



City of Tilburg

Intercultural profile

Background¹

Tilburg is a city of 206.000 inhabitants in the southern Dutch province of Brabant, and has celebrated its 200th anniversary in 2009. It developed as a centre of woollen textile production and trade though this largely disappeared by the 1970s. The city has since reinvented itself as a prosperous centre for logistics, light engineering, healthcare and education (with over 30,000 students). The city council has a reputation for innovation and efficiency, with the 'Tilburg Model' having been adopted by many municipalities internationally. Historically the city has stood upon two important boundaries in the Netherlands: that between land below sea level and 'dry land'; and also the division between areas of Catholic and Protestant faith. Tilburg was a predominantly Catholic city, although like the Netherlands as a whole it is now mainly secular. 14,3% of the population is of non-Western origin (in total 23% non Dutch origin) with the largest ethnic groups originating from Turkey, Morocco, Somalia, Surinam and the Dutch Antilles.

Diversity policy in the Netherlands

Before assessing the intercultural profile of Tilburg it is important to establish some background factors about history, culture and political economy in the Netherlands, particularly because over the last few years the country has undergone a period of debate and reappraisal in response to globalisation and migration, which has been extremely turbulent, even by comparison to other European neighbours. Even in his introduction to the CoE inspection team at the 2009 visit, Tilburg's then Alderman Gon Mevis explained that he was rather typical of Dutch people, in that his outlook on life had been questioned and disturbed by three personalities that have dominated the national scene in recent years: the assassinated politician Pim Fortuyn, the murdered film-maker Theo van Gogh and the controversial anti-Muslim politician Geert Wilders.

In regards to migration and diversity, the Netherlands has experienced sharp policy and public opinion shifts in living memory. For many years after the World War the Netherlands considered itself a rather impoverished and over-crowded nation and emigration rather than immigration was the main factor. From the 1960s it began to take migrants from the former colonies in the East Indies and West Indies as well as 'guest workers' from Turkey and Morocco. The state maintained a mixed nationality policy based largely upon the *ius sanguineus* 'nationality by blood' principle, whilst

¹ This report is based upon the visit of the CoE expert team on 29-30 January 2009 and 24 May 2011, comprising Robert Palmer, Irena Guidikova, Daniel de Torres, Thijs Malmberg and Phil Wood.

also granting citizenship to Indonesian ex-colonials who were expected to assimilate. In the 1980s the Netherlands switched to a *ius soli* principle, granting citizenship by place of birth, and adopted a policy of multiculturalism along similar lines to the UK by introducing robust anti-discrimination legislation and the recognition of cultural diversity.

This period was also characterised by that most Dutch of qualities – tolerance – notable, for example, by the universal right of individuals and groups to establish schools which meet their cultural, linguistic and faith requirements, and the widespread growth in new places of worship, particularly mosques.

Since the turn of the century however Dutch tolerance has been tested to the limits in a tempestuous process of national soul-searching. Firstly Pim Fortuyn brought out into the public sphere accusations that the Dutch were being overwhelmed by ‘political correctness’, which was blinding them to an undermining of their treasured tolerant society by intolerant forces within migrant communities. This communal fear was encapsulated in one act when the rabble-rousing film-maker Theo van Gogh was stabbed to death by a Moroccan Muslim extremist in 2004. Since then the public mood has hardened considerably and politicians have sought to reflect this in a tough new regime for people of migrant background. Some elements of which might be portrayed as punitive or assimilationist whilst others are more proactively concerned with encouraging greater intercultural engagement.

The vehemence of the Dutch reaction should be understood by reference to the history of the nation. The Netherlands derives from people under constant threat from the sea. Living in polders, people looked not to the state for protection but to each other. This ‘polder mentality’ has built inter-dependence, equality, suspicion of authority and the belief that decisions arise not from a central power but rational debate and compromise and consensus. This produced the *Gedoogcultuur*, or tolerance of those who behave, or believe, differently. In the past this came to be expressed through *Verzuiling* or ‘pillarization’ whereby Dutch society was portioned up into Catholic, Protestant and Secular worlds in which individuals would choose schools, workplaces, shops, and leisure activity provided only by institutions of their own beliefs. Although there was strictly enforced equality between pillars, it is possible to understand how in a condition of different power relations the Dutch Reformed Church was able to sanction apartheid in South Africa. Whilst pillarization has now declined there has remained the presumption that any group has the right to separate facilities and this is embedded in the pattern of single faith schools in the Netherlands. This became even more pronounced as the Netherlands became more religiously diverse.

The decline of the pillar system has created a vacuum that, in other polities, one might imagine the government would have filled. However, the Dutch suspicion of the state remains and so the growing demand for public services is met by a complex web of professional agencies such as professional and trade associations, labour unions and local authorities. Some complain that this has created its own distinctly Dutch phenomenon of the extreme professionalization of what were formerly private and voluntary functions, creating a vast, expensive and sometimes unaccountable layer of service providers responding to public and political demand with ever more projects and initiatives. However this seems to have done little to quell Dutch fears of the emergence of an underclass which is becoming detached from participating in society through poor education and

structural unemployment. Although ethnic minorities make up a proportion of this group, it is considered by many not to be an issue of ethnicity but of economics or class.

What also remains, despite the many policy shifts outlined above, is the Dutch concept of the *allochtoon*. Meaning 'deriving from another country' it is widely used in the Netherlands to designate anyone who cannot trace their origins to ethnic Dutch stock, regardless of however many generations their forebears may have lived in the country. Some would argue that the failure of a new terminology to enter the language represents a failure on the part of the Dutch to properly come to terms with themselves as a diverse post-migration society.

It is against this dynamic policy and cultural backdrop that we should consider the intercultural profile of the city of Tilburg.

Citizenship

The public mood has been reflected in some significant new pieces of legislation in the Netherlands. The Social Assistance Act is designed to encourage more people off welfare benefits and into work based upon a profound belief that social and economic participation is the key to citizenship. The Civil Integration Act sets a requirement on local authorities to ensure local people have the basic tools with which to be active participants, and to encourage them to become more interactive. People of migrant background are required to take the *inburgering examen* – an extensive test of their knowledge of Dutch language and society. The course of study may take a year or more and all newcomers are required to pass it within a maximum 5 years or they will find their welfare benefits are reduced. It is said that this, amongst other factors, has ensured that the Netherlands (almost alone in Western Europe) has seen a reduction in its ethnic minority population over recent years. It should be noted that the right to vote in Dutch elections is available to anyone with more than 5 years residency, irrespective of their status regarding the test.

In Tilburg the city council is taking an active role in fulfilling the legislation. The department for integration has been enlarged and now takes responsibility for encouraging people to take the test. It has been set a target of achieving 1880 passes between 2007 and 2009 and finds this target hard to achieve.

Perhaps to balance the rather stern demeanour of the national legislation, the city of Tilburg has enacted its own local legislation to improve intercultural relations in the city. This is not in response to any specific incidence of inter-communal tension but rather a wish to address a perceived growing level of indifference which, if allowed to develop, might one day provide fertile ground for extremists to foster tension. In particular, it has been felt that too little has been done on the part of ethnic Dutch people to be expressly open and welcoming to others. A report to the council entitled "Not with Our Backs to Each Other" was introduced in 2005 and has triggered several important initiatives.

For example a group of young Antillean women wished to express their pride for the town through sharing their skills in carnival-making. This received support from the council and the Mundial organisation and has now grown into the T Parade, a big annual carnival in which many groups now interact.

Also during Ramadan many Muslim groups have now taken the responsibility to show and explain their culture to other citizens. In 2008 600 Muslim families invited an ethnic Dutch family to share a meal, 450 people were fed a meal in the stadium and Muslims cooked meals in old people's homes. One Muslim woman was moved to comment that after living in Tilburg for 35 years she finally felt welcome.

The current approach to diversity management

According to the previous Alderman Mevis, Dutch authorities have become overly focused upon the individual, ie encouraging people to take individual responsibility for becoming an active contributing member of Dutch society or building trust. This has perhaps led to them turning a blind eye to matters of culture and community and there is now a need to redress the balance a little. Whilst minorities are being forced to integrate there needs to be an equivalent effort to get Dutch people to be more culturally-literate and open to their neighbours of different background.

According to Alderman de Vries following the 4 March 2010 local election, Tilburg has embarked on a fundamental review of its policies and practices. It believes that the size and influence of the state (local and national) has become too great and that, for reasons of both policy and of pragmatism (in response to the financial crisis and shrinking public sector budgets), the trend must be reversed. Whilst public sector intervention may have been initiated with the best of intentions, it has become an impediment and disincentive to citizen action, creating a dependency culture in many organisations and individuals. Another issue is the over-focusing of policies on migrants rather than on the wider community and social cohesion.

Community-based results accountability work in the 5 impulse neighborhoods has allowed Tilburg to focus on the true value of the many projects which it invests in, and many of these have proven to be much less effective than they were thought to be. The economic buoyancy of the recent past meant it was often easier to allow ineffective projects to continue than to close them. But in the current climate Tilburg will submerge beneath its commitments unless it takes tougher measures to rationalise them.

One of the negative side-effects of state intervention in ngo's and community projects is that it imposes a bureaucracy of accountability and a demand for professionalization on the recipient. This can stifle the very motivations that gave the project birth and can drive out the originators. They may then be replaced by people more interested in the process, salary or status than in the original passions for social change and public service. The system has created many winners but also far too many losers. This is one of the explanations of why so many people now feel alienated from the mainstream political processes and are attracted to populist messages.

To refocus its efforts as a local authority, Tilburg is to align all of its activities towards the things that it believes really matter to ordinary people. These, it has resolved, are Work, Poverty and Education. It may decide to broaden its goals further with two additional themes: Health and Community

There will be a transitional period of three years in which resources will be redirected towards activities which directly impact upon these three priorities and, as a consequence, many peripheral activities will have their funding withdrawn. The city has set itself targets to be achieved by 2014, and a strategy of how it aims to get there with a diminishing budget.

Politicians expect civil servants to make a radical adjustment to their own attitudes. They must learn 'the art of letting go' and must also embrace risk. Failure will be tolerated if it is seen to have been in

pursuit of innovation and that its lessons are learned, but the defence of vested interests and comfort zones will not be tolerated.

It will also cease thinking about its citizens as members of groups or communities of interest and will treat them all as individuals. The one existing policy priority of the city which will be maintained is the *Wijkimpuls* or 'impulse neighbourhoods' programme. Five districts will be targeted with extra resources to tackle deep-seated social and economic problems.

Tilburg feels confident that it can make this transition. After a period of political instability, the outcome of the last elections has created a political mix in the Council which should make it easier to achieve a consensus around policy. In particular the LPF (Lijst Pim Fortuyn), which played a disruptive role, no longer holds a seat.

Implications for diversity policy

Firstly, the work on diversity and support for minority and migrant groups will be integrated into all services of Tilburg, rather than be focused within one department. There is an expectation that each municipal department will take into account the specific integration needs and include these in their planning and budgeting. This assumes a horizontal or transversal approach to integration.

Second, the focus of the city's intercultural work will be in coming year(s) on one of the impulse neighbourhoods, Stokhasselt a large residential area within the Nieuw-Noord district, with 9,900 dwellings and 23,800 residents. If this is a success the city may extend the approach to other areas.

Third there is going to be a gradual withdrawing of funding from many organisations and projects across the whole city which represent the interests of, or deliver services to, single ethnicity groups, unless they can demonstrate they make a very direct impact upon the Council's priorities.

Fourth, there is to be a gradual phasing out of certain civic integration measures, specifically the *Inburgering* examination for migrants. The subsidy which Tilburg and other Dutch cities received from national government to administer will cease in 2013. Although the examination will still be retained it will be the responsibility of individuals to finance it themselves, if possible through a social loan. However the extensive administrative machinery for integration (under the control of Gijs Bax), which Tilburg had assembled, will be dismantled and resources distributed elsewhere.

The city's new priorities up to 2014 in regard to immigrants will be as follow:

- Fewer immigrant students leaving school without basic qualifications.
- At least 75% of people who follow the *Inburgering* course passing the exam.
- The number of immigrant and unemployed claimants falling.
- Fewer immigrants living in poverty.
- Immigrants are more socially active.
- Fewer young immigrants suspected of crimes.

Anything which does not directly contribute to these targets will be considered of lower priority and will therefore struggle to attract financial support. Whilst this will clearly apply to many of the multiculturalist, single ethnicity, projects it may well impact upon those activities concerned with interculturality. It is expected there will be diminishing resources for the *we zijn allemaal Tilburgers* (We are all Tilburgers) promotional campaign which was launched in 2005. However the flagships as T Parade will be an activity of the bureau for events in the city and the Huis van de Wereld will be a partner in the new policy on civil integration.

We visited Huis van de Wereld. It is located in large premises at a prominent point in a main street and has become a symbol of the city's commitment to interculturality and the welcoming of strangers. When the CoE team first visited Tilburg it was told of plans to relocate the Huis in new premises on a prestigious new development site to the north of the railway station. The financial crisis means that such ambitious plans are now shelved indefinitely. Although the Huis is now (2013) being expected to leave its current premises and distribute the activities over several premises in order to reduce its running costs they still will play an important role in the new civil integration policy.

Education

The Dutch system of schooling is quite distinctive. In strict terms, all Dutch schools are private having been established as the initiative of private individuals or groups rather than the state. Of course the state provides finance for most but control of staffing and curriculum is jealously guarded at the local level. Often several schools in a district will be managed by a board of governors, mainly comprising professionals.

The Groenwoud School is typical of several that serve multiethnic parts of the city. It is pleasant and well resourced although pupil-teacher ratios of 30 seem quite high for a school where Dutch is not always the language spoken by pupils at home. The head teacher and staff work very hard to ensure all parents receive at least one home visit each year.

It is noticeable that the school does not display anything that reflects the diverse cultural origins of the children. The headteacher explains that this is deliberate. The policy of the school is that all the children are Dutch and that it would confuse them to remind them of a past culture. It is also notable that few teachers in Tilburg are of migrant background. It is explained that this is because teaching is not considered a desirable profession by minorities. It would be interesting to know whether the city is prepared to accept this or whether it might see some value in attempting to change this perception.

At present the debate that is occupying the educational milieu in Tilburg is around findings that Muslim faith schools seems to be delivering lower performance outcomes than other schools. Some would like to see the state intervene to rectify this, but it would present a challenge to the Dutch tradition that anyone is free to establish a private school according to their beliefs.

The team visited the Rainbow Community School, known (with rather brutal perspicuity) in the Netherlands as a Zwarte School, meaning that more than 70% of its roll are children of a visible ethnic minority. Stokkasselt is the home to about 70 nationalities and most are represented amongst its 200 pupils. The district was until the early 1990s a mainly white working class district but it was not a popular location and house rents were low. This attracted a large contingent of Somalis and since then it has become increasingly diverse, with significant groups from Turkey, Morocco and Sierra Leone. This has been accompanied by white flight to other parts of the city.

However, Rainbow dispels the stereotype that such schools are of low quality. On the contrary it was recently inspected and declared to be of an excellent standard and one of the best performing schools in the south of the Netherlands. This clearly derives from strong leadership and a highly motivated staff team. Because the school receives extra subsidy in recognition of its multi-lingual

intake, it is able to offer a teacher/pupil ratio of about 1:10, which evidently produces results. So the headteacher prefers to call the school 'colourful and excellent' rather than the derogatory 'black'.

Amongst the school's principles are: the parent as partner; learning to learn together; and a revenue-focused approach (which we understood to mean that education is geared towards the child becoming a future contributor towards the welfare of themselves, their families and the community). In effect this is a teaching establishment which puts the student at the centre of a process which also includes the family and the wider community, and accepts that the child's education cannot be understood without reference to the wider influences upon it.

The Neighbourhood Impulse brings great opportunities for the school, not least in the impending move to new premises. The plan is to house Rainbow and another, all Muslim, school under the same roof. It had originally been hoped that the two schools might integrate their curricular activity but compromise has not been possible so they will exist side by side and share some common facilities such as a gymnasium and playground. Apparently the growth in Muslim schools in Tilburg has now reversed following a series of bad inspectorate reports on the quality of teaching, and many Muslim parents are now turning back to mainstream schools.

There are frequent tensions and violence around the school but not within it, and the headteacher is relieved that none of this is ethnically-based.

It is notable that the first time the team visited Tilburg they were taken to an ethnically-mixed school in Groenewoud district. Here the headteacher made it a matter of policy not to display any material or to teach anything which acknowledged the countries of origin of the children. This was regarded as an impediment to integration in Dutch society. The headteacher of Rainbow took a very different view and believed it was essential for kids to retain their knowledge of parental culture as part of a rounded education.

Housing and neighbourhoods

Most Tilburg residents and particularly *allochtoon* live in large housing estates on the edge of the city, combining a mix of social and private properties. The Stokhasselt district is typical of this with serried ranks of modernist tenements clustered around a central commercial and social area surrounded by ample green space. This is a familiar northern European scenario but one which seemed rather stark and unsociable to a Spanish member of the team – and doubtless feels the same to many of the migrants who make up 58% of the local population. Tilburg does not have areas in which only one ethnic group is concentrated. In the past it has taken action to break up a concentration of Antillean residents in one area but in general the city's method is to take active steps to avoid the concentration of people by economic status, age and housing tenure, ie to avoid areas of high youth unemployment developing.

Many have been designated as 'impulse neighbourhoods' and have received large injections of investment to upgrade the quality of housing and infrastructure. Public authorities take steps to involve residents in local decision-making. The 'Behind the Front Door' Project seeks the views of residents, who might otherwise be invisible, on their needs and perceptions of life in the area. However, there is often reluctance on the part of many to being drawn into the professionalized web of service provision. In such cases it might be better to introduce a voluntary and community based service such as the *Stadtteilmütter* in Berlin Neukölln, but the professional systems do not seem to easily allow the space for more informal provision.

One example of a project where professionals and community volunteers mix is *De Ketting* (The Chain) Mothers's Centre in the Groenwoud district. With 5 staff and 30 volunteers they help the city council make contact with isolated women and help them to succeed with the inburgering examen.

There are nevertheless some examples of emergent initiatives by migrant communities. The *Droomhuis* (Dream House) is a converted house in Stokhasselt set up by local women of diverse origin where they can feel safe and intimate. They felt there were very few places in Tilburg where people of different backgrounds can spontaneously mix. Even though the area had a lot of green space it was rarely used by locals as there was nothing for children to play on. They all said they would like to see the area soften its harsh exterior and express more outwardly the cultural diversity of the residents. Some thought the local schools should take a lead here.

The Pucciniflat is a large multi-storey block of deck-access apartments which has acquired a bad reputation – even by the standards of Stokhasselt. Its population is transient and unstable and it has been used as a place to deposit families with multiple social, economic and health problems. The owner of the property *WonenBreborg* housing corporation has gone into partnership with *Stichting Experimenten Werkgelegenheid* (SEW) (the Foundation for Experimentation in Employment) for an innovative new project to rehabilitate the place. In parallel with investment in the physical fabric there will be a concerted attempt to engage with the residents and give them some control over improving their circumstances. A frontline worker will take up permanent residence in the block and gradually make contact with all residents to bring them out of isolation. Many of the households are single migrant mothers with many children, some of whom are delinquent and school truants. The project does not set over-ambitious targets and is realistic about what can be achieved. It would be considered a breakthrough if, after a year, several of the mothers had the confidence to sit in the adjacent playground and supervise their own kids and those of others.

This will be long and painstaking work but it is seen as preferable to the other alternatives: to abandon the district to becoming a lawless ghetto, or of wrapping the residents in a welfare blanket which runs their lives but completely disempowers them.

The Ypelaer Community Centre is at the heart of the neighbourhood and will be a base for many of the activities planned for the district and for the devolution of officials and services from the centre.

Civil Society and Business

There is clearly a debate throughout the Netherlands about the relationship between the public and the private and about the legitimate extent of the professional as against the voluntary. Some argue that the bureaucracies have become too large and unwieldy and are becoming an impediment to progress. It was put to us, metaphorically, that if a house in the Netherlands develops a leak in the roof, rather than repair the problem (or let the householder repair it for himself) the professionals will demolish the house and build a new one. In parts of the system professional agencies maintain their power base by firstly identifying social malaise, and then giving money to the public so that they can purchase from them a solution to a problem they might not even have realised they had. If true this is demand-side economics in the extreme and is currently sustainable not because it is related to results or outcomes, but because the Dutch economy is strong enough to maintain it, and the tradition of decision by compromise prevents radical change.

Whether it is sustainable in a global economic recession remains to be seen but in the meantime it is not helpful to the emergence of new forms of civil society, particularly amongst new communities.

One notable exception to this rule in Tilburg is the *Mondial* organisation. Originally founded in 1987 as an overseas development charity with connections to Oxfam and the World Health Organisation it developed expertise in world music and staged an annual festival in Tilburg. The Festival eventually attracted 250,000 becoming so large it present a health and safety hazard so was scaled down. *Mondial* now acts on behalf of many artists around the world as a promoter, manager and tour organiser. However, it has recognised that ‘the world has now come to Tilburg’ and so devotes much of its energies to supporting talent and community initiative in local communities. It has created ‘breeding grounds’ where talented kids from neighbourhoods can begin the process of getting access to the Fontys University; and has created a ‘mix zone’ where touring artists from around the world can interact with local youth.

Also developing around the theme of youth culture is the *Hall of Fame*. A redundant factory has been occupied by a multi ethnic group of young people who have transformed it into an impressive haven for music, skating, graffiti and other forms of alternative culture, independent of ‘the professionals’.

A third example of independent civil society action is the *Stichting Experimenten Werkgelegenheid* (SEW), or Foundation for Experimental Employment. It has established training and workshops for women of diverse background and some of these have now established their own businesses. It has also moved into the field of health, arguing that the overbearing but culturally-illiterate nature of the professional health services are not sensitive to the needs of ethnic minority women.

In general it appears that whilst many people of minority background turn to small business as a the most viable form of employment, few have progressed out of specific ‘ethnic economies’ to become major players in the economy as a whole.

Media

The most widely-read local newspaper is the *Brabants Dagblad* with a local supplement Tilburg Plus with a circulation of 130,000. In common with newspapers in many other countries, local Dutch journals are facing very difficult times from competing media and changing reading habits. Journalists at *Brabants Dagblad* concede that they face justifiable criticism that up until 9/11 and the van Gogh incident they barely covered issues of cultural diversity at all. Now, on the other hand there is a public appetite for stories which illustrate the problems of multiculturalism, for example that 41% of boys of Moroccan heritage have a police record.

The paper has no intelligence on how many people of migrant background regularly read it – though it suspects it is small. Nor does it have minority journalists, which makes it difficult to cover stories from within minority communities as white journalist are often met with suspicion. They accept that this, plus the widespread use of foreign satellite TV means that most minorities exist in a completely different mediascape from the Dutch majority.

Meanwhile, there is concern that the voice of Dutch TV and particularly radio is becoming increasingly harsh, populist and intolerant of diversity.

Conclusions

Tilburg, like much of the rest of the Netherlands, has been through a turbulent period. The old political compromises of the 'purple coalition' and traditions of unquestioning tolerance to newcomers have been shattered by a strident militancy in Dutch popular opinion, and the rise of a new demagogic politics. This disruptive force has now been compounded by the shockwave of economic crisis and public sector austerity. It has ushered in a new tone in Dutch public life which is pragmatic and unsentimental, sometimes to the point of severity. Whilst Tilburg has been spared the worst excesses of the new populism and of the kind of communal unrest seen in Utrecht, it has felt impelled to question its assumptions to their foundation. The city is taking the economic crisis as a wake-up call, and as a warning that it was previously following an unsustainable path from which it has now decisively diverted.

The ICC visiting team saw many examples of practical interculturality in Tilburg on both its visits. Tilburg appreciates that the law alone cannot bring disparate peoples together and that the informal aspects of conviviality are as important as more structural integration methods. Tilburg also appreciates that interculturality is not an end in itself, but is valuable only if it facilitates practical improvements to the prosperity and the quality of life of citizens, their families and neighbourhoods.

Tilburg seems to have entered into a process in which it is very publicly sweeping away some of its policy priorities of the past – which might be categorised as vestiges of an outdated 'multiculturalism'. It is striving to rid itself of anything which appears to privilege ethnicity regardless of whether it is achieving positive outcomes or not. The danger is that 'interculturality' will simply become in the minds of the majority of Tilburgers, a shorthand for describing the process by which the residents of 5 marginalized districts pull themselves back in the mainstream, whilst asking no questions of the majority themselves.

An intercultural city must be a place which asks questions and requires adjustment of all its citizens, not just its most vulnerable residents, and for Tilburg this objective should be a priority.

October 2011