

Report of the study visit

Manresa 18-19 June 2008

CIMIC – Belgium

Elements that we recognized

1. We recognized elements of what one might call **the intuitive approach** to getting migrants in leadership positions, especially in the DIESA case (hotel chain). It seems that intuition and voluntarism continue to be the main guideposts for organizing diversity within the organization. As CIMIC we often receive specific questions from diversity managers to deliver tools, instruments and methods to recruit, select and motivate migrant workers in their organization. Increasingly, however, we have become convinced that that the personal convictions of the manager, and his (or her) underlying values, are key factors to understand the success of M2M approaches. Apart from the 'needing' factor (the economic perspective) it would seem that the 'willing' factor (the ethical perspective) looms large. This means that measures vis-à-vis policy and practice should focus on the motivations of the managers themselves. More often than not, as it turned out in the DIESA case, the life story of the manager (himself an immigrant from another area in Spain) proves to be an important source to seek and develop ways for change. In our own intercultural training trajectories we usually build on personal stories of migration, life and family histories, to come to a better understanding of how people think about themselves in relation to others.

In other words, work in this area is in dire need for process and person oriented approaches rather than anonymous blueprints and toolboxes. The contrast between the hospital case and the hotel chain case was telling in that regard: whereas in the hospital case the Cuban doctor was there to confirm the story of the HR Manager, Katia received room to tell her story and got questions from her manager.

2. From the story of Katia (area manager DIESA), the **parallels between participation and promotion of migrants in the labor market and the participation and school career of migrant students in higher education** seemed striking. The DIESA case confirms our own research findings on diversity in higher education indicating that personal motivation and hard work remain key factors of success. What furthermore facilitates success is a good personal contact with someone who is fully supporting them in different ways (because of being personally sensitive to migration issues). These aspects are hard to 'catch' and enhance, but very important to take into account when assessing or developing support projects.

3. **The human factor** often makes the difference between selection and retention of migrant workers in management positions. Migrants not only need help with sorting out work and employment issues, but also with lots of others social issues like housing, education and family. Only these initiatives and efforts that focus on the entire situation and on all aspects of personal life can be successful. Companies and organizations in Flanders are too little concerned with these issues. We do have a welfare system but all too often restrict ourselves to rather impersonal referencing.

Elements that surprised us

1. The **strong involvement of local government agencies** (city of Manresa – deputacio) was surprising to all of us. The State in Spain apparently continues to play a bigger role in providing, funding and organizing units that provide services in areas such as social economy (the case of Sabadell) or employment training of migrants for private companies. At least at the municipal level (the city council of Manresa) there appear to be many initiatives to fund other organizations or associations. At the same time, we heard that some of these initiatives are met with opposition from the local population. In any case, the local governments in Catalonia are more strongly involved than in Belgium/Flanders, where private sector initiatives or public-private partnerships often take the lead.

The Manresa initiative on social economy was a case in point, where it appeared that the city council provided a total budget of about 350.000 € to house, to concentrate, and support all kinds of projects in social economy. In Belgium, we suspect that this would not be conceivable. The Sabadell case was also instructive in that regard. The selection and training was provided by a public agency, whereas the company only was to take care of reception of workers. First, there is a sense that the private sector would not generally accept it that governments would play a significant role in setting up and organizing training and selection programs for its workers. Secondly, the emerging and still growing market of training- and consultancy firms in Belgium would not accept it if government agencies would start to become their competitors.

2. It is striking that **'history repeats itself'**: the sectors where migrant workers have most opportunities are those in which Spanish (Belgian/French...) people do not want to work. The migrant is an economic opportunity to the extent that he/she is prepared to do 'the dirty work'.

Nonetheless, we were sometimes struck by the *'attitude of care'* of the managers in the cases presented to us. It appeared to us that managers in Spain, more so than in Belgium, seem to be work from a work ethic that includes taking care of workers. Often they referred to workers satisfaction in their presentations! Another surprising element was that the informality of the process by which the supervisor promoted and referred workers to better positions in the company.

Again, it appears that the human factor is of greater significance than formal models of organization.

3. In the different cases there was little talk about the **impact of cultural barriers**, whereas in Flanders this is the first and often foremost topic that springs to mind by many when talking about integration of migrants in education or at the work floor. It appeared to us as if in Spain people seemed to be less concerned with the tricky issue of culture and religion... Training initiatives seemed to focus more on acquiring job skills and competencies required by the companies and organizations. Even the development of language competencies –both Spanish and Catalan– seemed not always to be a formal or core part of training programs as some participants witnessed that they learned Spanish and/or Catalan mostly outside the framework of formal training programs.

In Flanders, by contrast, Dutch language competencies are often a precondition for migrants to be accepted for jobs. And apart from language issues, we seem to struggle with cultural and religious differences at the work floor quite often. Is it because in Spain/Catalonia the wave of migration is of a more recent date? Perhaps there is less of a cultural distance between the group of migrants (Latin America, Morocco) and the Spanish/Catalonian population? Are these differences less visible? Or are discrimination and racism 'hidden facts of life' for migrants to cope with? Too bad we didn't have sufficient time to discuss these questions in more depth...