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# Authenticity or skill-oriented individualism, neutrality or managerialism: diversity officers as modern public officials

Maria Schiller

Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Göttingen, Germany

## ABSTRACT

Diversity has become a new buzzword in European cities. Newly introduced diversity policies have replaced previous multicultural policies with an approach that acknowledges difference in a more general sense. Drawing on in-depth fieldwork in diversity departments in Amsterdam, Antwerp and Leeds, this article investigates how the introduction of diversity policy impacted on the recruitment and the self-representations of public officials in newly created diversity departments. Despite a proclaimed move away from recognising minority-group specificities, many officials conceive their immigrant origin as a central element of their profiles. This continuation of a multicultural logic is interpreted as misunderstanding or resistance on the part of those meant to implement these policies, indicating agency of contemporary bureaucrats as well as creative space within bureaucracies. In order to place the shift from multicultural to diversity policy in the context of welfare state transformation and neoliberalism, I assess whether diversity officers endorse diversity policies in conjunction with New Public Management policies. However, I do not find an unequivocal promotion of both policies and my study thus does not confirm the common association of diversity policies with neoliberalism.

## KEYWORDS

Diversity; multicultural; integration; bureaucracy; official

## Introduction

In the past few years, a number of European cities have introduced so-called diversity policies. The introduction of diversity policies reflects a broader change of immigrant policies in Europe, that has been discussed extensively in recent scholarly work and been captured as a shift away from multiculturalism (Essed and De Graaff 2002; Ahmed 2007; Lentin and Titley 2008; Faist 2009; Zapata-Barrero and Van Ewijk 2011; Vertovec 2012). The UK, the Netherlands and Flanders are often depicted as three countries experiencing such a shift (Alibhai-Brown 2000, 17; Modood 2007, 11; Koopmans 2010; Van de Voorde 2010, 1; Adam 2011). Amsterdam, Antwerp and Leeds are three examples of cities that introduced diversity policies in 1999/2000 (Amsterdam), in 2007 (Antwerp) and in 2004 (Leeds) in response to the increasing unpopularity of multicultural policies. To date, limited empirical research exists on

**CONTACT** Maria Schiller  [schiller@mmg.mpg.de](mailto:schiller@mmg.mpg.de)

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the ramifications of diversity policies for public administrations. This article aims to provide such an empirically grounded analysis based on fieldwork in those three cities.

Diversity policies claim to go beyond single ‘target groups’, as was typical for multicultural policies, and instead address the diversity of the whole population. They take into account a range of diversity dimensions, such as migrant origin, gender, sexual orientation and abilities, in a combined way. In the literature, diversity is referred to in a number of ways, as a characteristic of societies, as an individual competence to address cultural pluralism, and as a set of programmes organisations adopt (Faist 2009, 174). The concept of ‘diversity’ emphasises the positive effects of cultural plurality (Faist 2009, 177) and is used as a business strategy (Squires 2007, 159), for example, to improve the quality of the labour force by opening jobs to all ethnic groups. These characteristics of diversity policies were also reflected in the official diversity policy texts of Amsterdam, Antwerp and Leeds (Table 1). In all three cities, the diversity policy emphasised accepting diversity as a

**Table 1.** Meanings ascribed to diversity in Antwerp, Amsterdam and Leeds.

Central principles	Antwerp	Amsterdam	Leeds
Diversity as a fact	‘The policy of the city targets all residents. They are nearly half a million of people that live together in the city, that have a lot in common, and that can also be quite different from each other.’ (SA 2008, 12)	‘Also the last decennia the composition of the city has undergone a metamorphosis. Mainly the influx of people with a different ethnic background has resulted in visible changes in the streets.’ (GA 1999, 5)	‘is a cosmopolitan city. It is a city of many cultures, languages, races, religions and lifestyles. It is a welcoming mix of very different neighbourhoods.’ (LCC 2006, 8)
Diversity as positive	‘Difference has quite some advantages. People who are different look differently at problems and tackle them in their way. Thereby an offer becomes richer and more creative.’ (SA 2008, 14)	‘It is not all about grief and agony, it is not only misery, but it is also a lot about what diversity adds to the city.’ (Interview A6 50)	‘We want to make sure that we take equality and diversity into account, in a positive way, at every stage of our work.’ (LCC 2006, 48)
Diversity as profitable	‘Dealing with diversity might not always be easy, but diversity for a city as Antwerp can also be an asset.’ (SA 2008, 14)	‘The diversity in backgrounds, orientations and talents of Amsterdam’s residents forms the human capital of the city. And this capital can, much better than now, be made use of.’ (GA 1999, 18)	‘skills and productivity ... the need to recruit, retain and motivate the talent necessary to business growth.’ (LCC 2006, 12)
Diversity as focusing on the individual, taking into account a number of categories	‘Everyone is man or woman, young or old, rich or poor, queer or straight, believing or not, disabled or not ...’ (SA 2008, 11)	‘Amsterdam’s population is not a sum of groups and categories but of individual citizens. Citizens who, each in their own way, are of particular meaning for the city.’ (GA 1999, 3) ‘It makes no longer sense to develop policy for THE homo, THE woman, THE ethnic minority member, THE person with a handicap, THE elderly. Experiences, chances and opportunities in society are not determined through one single difference, but through a mix of factors.’ (GA 1999, 8)	‘Diversity recognizes that people do not exist in neat and clearly definable groups and most people identify with more than one equality strand at a time.’ (LCC 2006, 5) ‘I think it is really hard to work in silos (...) you know, like I could fit into anything. I could fit into woman, I could fit into BME, disabled, lesbian, everything. You know, I can’t say I look at my needs separately.’ (Interview B5 181)

fact, as something positive and profitable. It focused on the individual (instead of the group in multicultural approaches) and on various categories of difference (addressing ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, disability, religion).

Some authors criticise diversity policies for their lack of focus on questions of equality (Cooper 2004; Lentin and Titley 2008; Berg and Sigona 2013), and their limits in terms of combining different categories of difference to an analysis of an individuals' position (Squires 2009). However, some authors also see diversity policies as potentially going beyond multicultural policies (Essed and De Graaff 2002) or as providing a new or extended form of multiculturalism (Faist 2009). Apparently, there is some scope for interpreting 'diversity' in different ways.

As part of the introduction of diversity policies, local authorities reorganised their departmental structure to address differences based on migration as well as on gender, sexual orientation and, in some cities, physical abilities and set up so-called diversity departments. In Antwerp, separate departments had worked on issues of disabled people, newly arrived migrants, people living in poverty, women and ethno-cultural minorities. They were merged into a general directorate of 'living together in diversity' with the two foci of maintaining contacts with different population groups and introducing diversity management in the municipal organisation. Each of these foci was the responsibility of one department, including the newly created 'Office for diversity management'.<sup>1</sup> Leeds had had an equality department with three sub-teams working on race, disability and gender since 1983. These sub-teams were dismantled and the department re-established with a new self-understanding of providing more general support on equality and diversity issues and taking more of a business-oriented approach. In Amsterdam, two departments – one working on ethno-cultural differences and another working on women and 'lgbt' emancipation were dismantled (Essed and De Graaff 2002, 23) and a new department created as 'Department for diversity and integration'.<sup>2</sup>

The transformation of previous multicultural, antidiscrimination and equality policies coincided with a more general transformation of the public administration. Like in other countries, the public administrations in the Netherlands, Belgium and England have been under transformation for some time. Managerialism has become a key word to describe the increasing alignment of the public sector with corporate ways of working. Extensive academic writing has traced the introduction of market principles and a more entrepreneurial or managerial approach in the delivery of social services at the beginning of the 1980s when, in most Western countries, the transformation of the welfare state began (Le Grand 2003, 15; Cochrane 2007, 85). The UK, as one of the 'neoliberal heartlands', introduced such managerial reforms early on (Guarneros-Meza and Geddes 2010, 117; Peters 2010, 326), followed by countries such as the Netherlands and Belgium (or Flanders, for that matter).

New Public Management (NPM) – the phrase summarising these changes – was introduced in the 1980s and 1990s by right-wing governments under Thatcher and Reagan, by left wing governments in France (programmes of 'modernisation' and 'gestion'), as well as by rainbow coalitions, such as in Finland (Peters 2010, 326). It challenged the traditional model of bureaucracy, as outlined by Weber (1978). In his seminal work of 1921, he described the bureaucracy as a form of social organisation meant to effectively manage large populations by following uniform rules and

procedures and by way of a hierarchical system. Public officials in this model were supposed to be neutral and technical implementers of those rules in their field of functional specialisation. The term NPM summarises a number of different elements, most prominently the introduction of market-based principles in the public sector and an outsourcing of some services to private providers in public–private ‘partnerships’. Importantly it assumes that the roles of public officials, as well as their relationships with politicians and civil society, are being transformed. Some authors claim that NPM has led to a more participatory style of management (Cochrane 2007, 31ff.; Peters 2010, 326) and a stronger discretionary power of public managers (Peters 2010, 327). They argue that previous characteristics of public administrations, namely their hierarchical structure and the dominance of formal rules, delineated as defining features of bureaucracies by Weber (1978, 124), were displaced. Instead, public administration now involves the general public more directly in the public sector, and bureaucrats are managing a complex field of partnerships and co-operations between state and non-state actors (Cochrane 2007). As a result, interactions with the population today are characterised by less hierarchy, and officials have more networks and links with private actors or individuals (Bogason 2001, 3). These depictions of the new public official in the literature often appear rather homogenising and idealising. We need to beware of assuming that all officials now work on more strategic levels or that public administrations are now non-hierarchical organisations, as of course this is not the case. And yet, at least in parts of the public administration public officials have unquestionably gained a more active and entrepreneurial self-image and an expectation of being close to and knowing the needs of the ‘customer’.

The introduction of diversity policies and the introduction of NPM measures are often depicted as parts of a broader trend of neoliberalisation. Neoliberalism has been defined as starting out from the idea that ‘human well-being can best be advanced by liberating entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade’ (Harvey 2005, 2). The role of the state in such a neoliberal framework is to ‘preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices’ (Harvey 2005, 2). Both diversity policies and NPM can be seen as projection screens as well as carriers of a neoliberal spirit in public organisations. Diversity policies were primarily introduced to replace earlier multicultural policies that have fallen into discredit, but they also were introduced as part of a broader shift from welfarist service delivery and Affirmative Action to an economic logic (the ‘business case’) and individual self-responsibility. NPM was promoted as a measure to reduce the state and to make it more effective as well as more customer-oriented. I hypothesise that, because of their shared link to neoliberal thinking, the diversity discourse and the NPM discourse go well together in European public organisations. However, to date there is limited empirical research into the actual effects of these discourses on administrative recruitment practices and bureaucrats’ self-representation. Discourses can have different effects and can function in more than one way, due to their different segments, as Foucault (1978, 100) argued. The ‘tactical polyvalence of discourses’, as he calls it, refers to the dependency of the effect of a discourse on the strategy or tactics employed.

Applied to the subject here, this article therefore aims to analyse the practices resulting from managerialism and diversity discourses. My analysis of recruitment practices and

self-representations of public officials sets out to assess whether managerialism and diversity policies are both reflected in the profiles of diversity officers.

This article focuses on local diversity departments which represent a special case of administrative departments. They were set up to implement a policy change from multiculturalism to diversity policies within local public administrations. Further, they were created by merging pre-existing separate departments on immigrants, women's affairs, and other issues and to create a new perspective that manages difference in a way that does not single out particular minority groups and that does not particularly emphasise the issue of inequality. My analysis started from the assumption that diversity officers would either embrace or reject recent changes towards diversity policy and in the management of public organisations. As members of newly installed departments, I also expected them to be particularly informed by the logics of NPM.

Arguably, public officials working on immigrant incorporation and diversity have a particular profile that differs from a generic profile of public officials. Since the inception of immigrant policies in the 1970s and 1980s, local administrations have increasingly recruited individuals who themselves have an immigrant origin to implement these policies. The self-image as well as the expectations that public administrations have of these officers can thus be expected to combine the more generic expectations of bureaucrats as well as more specific expectations of knowledge on particular immigrant concerns. Some recent literature discusses the particular profile of public officials in the policy area of immigrant incorporation, such as Jones' work on local officials working on social cohesion policies in the UK. She demonstrates that many of these officials have a migrant or 'ethno-cultural origin' (2013, 145) and that they use this origin to define their role as public officials (Jones 2013, 148). In these officials' narratives, some talk about the difficult act of balancing personal subjectivity and professional objectivity (Jones 2013, 152) whereas other practitioners strategically highlight different aspects of their biography in different situations (Jones 2013, 155). Jones' account assigns importance to the links of policy practitioners with immigrant populations. The underlying rationale is that policy practitioners' work is not at its best when they are neutral, but when they, in their very self-conceptualisations as policy practitioners, incorporate their migrant or 'ethno-cultural origin' into their profiles as public officials. This depiction of 'ethno-cultural origin' as advantage is also reflected in work that emphasises the increasing importance of capacities enabling public officials to link up with different parts of the population. As Nalbandian (1999) argues for the U.S. context, 'community building' and 'facilitating partnerships' are today parts of local government officials' role. Some literature on officials of ethnic minority origin, mostly from the Anglo-Saxon context, has discussed the loyalties of officials of ethnic minority origin. Cochrane (2004, 489) posits an ambiguity or double affiliations of officials of ethnic minority origin, as they were eager to embody the interests of their areas and communities as well as the administration. They were thus loyal both to the public administration and to the population groups ('communities' in his words) they are associated with. I challenge Cochrane's interpretation of public officials' self-image as an issue of loyalty, as this posits that different loyalties are inherently conflicting. However, his account illustrates that officers of immigrant origin working in diversity departments are likely to be exposed to both discourses of NPM as well as discourses of diversity, which they need to negotiate in their self-representation as public officials.

This article investigates the profile of public officials in diversity departments. I assess whether the equality concerns and targeted attention to specific immigrant groups are no longer accepted practices because of the introduction of diversity policies and whether diversity officers working in these departments have replaced their traditional self-conception as neutral technocrats. My expectations are twofold. I expect that the introduction of diversity policies means that the newly recruited officials are no longer expected to hold specific minority-group knowledge and qualifications relevant for the issue of inequalities. I furthermore assume that more traditional bureaucratic practices have been replaced by managerialism.

Instead of assuming that ethnic minority origin is important for diversity officers, I take an open analytical approach. Do diversity officers embrace managerialism and diversity policy in constructing their profile as public officials? Or do they rely on a profile as specialists for specific minority groups or on classic depictions of public officials as neutral and functionally specialised? What selection criteria are applied to new public officials required to fulfil the expectation of addressing diversity and performing managerialism?

In the following sections, I will first outline the methodology of this study and then turn to the structural changes involved in creating diversity departments. I will then present my findings on the changing recruitment criteria of diversity officers and on the self-representations of diversity officers. In a final section, I will engage with these findings in the light of the broader literature and assess how they help to answer the research questions.

## Methodology

In this study, I draw on qualitative semi-standardized interviews with 35 local public officials as well as on participant observations in the diversity departments of the cities of Amsterdam, Antwerp and Leeds. This data were collected during five months of fieldwork in these cities' diversity departments in 2010–2011. I particularly draw on interviews with officers involved in the recruitment of new team members. Second, I use interviews with diversity officers whom I asked about their motivations for becoming an official, their own conceptions of their role and their position in the team, and the ways in which they experienced their own recruitment and the recruitment of other colleagues. I complemented this interview material with extensive observations, recorded in a fieldwork journal, as well as material from the shared digital folders of the diversity departments. The qualitative interview data were transcribed and analysed, adopting a Grounded Theory approach as developed by Charmaz (Charmaz 2000, 2005, 2006; Morse et al. 2009), and using the qualitative analysis software Max.QDA.

## The institutionalisation of 'diversity departments'

Diversity departments are a fairly recent element of the institutional structures in cities. They replaced a range of previous departments, which had been organised around the categories of ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or disability. In Antwerp, separate departments working on issues of disabled people, newly arrived migrants, people living in poverty, women and ethno-cultural minorities were merged into the 'diversity department' in 2007/2008. In Leeds, three categorically defined departments had



previously worked on race, disability and gender until their merger in 2004/2005. In Amsterdam, the merger at the end of the 1990s involved two departments, one working on ethno-cultural differentiation and another dealing with gender and sexual orientation. Most of these departments had been established in the 1970s and 1980s, when local governments felt the need to react to the arrival of colonial migrants or guest workers, to feminist and gay and lesbian movements and to strengthened rights of disabled people. The subsequent merging of these departments under the header of ‘diversity’ had two objectives: it was meant to do away with addressing gender, ethnicity and disability through separate departments. By creating ‘diversity departments’ the cities aimed to address multiple categories in a combined way.

In order to implement this profound change new staff was recruited in particular for diversity departments. At the time of my research (2010–2011), the team in Amsterdam had 15 staff members, in Antwerp 14 officers formed the department and in Leeds the team had 9 members. With the merger of several departments into one diversity department, a significant exchange of staff took place. As Table 2 illustrates, only a small number of officials stayed on.

Diversity departments largely contained a new cohort of local officials. More than two-thirds of the 35 diversity officers I interviewed had worked for the municipality for less than 3 years. They had come from university or from jobs outside of the public administration. Those who had worked for the municipal administration before had moved from departments not involved in the mergers.

Diversity departments were assigned a strategic position within the structure of the local administration. Over time, however, they were re-located from more strategic positions in the institutional hierarchy into the general directorates. Today, the three diversity departments are neither a temporary task force nor departments with a special status, but they inhabit a more generic position within the general structure of the municipal authority. In Amsterdam, for example, the ‘diversity department’ became embedded in the ‘Service for Societal Development’. In Antwerp the diversity department was assigned a position more distant to the top management level through the reorganisation of the directorate of social affairs. And in Leeds the diversity department was further removed from top-level decision-makers by way of having another level of managers introduced. This change in organisational position was due to a decreasing political urgency to communicate a shift away from multiculturalism to the public and an increasing establishment of diversity policies as a long-term investment of the city.

**Table 2.** From previous departments to diversity teams: taking over officials.

	Total number of officials working in diversity departments at the time of my research	Officers directly taken over from preceding departments and still working in diversity departments at the time of my research
Amsterdam	14 officials	1 official from ethnic minorities department No officials from women and LGBT departments
Antwerp	14 officials	No officials from disability department 2 officials from department for newly arrived migrants 3 officials from department working on poverty No officials from women’s department No officials from ethno-cultural minorities department
Leeds	8 officials	No officials from race/BME department No officials from disability department No officials from gender department



## The implicit relevance of ethnic minority origin in the recruitment of diversity officers

In order to trace the process of composing a diversity team, the following section focusses on the recruitment practices in Antwerp before moving on to the self-representation of officials in the next section. Here the unit had been created shortly before my fieldwork and this enabled me to trace the whole process particularly well through interviews with different officials. Over three years following its establishment in 2007, Antwerp's diversity team was built up from 4 to 14 staff members. Every year, two to three new diversity officers were recruited, and each time a new recruitment procedure and a specific profile were tailored based on an assessment of the existing team (Interview C14). The declared goal was to compose a team able to implement diversity policies and in itself 'diverse'. Individual officers were not necessarily expected to have the same qualifications, but each team member was meant to bring different competences to the table. Rather than defining an unchanging profile of the diversity officer, the head of the team wanted to create a powerful 'diversity unit' as a collective entity. According to my interviewees, the diversity of the diversity team and the sum of the different team members' capabilities were said to provide strength in itself (IP C8 177, IP C8 213 and IP A7 365). Instead of having one profile for diversity officers, they developed different profiles over the course of time. In preparation of the job advertisements, the team reviewed some of the generic vocabulary used for the recruitment of municipal officials (Interview A14 190) and aimed to use a language accessible to a broad range of candidates. Each time a new round of recruitment was planned, they assessed the composition of their staff to find out what profile was needed to complement the team:

At a specific moment we had a lot of people that scored well in analysing, overseeing a situation, that were very good in seeing how they could approach something or which core issues one would possibly have to tackle. (...) And how are we going to change something and create a solution and which step are we going to take. At such a particular moment you say okay, we have a team that is mainly strong in this, with new acquisitions we need to look at other terrains. (IP C8 164)

A number of capacities were mentioned as decisive in the selection of the officials. The first set of competences aimed at the recruitment of good managers. One such capacity was analytical thinking. According to my interviewees, a diversity officer needs to be able to devise solutions based on the concrete situation at hand: if you are confronted with a problem, how are you going to approach it? What are the steps, what is the process you will have to follow (IP C14 201)? Another capacity was change management, which involved 'to achieve change with other people, thus accompanying processes, stimulating processes and taking people with you in a specific process towards change' (IP C8 147). The self-image of temporary 'change-managers', a concept that is well-established in the organisational literature (Weick and Quinn 1999), for some officers implied frequent switching of jobs between departments. One would contribute to a specific service as long as one felt able to make a contribution and to instigate a change, and move on as soon as that change was achieved (IP B7 78). Another competence was that of taking the initiative and finding creative solutions:

Then we had something like, we are too well-behaved, we need to have people who are proactive, where you don't have to steer too much, but who themselves take opportunities, chances,

that have entrepreneurship. Thus we've been screening more for people who have an eye for opportunities and who have that entrepreneurship. (IP C14 196)

These three capacities of analytical thinking, change management and initiative, and solution-oriented working form part of common expectations of an efficient manager. There was thus an expectation that diversity officers should have these managerial capacities.

But managerial capacities were not the only capacities considered in the recruitment of new officials. Saleem was one officer selected because of his 'target group links'. He was of Moroccan origin and had set up a civil society initiative in the past which targeted co-ethnics in a migrant neighbourhood. This ethnic connection was explicitly mentioned by his recruiters as reason for selecting him for the position, as his contacts to the community were seen as an asset and capital for the job. According to one of the members of his recruitment committee, the fact that he had these personal experiences even outweighed his lack of a university degree and his limited Dutch language skills.

Saleem's example illustrates a second set of capacities that was frequently mentioned as relevant for the selection of diversity officers. These capacities were based on the immigrant or ethno-cultural origin of officials.<sup>3</sup> Recruiters assumed that candidates like Saleem would naturally possess knowledge or networks based on their origin and use them as resources in doing their job. The selection of candidates with an ethnic minority origin was not an official 'affirmative action' policy. Apart from the general disclaimer that women and individuals of minority origin were particularly invited to apply, immigrant origin was not mentioned in job advertisements.

When asking my interviewees about the criteria for selecting individual team members, I could sense their insecurity about the legitimacy of the relevance of ethnic minority origin in the recruitment of some team members. While multicultural policies clearly supported the recognition of ethno-cultural origin, diversity policies were unclear whether such specific differences should still be focused on. If diversity officers are expected to reflect the 'diversity' of the population, is the recruitment of officials of ethnic minority origin an adequate approach? This insecurity whether boiling diversity down to ethnic minority origin was possibly a misunderstanding of the diversity policy became particularly evident in my interviews with one official. With her I discussed the recruitment of Amina, a female diversity officer of Moroccan origin. When I asked about the reasons for selecting Amina, the officer first mentioned Amina's entrepreneurship and proactive attitude as the central criteria, qualities which can be categorised as managerial. A bit later in the interview she explained the selection criteria for another diversity officer, whom they hired just after Amina had joined the team.

When we recruited him we didn't have the pressure anymore to have someone of ethno-cultural origin, because we had Amina already. All that we would get now was bonus and it was not really the reason anymore to hire him. (Interview C14)

In this statement, the interviewee indirectly concedes that Amina's Moroccan origin had played a role, contradicting what she had said earlier about the sole relevance of Amina's managerial qualities. This contradictory reasoning reveals some of the insecurity about using migrant origin or 'ethno-cultural origin' as criteria when selecting new officials. Yet, the fact that they had acknowledged Amina's ethnic minority origin and considered whether it was needed for the team (or not) shows that recruiters nonetheless

perceived ethnic origin as a potential asset. Having worked as a shop manager before, Amina's professional background had not pre-destined her to becoming a diversity officer, but the combination of her experience in managing a large team and her ethnic origin was apparently an interesting package for her recruiters.

Overall, I found expectations of both managerial qualities and of migrant or ethno-cultural origin in the recruitment of diversity officers. By investigating the self-representation of diversity officers of migrant origin in the following section, we can probe further into the influence of managerialism and an emphasis of individual needs within diversity departments, this time from the perspective of the diversity officers themselves.

### **Authenticity, skill-oriented individualism, managerialism and neutrality as different self-representations of diversity officers**

Managerialism and a policy change to diversity can be expected to also have repercussions on the self-representations of officials. In interviews with individual diversity officers, I asked about their motivations for the job, their conception of their role and position, and how they had experienced their recruitment. I identify four different types of self-representation of diversity officers, which reflect different interpretations of the profiles of diversity officers in the context of a policy change and ongoing transformations of public administrations.

Typologies of officials are common in the literature. Watkins-Hayes' typology (2009) aimed to show the effects of welfare reforms and larger institutional changes in public administrations in the profile of welfare officers. She distinguished between efficiency engineers, social workers and bureaucratic survivalists. Making an argument about the complexity of motivations of public officials, Le Grand analytically differentiated between self-interest and altruism of welfare professionals (Le Grand 2003). Paquet's discussion focuses on bureaucrats as immigration policy-makers, and her case is thus most similar to the case of diversity departments I present here. She identifies three types, the classical entrepreneurs, the policy puzzlers and the diagonal innovators (Paquet 2015). Her typology focuses on the ways in which these public officials inform immigrant policies. None of the existing typologies seems fitting for the purpose of this analysis, which aims to demonstrate the impact of changing immigrant policies and changing professional standards on the self-representation of public officials. I find four types of officials. There is the 'authentic official', who draws on his or her immigrant or ethno-cultural origin, gender, sexual orientation or disability or on experiences of discrimination as a key resource for his or her role as public official. The second type of official is the 'skill-oriented individualist', who emphasises his or her individual competences and career aspirations and refrains from any reference to his/her belonging or experiences based on belonging to one or the other collective group. As a third type, I identify the 'competent manager', who is adopting the expectation of managerialism. And the fourth type is the 'neutral official', who strongly emphasises the importance of neutrality and thus resists pressures to become 'a competent manager'. This alternative typology illustrates the different responses to managerialism and diversity policy, including alignment and resistance to as well as a lack of understanding of these changes (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Changes and expected transformations of public officials' self-representation.

	Traditional profile	'Modern' profile
Immigrant policy	The authentic Official	The skill-oriented individualist official
Managerialism	The neutral official	The competent manager

### *The authentic public official*

The first type refers to officials who consciously emphasised their minority origin as part of their self-representation, describing it as an important and relevant resource for their job. Especially immigrant origin was mobilised by some officers as a relevant aspect of their profile. A few female officials also ascribed relevance to their gender, arguing that as a woman they were better positioned for developing and implementing measures aimed to address the situation of women within diversity departments. By contrast, very few officials commented on the relevance of their sexual orientation or (dis-)abilities and overall, the recruitment and self-representation of diversity officers reflects an emphasis on immigration-related differences.

These officers often assigned importance to having already expertise on a specific issue through personal experiences (IP A4 52). Some diversity officers argued that outsiders might be unable to gain access and be accepted by specific minority groups (e.g. IP A1 356). Having networks and contacts in a specific minority group was important to diversity officers (IP A2 26, IP A12 24, IP C13 52), and they argued this was particularly so when issues within that group arose in the city (IP A11 25). Sevil was one of the officers who strongly emphasised her personal experiences based on her migrant origin as central in their job. Her story started out from the struggle she had experienced as an adolescent with the conservative upbringing by her parents and the close-knit social network and the resulting social control. She told me how growing up as a daughter in a conservative Turkish guest-worker family in a small Dutch village had shaped her. Challenging the pre-conceived ideas of her parents about her appearance and life plans was a central theme in Sevil's narrative, but she also emphasised that she at the same time wanted to retain her parents' respect and love. Her adolescence was informed by rebelling against and rejecting some of her parents' ideas about appropriate behaviour, while adopting others. She represented herself as a young educated woman who had moved to the capital city after her studies, who had a good job and who was easy-going and extrovert. She made it clear that negotiating what she interpreted as her parents' culture and guest-worker origin was an important resource for her self-positioning as diversity officer.

Some officers also drew on their immigrant origin, as they had experienced discrimination or marginalisation in the past and they said that their own social mobility has inspired them to empower others. They saw their work as public officials as a way of giving 'something back to society'. We find an emphasis on the empowerment of others in reaction to her own experiences of racism in Amina's narrative:

I am myself from Moroccan background and I myself have felt a lot of racism and discrimination on the job market. And I am now working on personnel policy. So you try to have a policy through which people get equal opportunities.

Several officers like Amina saw their immigrant origin as a resource, because their own experience of inequalities allowed them to have a more immediate understanding of other immigrant's unequal position.

### *The skill-oriented individualist*

Sevil and Amina were not alone in drawing on their experience of having grown up in an immigrant family and as a minority in society as a resource but not all officers did. Some of them did not see their minority origin as relevant for their capacity to do the job or did not want to become reduced to it. Renaldo, who self-identified as gay and as belonging to an ethnic minority, for example, had many doubts about taking up a job in which he would work specifically on the acceptance of homosexuality and on a programme targeted at the ethnic minority he identified with. Despite being clearly interested in the topic and being, in his private life, involved in minority-group networks and forms of political mobilisation, he did not want his job as diversity officer to be reduced to working on issues related to themes he had a personal stake in. Like some other diversity officers, he was concerned about the blurring of boundaries between professional and private life in this job and afraid of becoming tied to the role of representing specific minority groups.

While for Sevil her personal experiences were a resource she wanted to draw on, Renaldo was unwilling to adopt a profile as immigrant gay male officer. In her story, Sevil happily emphasised her personal experiences as basis for her professional practice, while in Renaldo's self-representation more weight came to lie on his self-representation as an individualist, who has completed university degree and who has collected relevant work experience for carrying out this job. We thus see competing interpretations of the policy change to diversity in the self-representations of diversity officers – one understanding it as relying on immigrant minority knowledge and a struggle against inequality, the other resisting the reduction of diversity to ethnic minority knowledge and emphasising education and work experience.

Fatima was another official who was rather weary of incorporating her own immigrant origin into her profile as public official. Fatima, who holds a university degree in the social sciences and whose parents migrated from Morocco, saw her personal experiences as a child of immigrants as a resource for the job. However, experiencing Fatima's self-representation and habitus in the office, I felt that she was particularly concerned about being reduced to her migrant origin and gender. She wanted to be seen as an individual with relevant skills, in the first place, and not as a woman of Moroccan origin. In the interview she recalled how her own migrant origin was referred to and drawn upon very quickly when some incidents happened with youngsters that were reported to have 'Moroccan origin', and she rejected such an ascription of belonging to that group. She contested the relevance of her migrant origin for doing her job well and she addressed the danger of having one's capacities reduced to migrant origin by one's professional environment. Discussing whether it was appropriate to openly identify her own ethnic origin and argue from that position at a public event, Sevil saw no problem in openly declaring herself as a woman of Turkish origin. She wanted to take sides based on her personal experiences when participating in public debates in her function as diversity officer. Fatima, by contrast, contested that this was 'professional'. She wanted to draw on her personal

experiences when she felt it was suitable, but she did not want to be seen as a representative of or as responsible for that group.

### *The competent manager*

Next to his emphasis of his individualist skills, Renaldo in his self-representation also strongly focused on being an entrepreneur, someone who successfully manages projects and who is well versed in research development. His self-representation thus clearly reflected both a change towards diversity policy and towards managerialism. The third type of official, which I call the competent manager, was typically guided by the aim to perform changes and pursue his/her individual career within the local administration. Many interviewees acknowledged a broader transformation of the profile of the public official, which would move from authority to partner and facilitator (Interviews C7 306, A1 630, B2 30, A4 147, A9 124, A7 123, C3 137, B5 135). In each of the cities I found some officials who most clearly took on the self-representation as a change manager and entrepreneur. Their colleagues were sometimes critical towards the fact that these officials were strongly oriented towards making a career within the municipal organisation and they expected that they would quickly move on from working in the diversity unit to other positions.

### *The neutral public official*

Fatima, who shared the individualist, skill-oriented self-representation with Renaldo, differed quite substantially in her response to the pressure of managerialism. In her self-representation she did not refer to any managerial capacities, instead she seemed to allocate much weight to professional standards and the ethic of being a public official. In her view neutrality was an important professional standard of an official. She made that very clear in a debate with Sevil, who – as explained above – explicitly drew on her migrant and ethno-cultural origin in her self-representation. In Fatima's view this was illegitimate, as a public official would have to safeguard his representation as unbiased towards different parts of the population (Table 4).

## Discussion

This article investigated how ideas about difference as transported in diversity policies contribute to a changing profile of public officials. Having analysed the recruitment and the different self-representations of local diversity officers, my findings are threefold:

Despite the introduction of diversity policies, some diversity officers continue to conceive knowledge about particular minority groups and experiences of inequality as important elements of their profile. This is surprising, as diversity policies claimed to move away

**Table 4.** Patterns of self-representation.

	Authentic	Skill-oriented individualist	Neutral	Competent Manager
Renaldo		x		x
Sevil	x			x
Fatima		x	x	

from the multicultural recognition of minority specificities and towards a more general approach to difference. However, many public officials, as well as their recruiters considered immigrant origin or 'ethno-cultural difference' as a relevant aspect. This shows that the official policy dictum is not simply taken over and that some officials either misunderstand diversity policies or consciously resist them. Such a resistance points to deeply held beliefs and convictions among bureaucrats about the importance of recognising 'immigrant origin' or 'ethno-cultural difference', that apparently are difficult to replace with the introduction of new policies.

I also find no unanimous adoption of a managerial profile within diversity departments, which I had expected due to the trend to move away from more traditional bureaucracies and the prevalence of NPM. Although a range of managerial capacities were explicitly sought for in recruitment procedures and some officers themselves emphasised their entrepreneurial profile, reflecting an endorsement of the values of NPM, not all officials were happily adopting the profile of competent manager. Some officials instead mobilised more traditional Weberian values of the bureaucracy, upholding a commitment to an ethic of neutrality. Based on this finding an often assumed clearcut transformation of bureaucracy in the spirit of NPM cannot be confirmed.

Given that managerialism and diversity were two policy trends that are often associated with neoliberalism, I expected individuals to either take a more traditional stance (adopting the ideas of multicultural policies and of traditional bureaucratic values) or a more modernist, neoliberal stance (adopting the ideas of diversity policies and a managerial profile). However, as was shown in my analysis, only some officers embraced both managerialism and diversity discourses and thus consistently adopted policies that are often associated with neoliberalism, as exemplified by Renaldo in my case study. While some officials incorporated a self-representation of a skill-oriented individual, they at the same time rejected representing themselves as a competent manager, as was the case with Fatima. Others endorsed the profile of a competent manager, but held on to knowledge about particular ethnic groups or awareness of inequalities as important basis for their work, as was the case with Sevil. We thus do not find an unequivocal promotion of neoliberalism through NPM and diversity discourses. This finding falsifies my initial hypothesis that diversity and managerialism go well together due to their association with neoliberal thinking. There can be several reasons for this. Public officials may not understand diversity management and/or NPM discourses as promoting a neoliberal agenda and the assumption that diversity policies are clearly connected with NPM because of their association with neoliberalism is wrong. Or there is a more selective adoption of neoliberalism and welfarism for different policy fields and issues. For instance, official may promote neoliberal values for the re-organisation of bureaucracy, but not for responding to migration and diversification. In this case, the assumption that individuals generally follow one or the other normative framework would need to be questioned.

Overall, this study does not confirm a smooth and encompassing transition from more multicultural policies to diversity policies and from welfarism to a neoliberal logic. Analysing the recruitment and self-representation of officials reveals that there is a mismatch between official discourses and the practices of public officials. This gap hints towards the existence of a creative space within bureaucracies for interpreting new policies in different ways than originally conceived and thus the potential of bureaucrats to negotiate and re-define the policies that have been decided by policy-makers. According to these findings,



bureaucracies are not ‘merely’ implementing, but they can actively shape the meaning of ‘diversity policies’.

The findings of misunderstanding of and resistance against diversity policies also have implications for debates about the shift away from multiculturalism and the significance of diversity policies. Misunderstanding of or resistance against policies usually indicates two failures, namely that of explaining something well and convincing that it is the right thing. If diversity officials, despite their predestination, do not unequivocally endorse diversity policies, then this casts doubt about the degree to which diversity discourses are lucid and the degree to which they are compelling. This brings me back to the finding that diversity is not necessarily associated with NPM and an ideology of neoliberalism. Whether or not diversity discourses are perceived as lucid and as compelling may depend on an unambiguous connection of diversity discourses with either an ideology of welfarism or neoliberalism. The ambiguity of diversity on this fundamental issue in my study revealed disorientation among bureaucrats, a finding that perhaps is of broader relevance when discussing the scope of diversity discourses.

## Conclusion

This article investigated how the introduction of diversity policy impacted on the recruitment of public officials and the self-representations of public officials in newly created local diversity departments. Relating a shift from multicultural to diversity policy to broader transformations from welfarism to neoliberalism, I analysed whether diversity officers embrace diversity policy and whether they associate it with other neoliberal policies in their self-representations as public officials and in the recruitment of fellow diversity officers. I argued that the interstices between discourse and practice in public organisations and in bureaucrats’ behaviour, though rarely explored, are relevant for gaining a more nuanced understanding of the relevance of bureaucratic organisations in interpreting these new policies and for assessing the limitations and potential of diversity discourses.

As my study shows, bureaucrats have considerable convictions they hold on to, which illustrates their individuality and agency. Therefore, studies of official policies fall short of understanding the important ensuing negotiation process within local bureaucracies and of individual bureaucrats for interpreting and thus bringing such policies to fruition. Bureaucratic organisations provide a testing ground for new discourses and policies and thus a fertile soil for contestation. This rebellious potential of bureaucracies has so far been understudied and challenges the monolithic image of the state that informs much debates of immigrant governance. Such contestation may also become more common as officials are increasingly transformed from neutral bureaucrats into entrepreneurial managers.

Identifying misunderstanding of and resistance against diversity policies, I furthermore identified two qualifiers that are important to assess the significance of diversity discourses: the degree to which these discourses are clearly outlined and the degree to which they are compelling. In this study their ambiguity seems to present a weakness: clearly associating diversity discourses with welfarism or neoliberalism is a prerequisite for preventing disorientation and for allowing the strategic use of or resistance against diversity discourses of those who commit to or challenge its attendant ideas and norms.

## Notes

1. 'Bureau voor diversiteitsmanagement'; I conducted several interviews also with the department focused on the external dimension, but the latter department was where I carried out my fieldwork and thus spent most time at.
2. 'Afdeling voor diversiteit en integratie'; It was later renamed as 'Afdeling Burgerschap en diversiteit'.
3. Gender, sexual orientation or disability were hardly mentioned as relevant, even though several of the diversity officers had been activists for women's issues before or were openly gay or had a disability.

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