, we will call the meso-level authorities "regions", it being understood that this might relate to the two different types of Belgian regional authorities, the Communities as well as the Regions.

[2] ADAM (I.), "Immigrant integration policies of the Belgian regions: sub-state nationalism and policy divergence after devolution", *Regional and Federal Studies*, vol.23, n°5, 2013a, p.547-569 ; ADAM (I.), *Les entités fédérées belges et l'intégration des immigrés. Politiques publiques comparées*, Brussels, Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2013b.

[3] DELWIT (P.), REA (A.) et SWYNGEDUW (M.), *Bruxelles ville ouverte*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2007.

[4] COFFÉ (H.) and TIRIONS (M.), "Migrantenbeleid in Vlaanderen en Wallonië. Een parallel perspectief", *Ethiek en Maatschappij*, vol.7, n°3, 2004, p.27-43.

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] KOOPMANS (R.), MICHALOWSKI (I.) and WAIBEL (S.), "Citizenship Rights for Immigrants: National Political Processes and Cross-National Convergence in Western Europe, 1980-2008", *American journal of sociology*, vol.117, n°4, 2012, p.1202–1245.

[7] See also ADAM (I.), *Les entités fédérées belges et l'intégration des immigrés*, *op.cit.*, for

immigrant integration policies.

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