

Evaluating integration and participation policies for immigrants and minorities in an Amsterdam District: Oost

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1. Introduction

As was explained in the City Template of Amsterdam, the municipality of Amsterdam was sub-divided in 1990 into sixteen districts, each having an elected District Council. The administration of these districts is responsible for a limited spectrum of services and activities: institutions that serve a wider region, such as secondary schools, remained under the supervision of the city administration (Centrale Stad). One of the new districts was Oost. The district of Oost is situated just outside the inner city ring of Amsterdam. It was built between 1880 and 1900 as part of the great extension plan of Amsterdam adopted in 1877 (the Kalff-plan). Nowadays most of the area still consists of the original buildings, the majority of them social housing units now. Since 1970 a considerable part of the buildings has been renovated.

Inhabitants of Oost are relatively poor; the general unemployment rate is high (about 21 percent in 1997). Of the 43.000 inhabitants of Oost 46,3 % are considered as belonging to the target groups of 'ethnic minorities' or 'integration' policies: they are born outside the Netherlands or do have at least one parent that is born outside the Netherlands. The largest immigrant groups in Oost are of: 1) Surinamese, 2) Moroccan, 3) Turkish and 4) South-European descent.¹ None of these four largest groups dominate. There no clear physical concentration of groups in parts of the district.

Politically Oost has been dominated by leftist parties from the beginning.

In 1996 the District Administration of Oost published a policy document entitled "Het daget in den Oosten" (It dawns in the east). That document formulated objectives of immigrant and minorities' policies in a number of domains such as education, labour market, sports, elderly care.

In 1998 the administration of the district requested the Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies (IMES) to evaluate its minorities' policies. The IMES made a proposal for this evaluation that was based on the analytical framework developed in the MPMC-project, and thus specifically focussed on political participation. That research was done in the period between July 1998 and February 1999 and the final report was published by Oost.² In this section we will briefly summarise the results of that research project in general and specifically address three questions of the MPMC-programme: How did local authorities activate immigrants and ethnic minorities to participate in decision making on and implementation of local policies? Secondly: How did immigrants and ethnic minority groups mobilise and try to gain access to decision-making processes and what obstacles were encountered in the process? And lastly: To what outcomes leads the interaction between the two?

2. Policy objectives and research method

The 1996 policy document "Het daget in den Oosten" had been initiated by the alderwoman of the Labour Party of Oost, who was in charge of Welfare and Education. The document itself was written by senior staff member of her department who acted as co-ordinator for

immigrant policies within that department. He is an immigrant from Turkey, educated in the laicist, Atatürkist tradition. The political principles of both persons were reflected in the policy document. It focussed strongly on three major fields of action: labour market policies, educational policies and participation of immigrants in policy making and implementation. The primary aim in the first two fields was to take away arrears of immigrants and improve their socio-economic position. In the perspective of the leftist politicians and policy makers of Oost these aims should be achieved with the explicit help and assistance of organisations of immigrants.

In the field of employment the policy document states ambitious plans, such as the creation of 1000 jobs for immigrants within three years, an increase of the percentage of immigrants as employees in the local administration and services by measures of positive action, a proposal to implement contract compliance to stimulate contracting partners to employ more immigrants, and creating opportunities for immigrant entrepreneurs in the district.

In the field of education policy, efforts were to be directed towards raising the educational abilities of migrant-parents by supporting them with educational material, increasing kindergarten places, creating extra-curricular stimuli for six to twelve year old migrant pupils, motivating parents to be involved in the education of their children at school and at home, and organising activities for twelve to eighteen year old pupils of secondary schools.

Under the heading of political participation as a third important field, the document wanted to stimulate 'active citizenship' and 'loyalty to the local community', which in practice was narrowed down to the role of migrant organisations in relation to policies of the district administration. A regular Consultation of the administration of Oost with all organisations of immigrants in the district, irrespective of the nature of these organisations, was established, called BOMO (Bestuurlijk Overleg Minderheden Organisaties). A BOMO-meeting was and is organised every two months where representatives of immigrant organisations, public institutions and district officials meet. The (aldermen and policy co-ordinator of) district Oost use BOMO-meetings to consult and inform the immigrant population through their organisations and to establish further co-operation between all participants of BOMO. The policy document speaks highly of the importance of immigrant organisations and their role in nearly all fields of the policy.

The IMES proposed to evaluate the policies of Oost on three levels based on the following basic questions:

To what extent are the concrete objectives formulated in the 1996 policy paper achieved, particularly in the three domains of labour, education and participation?

Which factors have prevented or hindered the implementation of policies, particular factors relating to the institutional setting?

How can the policy of Oost be characterised on the basis of an analysis of content and implementation? What role is allocated to immigrant organisations? In this short contribution we will focus on the questions 1 and 3.

The material collected for the evaluation came basically from two sources: firstly, a large number of written documents were collected and analysed. These included annual reports and policy documents of all relevant (social) service organisations active in the district, of immigrant organisations, and of all relevant departments of administration of Oost.

The second source were systematic interviews with all relevant actors in the three fields of labour, education and participation. In total, more than 40 interviews took place in roughly the following categories:

- a) officials of six different departments of the Oost administration;
- b) representatives of 11 (of in total 13) immigrant organisations in Oost; and
- c) representatives of 15 institutions and organisations in Amsterdam that were somehow involved in the implementation of integration policies in Oost.

3. Labour and education: targets and results

In the field of employment, the results of the policies of Oost have varied significantly, first and foremost as a consequence of the instruments that the responsible alderwoman and the co-ordinator were able to use. In relation to the first target, the plan to create 1000 jobs for immigrants, for example the district was dependant on actors that worked not only for immigrants (but for all unemployed) and covered a larger work area than the district of Oost. Specific wishes and targets thus had little chances. In retrospect one can also question the political wisdom of formulating such explicit target for immigrants in a district that has a high overall unemployment figure, particularly for low-skilled. Anyhow, the target did not function as foreseen and was not implemented (although an unknown number of immigrants in Oost has profited from the general employment policy).

The second target, an increase of the percentage of immigrants as employees in the local administration and services by measures of positive action, was missed completely. There proved to be insufficient political basis to formulate and implement any form of positive action. Except for a number of low skill jobs the workforce in the administration of Oost remained native white.

The third proposal to implement contract compliance to stimulate contracting partners to employ more immigrants, has in fact remained a paper target: no general application of contract compliance was even discussed politically. There is one significant exception: the alderwoman for Welfare and Education, also responsible for the co-ordination of minorities policies, has exerted a strong influence on two major (district subsidised) organisations for social and welfare work (MDSO and SWO): the percentage of immigrants as employees in these organisation rose to 40 and 55% respectively, though often in temporary jobs. That same departments also helped immigrant organisations to employ some people on temporary contracts through specific subsidised regulations. It also initiated successfully a local employment project in which about twenty young boys were trained as neighbourhood watchers under supervision of the police.

To implement the fourth target of creating opportunities for immigrant entrepreneurs in the district initially initiatives were taken to inform and mobilise immigrant entrepreneurs. The relevant department of economic affairs, however, did not take further development as a priority.

The general picture of effectiveness of policies in the domain of work is thus rather gloomy. The political and administrative basis for such a policy in Oost turned out to be too small; proper instruments were lacking. The department of Welfare and Education, the alderwoman of this department being responsible for the co-ordination of minorities policies, formed the exception.

It is remarkable that no role has been foreseen for immigrant organisations in the planning or implementation of policies in the domain of work. Such an involvement has also been absent in practice.

In the field of education the district has put in its full efforts to attain the targets, and again it was the department of Welfare and Education. The instruments that are available at the district level, however, are limited: within the national regulations the district may implement policies for nursery homes and primary schools, mostly by designing special projects. Furthermore part of adult educational facilities may be organised by the district. Secondary and higher forms of education, however, are outside the range of policy competence of the district.

The major part of district policy thus relates to primary schools and what precedes that. Many activities, even more than originally listed, have been initiated particularly aiming at reducing arrears in education for young children between three and twelve years old. The specific composition of the classrooms in Oost, where children of immigrants do form a majority, demands extra efforts by schools and teachers. Oost managed to use many possibilities and find financial means for extra curricular activities.

The activities focus in the first place on improving learning skills of the youngest upon entering the school, for instance by organising a "Pre-school". Secondly the emphasis is on improving reading and writing skills during the primary school period, without losing attractive subjects and activities at school; the prolonged school day is an important instrument to do that. Furthermore, supportive elements in the school and home environment are mobilised by organising parental participation projects and projects that support the mothers in bringing up their children.

Analysing the content of all these activities it is clear that the first priority is to secure 'the highest' and preferably equal attainments for children of immigrants in the school system, but this is done 'given the existing school system': education is implicitly defined as transfer of knowledge and there is very little notion of the fact that education is implicitly also transfer of culture. Activities in the framework of Intercultural Education are marginal or absent. Officials tend to say that these elements come in automatically, since in many institutions immigrants form a majority as clients. Looking furthermore at the involvement of immigrants, it seems that their participation is in line with the above mentioned priority: parents' involvement is seen as necessary to attain the highest levels for their children. From this perspective immigrant organisations do not have an important place in the educational sector, except in the adult educational facilities where organisations are used as a source of customers for the (language) courses.

4. Participation of immigrant organisations

Let us now look in some more detail at the third important domain, that of political participation. We have to make some preliminary remarks here. The first is that political participation may have several meanings. It may pertain to individual citizens who take part in the political process by using their active and passive voting rights and may participate in political institutions. It is remarkable that political participation in this sense is absent in the policy documents and the actual policies of Oost. It is also clear that the formal political representation of the Council of Oost does not mirror in any proportional way the dominant presence of immigrants as inhabitants of the district. This not a consequence of the absence of voting rights: in the Netherlands also aliens living 3 years or more legally in the Netherlands, have voting rights in local elections since 1985.

Political participation, however, may also pertain to a broader domain than participation in formal political institutions: the struggle on policies and policy making. In this meaning interest groups are central that try to influence policies and the process of policy making. Immigrant organisations may then be seen as important players and the original policy document of Oost did so.

Getting access: the practice of BOMO

How did immigrants and ethnic minority groups gain access to decision-making processes and what obstacles were encountered in the process? Before Amsterdam split up into districts in 1990, some of the older organisations like the Amsterdam League of Turkish Women (ATKB) and Ons Suriname, an organisation of Surinamese artists, has established contacts with the City Council of Amsterdam and received subsidies for their projects and/or for their organisation. When the districts were created in 1990, some of them remained dependant on money of the 'Central Municipality' and some became dependant on the new districts. The district Oost took the initiative to form a council of migrant organisations. All migrant organisations, irrespective of the primary aims of their organisations – thus including four religious (mosque) organisations –, were invited to join a bi-monthly meeting in which policy issues would be discussed with all parties concerned.

The opening up of this possibility to influence policy on the one hand and the practice of subsidising of at least part of the activities of immigrant organisations by the district on the other has created a kind of mutual dependence between these organisations and the district administration. The immigrant organisations need the district administration for subsidies. These are partly given in money through the yearly budget the district administration (between 20.000 and 100.000 guilders per organisation), but also partly in natura; Often, for example, the rent of the building is paid by the district. On the other hand, the district needs the organisations to legitimise their policy and to mobilise support for such policies, which is important in an area in which half of the population consists of immigrants. The district uses BOMO particularly for consultation, mobilisation and co-ordination. The district hopes to disseminate information effectively to the population of Oost through the key-persons of the various immigrant communities. These are to be found in the organisations.

The distribution of power within this framework of mutual dependence, however, is not even. The district authorities start from a position of power: it divides money and it asks for advice. It has the possibility to consider comments of the immigrant organisations as 'not relevant or not useful'. It also has a kind of monopoly on information: immigrant organisations are less acquainted with rules and regulations, important developments within and outside the district,

etc. The professionals of the district administration are in an advantageous position as compared to the (often less educated) volunteers of the organisations. It is no wonder that in such a situation BOMO now and then turns into an informative speech of the mayor of the district or his aldermen on plans and regulations of the administration. If on the other hand, as it happened during our research, representatives of organisations pleaded for instance for care of the homeless around Christmas, everybody agreed, but the answer of the administration was that the existing organisations already did their best. Actual involvement in and influence on decision-making processes is a relative question in such a situation.

The financial policy towards immigrant organisations is a subject that pops up regularly on the agenda of BOMO and that is not surprising. Organisations that do not have their own building, question why others have and they do not: financial considerations seem to be an important reason to attend the meeting for some organisations, and sometimes this reason seems more important than the desire to participate and influence the decision making.

Apart from the regular BOMO-meetings (which are attended regularly by most organisations), there are also ad hoc and sometimes institutionalised contacts and co-operation between for instance public Social Work and Welfare organisations (like SWO, MDSO) and immigrant organisations. Some immigrant organisations rent meeting space to meet in community centres in the district. Community workers employed by SWO provide legal assistance to Turks and Moroccans in one of the mosques. Language courses are organised by the professionals of Adult Education ("Basiseducatie") in buildings of immigrant organisations. For a group of Turkish teenage girls sewing lessons and homework-support is organised by an immigrant organisation in a building that is especially rented outside the common youth centres to reach exclusively Turkish girls.

A – probably important – consequence of the regular contacts of representatives of immigrant organisations with politicians and officials of the district of Oost in BOMO meetings is the fact that informal contacts and networks are established. Representatives of immigrant organisations for example, approach the Council Members or officials more easily. This is particularly the case with the 'mayor' (chairperson of the Council of Aldermen) and officials of the Department of Education and Welfare who attend the BOMO-meetings regularly. Contacts with other departments of the district are much less frequent.

Evaluation: two different perspectives on participation

BOMO is thus a consultative body at a district level; it has no power or competence to enforce decisions. With the exception of two, all of the 13 immigrant organisations continued their contact with BOMO through the years. When asked their opinion on BOMO, the organisations were positive about the opportunities it provides them to maintain and broaden their network of contacts. On the other hand they criticise the way issues are prioritised on the agenda and the lack of results. During our research we noticed that subjects connected to education and welfare were more often handled positively. This is due to the permanent presence of the district officials concerned with Education and Welfare at the sessions of BOMO. Other departments such as Economic affairs, Employment and Personnel usually do not take up issues raised at the BOMO meeting onto their agenda.

From the point of view of the district council BOMO is a success; the fact that issues are discussed is an important step. The council considers immigrant organisations as necessary partners in breaking the isolation of immigrants. It makes it easier for officials to identify partners with which they may solve practical problems, such as celebrations of specific (religious) holidays. The opinion of the council is, however, that immigrant organisations should not take over the work of professional public institutions in fields like for instance childcare, youth-work, work for the elderly or language lessons. These public institutions should work for all inhabitants of the district. Immigrant organisations are supposed to inform their members and send clients to the public institutions.

Immigrant organisations often hold quite different views on this strict division of tasks. They often aspire to supply their community with broader service than only religious and cultural activities. Against the claim of professionals of these general institutions (endorsed politically by the district authorities) they claim that they have knowledge of and networks in their communities that enable them to solve for example problems with groups of problematic youngsters much better than the public youth centres do. They claim to understand their problems and they mistrust the "Dutch" way of treating youth issues. That marijuana is allowed in one of the youth centres, for example, is considered absurd by the Turkish and Moroccan representatives, since they think the availability of drugs is one of the reasons of youth problems. It is on these grounds that relations of immigrant organisation with both district officials and representatives of these general institutions are sometimes tense. This struggle on competence could develop into a serious problem in the future.

Most immigrant organisations keep contact with other immigrant organisations outside Amsterdam Oost. There are consultative bodies similar to BOMO at the city and national level, that attempt to speak up in the interest of immigrants. Some of the immigrant organisations of Oost are represented directly or indirectly in organs at city or national level. On the municipal level in Amsterdam some organisations are a member of the Consultative Council of Turkish Organisations, TDM (Adviesraad Turken), and some of the Moroccan Council, SMR (Stedelijke Marokkaanse Raad). These two councils give advise to the municipality of Amsterdam. One Turkish and one Moroccan organisation in Amsterdam Oost are of national importance, because they function as an umbrella organisation. Two Turkish organisations are members of the Consultative Council of Turkish Organisations on the national level, IOT (Inspraak Orgaan Turken). Two of the local mosque organisations in Amsterdam Oost are represented at the city and national level by their religious umbrella organisation.

5. General Conclusions

Looking at the policy of Amsterdam Oost as a whole, we noticed that the stated policy and the practise of it focuses first and foremost on improving the disadvantaged socio-economic position of immigrants in the district. That means that the policy is geared to improve the quality of education and enhance the employment opportunities. The policy documents and actual policy is relatively silent on matters relating to ethno-cultural factors such as religion and culture. The domain of culture and religion is explicitly defined as a matter of the private domain. Religious and cultural organisations are accepted and invited for consultation in BOMO, but on matters regarding integration policies in the public domain. In this sense policies of the district reflect a republican view on citizenship.

In fact the district administration has not been equally successful in the various fields of policy. In the field of employment the plans were too ambitious, instruments were lacking and foremost the political and administrative basis for implementation within Oost proved insufficient. In the field of education and welfare the situation was different; strong commitment of the alderwoman involved and thus from the department has led to substantial activities and to concrete results. The discrepancy between these two field showed the lop-sided nature of district policies.

As to the (political) involvement of immigrants district policies have been limited and open and active at the same time. Limited mainly, because political participation was actually narrowed down to the involvement of immigrant organisations as advisers. The actual impact of their involvement is also limited, as a consequence of the unequal balance of power between professionals of the administration and general institutions on the one hand and the (often – but not always – less educated) representatives of immigrant organisations on the other hand. The policies have been open, in the sense that all immigrant organisations in the district were invited and there has been conscious efforts to keep them involved. District authorities have chosen deliberately to endorse immigrant organisations financially and have stimulated them to participate in discussions on important matters in Oost. And immigrant organisations appreciate this involvement. The way this was done, however, has clear limitations again: immigrant organisations are regarded as consultants and advisers. Implementation of policies to improve the disadvantaged position of immigrants is primarily the task of general, professional institutions in the district. Consultation of immigrant organisations by these institutions is regarded as very helpful, but the factual work, such as language courses, should remain in the hands of these professional public institutions. Here there exists a tension between the claims and aspirations of immigrant organisations and both the district authorities and the general institutions.

Literature

Wolff, R., A. van Heelsum & R. Penninx, Erkend, aangesproken, aanspreekbaar. Evaluatie van het migrantenbeleid van voormalig stadsdeel Oost en de participatie van organisaties van migranten, 1996 – 1998, Uitgave Stadsdeel Oost–Watergraafsmeer, Amsterdam, 1999.

Footnotes

1 The figures given here pertain to the district Oost as it was between 1990 and 1998. In 1998 the municipality of Amsterdam reduced the number of districts to thirteen. As a consequence Oost merged in 1998 with the district Watergraafsmeer, a newer, richer area, dominated by native Dutch. In 1999 the new district Oost/Watergraafsmeer counts 56 percent of its inhabitants as native Dutch, 27 percent as first generation migrants and 17 percent as second generation migrants. The research reported here pertains to the situation in Oost before the district merged.

2 See: R. Wolff, A. van Heelsum en R. Penninx, Erkend, aangesproken, aanspreekbaar? Evaluatie van het migrantenbeleid van voormalig stadsdeel Oost en de participatie van organisaties van migranten, 1996–1998. Published by Stadsdeel Oost/Watergraafsmeer, Amsterdam 1999, 68 pp.

3 Local politicians give several reasons why immigrant candidates are absent, or if they are chosen, do leave soon; one of these reasons is that they often leave for higher politics than district level. There may be some truth in it: of the 150 members of the Dutch Parliament chosen in 1998, at least 11 were (naturalised) immigrants, which is between 7 and 8 %.