

**Report of the study visit
Mechelen 9-10 October 2008
Manresa City Council- Spain**

Elements that surprised us:

1. The access to the country for the migrants and the influence of the chosen language.

On the one hand, it was said that the people who wanted to get the residence permit in Belgium were required to pass a compulsory exam after attending a civic integration course: what you should know as a Belgium citizen.

A similar initiative was suggested by a political party in our country not long ago, but it didn't work. By contrast though, it was seen by many people from the civil society, NGOs and from other political parties as unfair, and as going against immigrants rights.

In the case of Belgium, we think we should know in more depth about the content of both of them, course and exam, and about the way they are given to evaluate its results (pros/contras)

On the other hand, we found that the influence of the chosen language is striking: the place in Belgium where you decide to live and the language spoken there, may determine the access to the Labour Market all over the country.

In Catalonia, though we have two official languages as well, one of them (Spanish) is spoken by all the Spaniards. Catalan is needed to live and work in Catalonia, but if it isn't spoken it doesn't mean that you cannot access the Labour Market. So Catalan is a plus in the *ordinary Labour Market*. When referring to the Public Administration though, it changes: In this particular field, Catalan language competencies are a precondition to be accepted to develop such job.

2. Diversity Management

In our country Diversity Management is a new issue and mainly only in the agenda of the public bodies. Private companies in general are not aware of the problems that may occur at the workplaces if they do not consider diversity.

In Spain, diversity management focuses on *women and disabled people* as target groups, while race and origin are not actually being considered. And this is mainly because for instance, the law obliges medium-sized companies to have a 4 per cent of disabled people in their staff.

It was a nice surprise for us to realise that in Belgium diversity is an important issue for the companies, which have seen the need to manage it to

reach quality and to be more efficient as well. The case of Soumia's company shows us the possibility of working with this issues, something unbelievable in Spain nowadays.

3. Minorities Organization.

Once more, the trajectory of the minorities in Spain is shorter than the one in Belgium. It can be seen, for example, in the existence of different kind of organizations which work together to be more efficient, to press the administration, companies and civil society and get better results in all matters related to minority rights. We recognize this in the Minority Forum.

In our country, at the moment we only have particular organizations or migrant groups that work separately and only for cultural reasons or purposes.

Elements that we recognize:

1. The needing factor

We recognize elements related to the "needing factor": in the study visit in Sommer Seeds we realized that the manager started recruiting migrants because no woman in the company was strong enough to make a machine work. It means that, as it happens Spain, in most cases migrants have the opportunity to work for a company when the company is not able to find another "allochtone" candidate.

We consider it as a positive factor though, since it gives the migrants the opportunity to be known. As a result, some new dynamics are generated improving the access of minorities in the local Labour Market:

On the part of the foreign workers:

- More expertise and skills
- More self-esteem and motivation
- Better self-value
- Better integration in the company and in last term better social integration
- Being more visible

On the part of the companies:

- Consideration of the minorities as possible candidates for a job
- Being the company more competitive
- Increasing the social value of the company
- Discovering other new values

2. Minority languages

In Catalonia we also have to official languages as in Belgium (as we explained before). People who are skilled in both have more opportunities to get a job, everywhere: to facilitate communication but specially because we consider it as a tool for social integration and it recognises our singular identity. Catalan, like Flemish, are minority languages.

3. The human factor

The human factor is essential to play an important role when referring to managing diversity:

Soumia El Mahjoub (testimonial)

Wafa Asrar (testimonial)

Naima Charkaoui

Sleepwell manager

In the three first cases, their origin and their own experiences have determined the development of their professional career and in the last one, his working methodology, that takes always account on minorities.

We recognize the same philosophy in the Sleepwell case as in the DIESA one, that we presented in Manresa. Both managers consider themselves part of a minority because their hometown is not where they are living and they have had difficulties in general because of this. This life experience has motivated their "how to" in managing.