

Ten for Cooking: Learning trajectories to work in the catering sector for people on minimum subsistence income in Leuven, Belgium.

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Case Study N°7
March 2015

Acknowledgements

The research for this Case Study has benefited from financial support by the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2012-2016) under grant agreement n° 290613 (ImPRovE: Poverty Reduction in Europe: Social Policy and Innovation; <http://improve-research.eu>). The authors are solely responsible for any remaining shortcomings and errors.

March 2015

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Bibliographic Information

Cools, P. & Oosterlynck, S. (2015), *Ten for Cooking: Learning trajectories to work in the catering sector for people on minimum subsistence income in Leuven, Belgium*, ImPRovE Case Study N°7. Antwerp: Herman Deleeck Centre for Social Policy – University of Antwerp.

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1 The initiative and its organizers¹

Ten for Cooking ('Tien voor koken' in Dutch) is a training trajectory for people on minimum subsistence income (social assistance benefits) who participate to find a job in the catering sector. Each trajectory includes about ten participants, hence 'Ten' for Cooking. The coordinators of the project describe it as a "short, efficient and varied training program" (I: SPIT vzw coordinator and OCMW coordinator). The duration of each project is six months. Within this period participants get intensive language training (Dutch speakers get ICT training), their basic knowledge of mathematics is refreshed and they are initiated in cooking and HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points), which is a risk inventory for food. They also get opportunities to prove themselves on the work floor through internships. The first training started in March 2011.

The project is based on a partnership between the local public welfare centre (henceforth OCMW) of Leuven, the catering departments of the French food services and facilities management multinational company Sodexo, the social economy organization SPIT vzw, the adult education centre of the school Vrij Technisch Instituut (VTI) Leuven and the Centre for Basic Education Leuven. The project is co-financed by the European Social Fund and Horeca Vorming Vlaanderen, a sector fund that supports people to make a career in the catering sector. Ten for Cooking is officially recognized and certified as a training by the Flemish Office for Labour Market Mediation and Job Training (Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding, henceforth VDAB).

Two of these partners have an important coordinating role: OCMW Leuven which is the initiator and promoter and the project coordinator appointed by SPIT vzw. Bringing these different partners and expertise together, the coordinators aim to invest in those factors that enhance the chances of participants on the labour market and meet the needs of a sector that has problems finding good staff. Representatives of the different partners meet three to four times over the course of a project in the steering committee to evaluate the project, the training package and individual participants. The training program is not static, it is adapted constantly based on the screening procedures and practical experiences. For instance, the hours to learn Dutch and mathematics were expanded throughout the years.

The project coordinator meets the participants individually to discuss their progress and to develop a plan for future labour market participation. The coordinator is convinced that these tailor made trajectories and personal follow-up, together with the screening procedures, explain the low number of people that drop out of the project early. About 50% of the participants found a job in the regular or social economy in a relatively short period after the training (one month). Given the target group this is regarded as a success. Especially the number of participants that ended up working in regular companies (including subsidized employment in a regular company) exceeded expectations. Ten for

¹ This report is based on document analysis, in-depth interviews and a focus group. More information about the methods used can be found in Kazepov et al., 2014 (accessible via <http://improve-research.eu/>). When information is drawn directly from one of the interviews or when one of the interviewees is quoted it will be referred to as (I: Alias of the respondent). The respondents have been asked to approve of the researchers to use an alias that discloses their affiliation to the organisation. When information or quotes are drawn from the focus group discussion, this is referred to as (focus group). Appendix A provides an overview of all interviewees and focus group participants. The authors want to express their gratitude to the interviewees and focus group participants for their participation and valuable input.

Cooking is subsidized to be a pathway to prepare for activation but it has the results of a proper activation to work trajectory².

The project targets people who receive minimum subsistence income from the OCMW Leuven. They are diagnosed as being at a big distance to the labour market, meaning that they have low chances when it comes to education and employment. Participants are recruited by the three welfare desks of the social service of OCMW Leuven. In many cases, their knowledge of Dutch is limited and they miss certain key competences in mathematics which are expected by employers in the catering sector. Sometimes the legal conditions to start in the regular educational system are not met. The biggest part of the participant groups consist of foreign-language newcomers, who in most cases arrived in Belgium via asylum procedures or family reunification. About 90% of the participants do not speak proficient Dutch at the start of the program (I: SPIT vzw coordinator and OCMW team coordinator).

2 Basic information on the (local) context and the emerging problems

2.1 *Different responses to the structural unemployment problem*

Over the past decades the Belgian welfare system has been confronted with growing social expenditures and high inactivity rates. Concerning the high inactivity rates, the groups with the highest risk of unemployment are: non-native born (especially people without a Belgian nationality), older people and increasingly also young people who have difficulties finding a job that matches their degree and capabilities after their studies. Between 1990 and 2012 the youth unemployment rates rose from 14.2% to 19.8%³. Being of foreign descent constitutes the highest risk of unemployment in Belgium. Figure 1 shows the huge difference between unemployment rates of native-born and foreign born population.

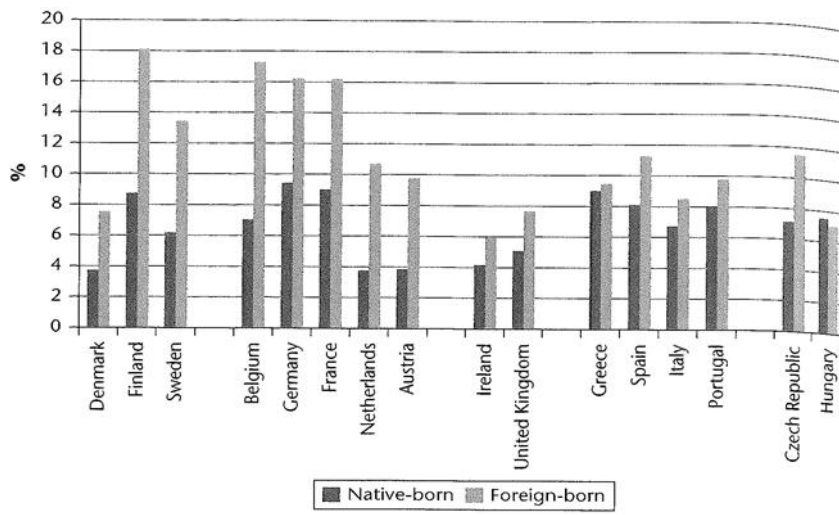
In the context of high inactivity rates and growing social expenditures, Hemerijck (2013) refers to the syndrome of 'welfare without work'. To illustrate this condition, one often refers to the fact that in relative terms expenditures on unemployment in Belgium are much higher than in neighbouring countries. In 2012 in Belgium 12,8% of all social expenditures went to unemployment-related matters.

² The difference between 'activation pathways' and 'activation preparatory pathways' was adopted in the Belgian ESF priorities after 2006. "The activation preparatory pathways take place before the actual engagement pathway for those receiving social benefit, who are the furthest away from employment and who currently don't participate in the labour market. These preparatory pathways are innovative in respect of the previous programme period, the plan being to counteract the social 'skimming' effect. Experience does indeed show that those participating in the socio-professional engagement pathways show a relatively stable social profile. As a consequence, for socially isolated persons and persons without a social structure, another type of intensive guidance should be provided, so that they can take their first steps towards the labour market. The activation preparatory pathways also work towards strengthening the social cohesion, by stimulating social participation through habituation work placement or subsidised employment" (online: http://ec.europa.eu/social/esf_projects_117/project.cfm?id=88&project_lang=en)

³ Source: EUROSTAT online, February 2014, http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/statistics/search_database (Database by themes > Population and social conditions > Labour market (labour) > Employment and unemployment (Labour Force Survey) (employ) > LFS main indicators (lfsi) > Unemployment - LFS adjusted series (une)

This is the highest of all case-study countries⁴ and very high compared to the EU-27 average of 5,61%⁵. There have been two basic responses to this situation: active labour market policies (focusing on the supply side) and social economy initiatives (focusing on the demand-side).

Fig. 1: Unemployment rate of native-born versus foreign-born population (15-64 years), 2006



Source: Eurostat, European Labour Force Survey

Active Labour Market Policies (ALMP's) respond to the 'welfare without work' analysis by stimulating re-entry in the labour market in various ways such as new obligations related to searching for work, making benefits decreasing or limited in time, short term training opportunities and so on. In this regard Salognon (2007) speaks of "adaptive policies" as the main rationale is to make the unemployed adapt to existing opportunities on the labour market. The "demand-side" of the labour market, such as the number of available jobs for low skilled workers, the preferences and hiring procedures of employers are not questioned (van der Aa & van Berkel, 2014). The shift to more supply-side oriented approach represents a shift away from the structural problem of an imperfect labour market to the individual problem of employability (Oosterlynck et al., 2013; Salognon, 2007). Simultaneously the goal of social intervention shifted from income maintenance and social protection to employment promotion and activation (Jenson & Saint-Martin, 2003).

The nature of these reforms are contingent on national welfare tradition (Bonoli, 2009; Hemerijck, 2013). As in other corporatist welfare states, Belgium made its fundamental reorientation towards and 'Active Welfare State' in the late 1990's (Vandenbroucke, 2012). "The European Employment Strategy plays an important role in the development and follow-up of active labour market policies" (Bogaerts et al., 2010: 1). Important milestones in this regard are the treaty of Amsterdam (1997) and the Lisbon

⁴ Austria, Belgium, Hungary, Italy, England, Sweden.

⁵ Source: EUROSTAT online, February 2014, http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/statistics/search_database (Database by themes > Population and social conditions > Living conditions and welfare (livcon) > Social protection (spr) > Social protection expenditure (spr_expens) > Expenditure: main results (spr_exp_sum)

Agenda (2000). The follow-up, guidance, training and/or reorientation of people that receive income protection benefits became increasingly important.

In percentage of all social expenditures the expenditures for activating, capacitating measures rose from 1,09 to 1,59 between 1990 and 2012, which is the highest of our case study countries, including our Nordic country Sweden⁶. This indicates a clear shift in policy orientation for Belgium over the last decennium. However, looking at the general indicators on employment and unemployment in Belgium in 1990 and 2012⁷ one cannot observe a clear decrease in unemployment. The exact impact of ALMPs or the reasons why results are not as expected are still a matter for debate.

Until recently unemployment benefits, which one is entitled to after about one year of working fulltime, were not limited in time and not decreasing. Recently, they were made decreasing⁸ and there is an overall tendency towards being more strict, offering more possibilities for individual guidance and making more use of financial sanctions for not taking up job opportunities. Important concepts in this regard are 'appropriate employment', 'willingness to work' and 'searching behaviour' (Coene, 2013).

Over the last decade, different scholars (see for instance Fletcher, 2004; Salignon, 2007; Spoonley, 2008) have observed the emergence of "innovative employer-oriented activation policies, which aim to influence employers' willingness to hire or possibly train and guide the unemployed" (van der Aa & van Berkel, 2014: 11). These policies were pioneered in Denmark (Martin, 2004) and introduce some demand-side oriented thinking in supply-side oriented activation policies. This results in new combinations and uses of policy instruments and new distribution of roles between public organisations, employers and the unemployed. Van der Aa and van Berkel (2014: 12) identify three possible explanations for this shift: (a) disappointing results of supply-side oriented activation, especially for more vulnerable groups; (b) making the investment in 'adaptive policies' more efficient for clients, public organisations and policy makers; (c) the implementation of governance strategies that favour a greater role and responsibility for private actors, including employers, instead of state actors.

A second, older, response to the problem of high inactivity levels is focusing more on the demand side of the labour market and co-exists with ALMPs. Being faced with structural unemployment since the early 1980's Belgium has a rich tradition of innovative social economy initiatives in a more protective and caring tradition. Social economy policies and initiatives can be regarded as activating policies *avant la lettre* (Gardin et al., 2012), but activation is less narrowly conceived in terms of labour market participation and more attention is paid to non-instrumental goals such as improving personal well-being and building social relationships of trust and support. An emblematic example targeting long term unemployed is the Flemish model of Social Workplace (Sociale Werkplaats). This model is partly financed with job subsidies and can be regarded as a demand-side approach as it creates a protected

⁶ As (%) on GDP. For HU first year: 1992; Last year for all countries: 2011 (for UK = 2009). Source: OECD, online, February 2014, <http://stats.oecd.org/> (Labour > Labour Market Programmes > Public expenditure and participant stocks on LMP).

⁷ Source: EUROSTAT online, February 2014, http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/statistics/search_database (Database by themes > Population and social conditions > Labour market (labour) > Employment and unemployment (Labour Force Survey) (employ) > LFS main indicators (lfsi) > Unemployment - LFS adjusted series (une)

⁸ Unemployment benefits are still not limited in time, but this was an important issue for debate in the debates in the run-up to the May 2014 elections.

workplace in which the expectations of the employer are adapted to the productivity of the worker and social support on the workplace is provided.

Today several initiatives working with long term unemployed and people with a long distance to the labour market are still working in this tradition. However, with the rise ALMPs, there is a policy shift towards short term trajectories that focus more on the transition to the regular economy. This puts this older social economy tradition under increasing pressure to adapt to more instrumental active labour market policies (Nyssens, et al., 2012). The older social economy tradition is often critiqued nationally and internationally for being too protective, too expensive and a form of unfair competition since the government subsidizes the creation of jobs. As a result of this criticism, the social workplace model will be reformed with the implementation of the 'Tailored Labour Decree' (Maatwerkdecreet)⁹. Tailored work companies will have to prove their success in decreasing the individuals' distance to the labour market.

2.2 The dual structure of income protection

In order to better understand the development of 'Ten for Cooking' and the status of the target group this section zooms in on the structure of income protection. Income protection in Belgium has a dual structure that consists of unemployment insurance based on contributions from labour on the one hand and social assistance on the other (figure 2).

The unemployment insurance, based on contributions from labour income, is facilitated by the centrally (federal) organized National Office for Employment (henceforth RVA; Rijksdienst voor Arbeidsvoorziening). RVA is responsible for the administration of unemployment benefits. The regionally organized services for employment and job related education, called VDAB in Flanders, aims to guide people to paid labour through job search assistance and training. The RVA decides on suspensions of the right to unemployment benefits based on data from the VDAB about the individual's willingness of effort to find a job. It is important to note that the trade unions are responsible for paying the unemployment benefits to the unemployed. The unions take the role of a spokesmen in relation to the RVA and they offer services to their members related to information about their rights in relation to the RVA, VDAB and former or future employers. This is different from claimants of social assistance benefits. The OCMW pays the assistance benefits directly and the trade unions do not represent these claimants. The fact that these people are in most cases not unionized is explained by the relation between their statute and their work history (discussed below).

The guaranteed social assistance minimum income distributed by local public welfare centres (OCMW in Flanders) for those without adequate means to live a decent life is the safety net of last resort for income protection. The provision of social assistance is regulated by the law on the Right to Social Integration (henceforth RMI-law; Recht op Maatschappelijke Integratie¹⁰) of 26 May 2002. The RMI guarantees social integration either through work or through a social assistance cash transfer (the so-called 'leefloon' or equivalent) to all persons who are below a certain income threshold and comply

⁹ <https://www.werk.be/beleidsthemas/sociale-economie-en-tewerkstelling/sociale-economie/maatwerk>

¹⁰ This law reformed the former system of social assistance. OCMW's now have three instruments: employment, living wages and individualized trajectories for societal integration. The use of these instruments should depend on the needs of the client (Bogaerts, 2010).

with a number of conditions regarding age, nationality etc. The RMI-law is an important part of the legal framework in which the Ten for Cooking project operates.

“Social assistance payments provided within the RMI are inadequate to provide sufficient protection against income poverty” (Van Mechelen et al., 2013: 3). Van Mechelen and colleagues show that the difference between social assistance benefits and minimum wages is larger in Belgium compared to the neighbouring countries Netherlands, France and Germany. At a first glance the inactivity trap for this group seems smaller in Belgium, but the Belgian system also offers several forms of complementary financial support, to compensate partially for the inadequacy of statutory benefit levels. More adequate benefits reduce financial incentives to take up work or to switch to full time work. However it remains highly doubtful that only financial incentives are sufficient to achieve such a transition for this group (Ibid.). As explained (see footnote 9), the RMI legislation offers local welfare centres more tools than merely financial incentives to activate people into work. Overall though, this legislation clearly prioritizes labour market participation as the main pathway to societal integration for the majority of clients. “We try to find ways to fulfil our mission to support people in difficult circumstances in Leuven. We take into account that this will have to be done within the [Frank] Vandebroucke doctrine that basically says: ‘give people work and the rest will follow’. You can put question marks next to this logic, but it is actually the doctrine that instructed the [RMI] legislation in 2002 which was clearly an activation legislation” (I: Director of the Social Department of OCMW, brackets added).

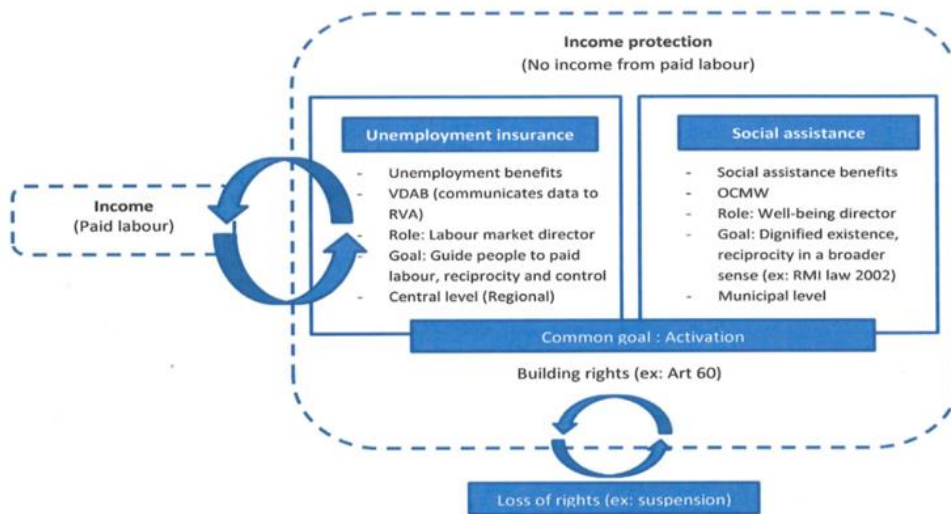
To return to the dual structure of the benefit system: the VDAB is principally preoccupied with the active labour market participation of people that receive unemployment benefits, the OCMW is preoccupied with the societal integration of people that receive minimum income assistance benefits. However, as Belgium made a shift towards a more active welfare state, the topic of better coordination and cooperation between VDAB and OCMW at the local level moved and remained high on the policy agenda¹¹. Between 2008 and 2013 there have been several publicly supported and academically evaluated experiments concerned with this cooperation (Van Mellaert et al., 2013). Cooperation remains difficult, but academics and fieldworkers agree that the OCMW is becoming more labour oriented and the VDAB increasingly recognizes the diverse needs of certain target groups. Since the mission of the VDAB is to “create space and maximum opportunities for every Flemish citizen to develop their own career”¹², its focus remains fundamentally different from the OCMW, which mission is to ensure that “every person has the right to social assistance. This should enable everybody to lead a life conform to human dignity”¹³.

¹¹ The chief executive of VDAB has shown the ambition to organize the activation of people on social assistance benefits and he has launched several, sometimes controversial, proposals on the better cooperation of the two services (see for instance Leroy, 2007).

¹² <http://www.vdab.be/vdab/algemeen.shtml>

¹³ Article 1 of the 8th of July 1976 OCMW law

Fig. 2: Belgian income protection: A dual structure



Source: Van Mellaert, 2013: 10 Authors translation

People have to go to the OCMW for social assistance if they are not entitled to unemployment benefits because they have not worked the mandatory amount of days or if they are suspended from employment benefits. Looking at the first category, the share of young people has been growing over the last decade. Low educated immigrants also represent a large share of this group. In December 2012, 96.130 people received (partial or complete) social assistance benefits (0,9% of the Belgian population). This is 23.360 in Flanders (0,4%), 44.976 in Wallonia (1,6%), 22.794 in Brussels(3%) (Hertogen, 2013).

Going from social assistance to unemployment benefits without employment in the regular economy is possible too (see figure 2). The common procedure is called 'Article 60'. Employment by article 60§7 of the OCMW-law (July 1976) is a form of social service provision often categorized as activation through labour experience. The aim is to reintegrate the person into the social-security framework and the labour process. To this end the person needs to work a certain period from one to maximum two years, which makes him/her eligible for unemployment benefits. It is understood as a period to build up skills and experience necessary for stable employment. The OCMW is the juridical employer¹⁴ that provides the job inside or outside its own organisation. The main argument against employment by Article 60 is that in many cases it results in reintegrating people into the benefit system but not into steady employment. Organisations of people living in poverty call Article 60 a "vacation from poverty", because of the relatively good wages and labour conditions and the fact that people usually return to their deprived situation afterwards. However, the number of people in article 60 is still an often used indicator to evaluate the activation policy of local welfare centres (I: Director of the Social Department of OCMW).

¹⁴ POD Maatschappelijke integratie, online: <http://www.mi-is.be/be-nl/ocmw/artikel-60-7>

2.3 Leuven

The Ten for Cooking project is situated in Leuven. Leuven is a medium-sized city in Flanders with 98.074 inhabitants (2013). It is the administrative capital of the province of Vlaams-Brabant. It is a rather rich city with high income inequalities (Raad voor maatschappelijk welzijn van Leuven, 2007). In 2013, 84% of the inhabitants had the Belgian nationality (www.leuven.be), but people from around 140 different nationalities reside in Leuven. Different from other OCMW's in centre cities, Leuven has mainly EU 25 foreigners and only a relatively small share of Romanians, Bulgarians and Croats and non-EU foreigners. The influx is mainly from low educated people (I: Director of the Social Department of OCMW).

The Leuven area has a big catering and Horeca sector. It is a university city that attracts a lot of tourists, so it boasts many restaurants and bars. There are also many schools and care institutions that have large kitchens. The sector finds it increasingly difficult to find good staff for these positions because of the flexible hours and relatively low wages. Pressure on wages will probably rise in the future as the government is actively targeting undeclared work which is very common in the Horeca sector (focus group).

In 2010 the OCMW of Leuven came in the media because of the alarming rise of people on social assistance benefits, which they attributed mainly to the economic crisis of 2008¹⁵. Expenditures on social assistance benefits rose by 20% after 2008 to € 8,980,072¹⁶. After 2010 these numbers stabilized. In 2012 an average of about 1.050 people depended on social assistance benefits (about 1070 on social assistance benefits) (OCMW Leuven, 2012).

3 Genesis of the initiative

This project was initiated by the Social Department of the OCMW Leuven and co-developed by the different partners of the project. The first training started in March 2011.

“The purpose of our department is to activate as much clients as possible to work. Whether this is through training trajectories or directly does not make a big difference to us. As long as people can get a job and are no longer dependent on OCMW support”. (I:OCMW team coordinator)

As in many OCMW's, OCMW Leuven already had some experience with employing clients in the catering sector. Most of them were employed with Article 60§7 statute in the kitchen of SPIT vzw. Today this kitchen is used as one of the training sites of the project. The Social Department of OCMW Leuven wanted to do something with the observation that their clients did not succeed in making the transition towards the regular catering sector. The competencies that people gained during the Article 60 trajectories proved to be insufficient for that. What was demanded from the employees throughout these trajectories did not reflect the reality in regular firms. However the “activating-ness” of an OCMW is still often measured by the number of people they employ with Article 60 statute. The Social Service of OCMW Leuven disputes the value of this indicator because people often remain stuck in a

¹⁵Number of people on social assistance benefits breaks all records', online: www.nieuwsblad.be/article/detail.aspx?articleid=A82TF1VH

¹⁶ We do not distinguish here between social assistance benefits called 'leefloon' and the equivalent for people without a Belgian nationality called 'leefgeld'.

carrousel of individualized trajectories and subsidized employment statutes (I: OCMW team coordinator; I: Director of the Social Department of OCMW).

In their search for activation trajectories with better, durable results in terms of transition to the regular labour market, they decided to organize relatively short term and intensive trainings. Originally these were designed to be preparatory training trajectories, but the project succeeded unexpectedly well in “matching” the participants with employers in the catering sector, who saw opportunities to overcome their difficulties to fill in positions. Ten for Cooking is not the only “low threshold training trajectory” of this kind developed by the Social Department of the OCMW Leuven. They have similar projects for other occupations for which employers encounter labour shortages (e.g. the construction sector and some niches of the care sector). However, Ten for Cooking is the most successful in terms of ‘transition results’. This is interpreted broadly as “the participants having a job shortly after the project” (I: OCMW team coordinator). A regular labour contract and Article 60 in a private company are the main possible steps and this happened more than expected. Other labour experience trajectories, more specialized training or social employment are also regarded as a good result.

For this particular project, the organizers found inspiration in Ghent, where the OCMW organized the project IKOOK (which can be read both as ‘Me Too’ and ‘I cook’). This training project aimed to employ people on social assistance benefits or unemployment benefits in the catering sector as kitchen staff, sous-chef or waiter. The project in Ghent stopped after three cycles of 25 weeks. The subsidising partners decided not to start up a fourth cycle because of the financial costs (OCMW GENT, 2010). Two main differences with Ten for Cooking are that the latter has more partners involved in the project and that it receives financial support from the ESF. In Leuven it was a deliberate choice to involve external experts .

“For a project like this, it is not a good strategy to keep the centre of gravity within your own organisation. We do not have the competencies, the history and the culture to do these things. We can never do what the VTI¹⁷ does, we are not a cooking school and we never will be. We cannot give a chef’s hat to a social worker, that would not work. If I tell my clients I will give them a training, it has to be as good as in the regular circuit or even better” (I: Director of the Social Department of OCMW).

The director of the Social Department, who played a key role in designing the project, used his experience from working as an advisor in the food sector. He knew of the existence and financial capacity of the ‘sector funds’¹⁸. He also knew of the problems of the sector in finding good and flexible staff. In his current professional position he is confronted with the challenges of activating people on social assistance benefits and saw opportunities to connect both. He was aware that it was necessary to mediate the relationships between employers and future employees, who are generally perceived as people with an unattractive labour market profile. The director confirms that especially foreign-language newcomers have low chances on the labour market and he adds that there has been hardly any policies in Flanders that aim to strengthen this group’s chances on the labour market. He believes that this project does take these people seriously and that the ‘end-to-end chain management approach’, including screening procedures before the training and follow-up and support afterwards, sets this trajectory apart from others (I: Director of the Social Department of OCMW).

¹⁷ Adult education centre.

¹⁸ The sector fund Horeca Vorming Vlaanderen is a partnership of social partners in the catering sector that organizes training and support for catering companies.

Another strong characteristic of the Ten for Cooking project according to the different partners is its flexibility. The project is evaluated by all the partners after each cycle and the training package has been adapted several times as a result. It also took a while to find the right ways to reach employers and build trust relations with them. After some good experiences employers spread the word amongst their colleagues. The coordinators believe that the project is now running in full effect (I: SPIT vzw coordinator and OCMW team coordinator). However, processes and (expected) results differ tremendously between groups, which sometimes result in tensions between the different interests within the steering committee.

4 The activities and organization

4.1 Screening, training and job coaching

As mentioned before, all participants of the Ten for Cooking project are under supervision of the OCMW and receive a social assistance minimum income. It is generally accepted that there is a long distance between this target population and the regular labour market. Many of them do not have a proficient knowledge of Dutch and it is not exceptional that people from this group had a troubled migration background with experiences of being separated from their families, hardship and war (I: OCMW team coordinator). The profile of this group is diverse and it changes with the immigration flows in the city of Leuven. Some participants have only a temporary residence permit. People who reside illegally in Belgium cannot be included in the project for legal reasons. During the project the participants are still on social assistance benefits and they receive one euro extra for each hour of training, internship and supervision they attend.

Participants are referred to the project by social workers from one of the three welfare desks of the Social Department of the OCMW Leuven. Before entering the project, they are carefully screened on their foreknowledge and motivation by the coordinators of SPIT vzw and the OCMW. During the project, social workers are invited to a dinner organized by their clients, to see how they are doing. At first, it was not easy to find ten people to start with, as social workers get calls from various other projects as well, but as the project became better known this problem disappeared. This made it possible for the coordinators to be more selective, especially when it comes to the client's motivation. They want to give priority to people who show that they actually want to work in the catering sector afterwards.

The coordinators stress that they are not "roaming of clients". "Many of our clients have a long distance to the labour market. We are not picking out the strongest only! Everybody who is motivated should get a chance. We have people with very different backgrounds at the OCMW Leuven and we want this to be reflected in our groups" (I: coordinator SPIT vzw). If the OCMW feels that a client has a lot of foreknowledge they refer them to a VDAB training or other training trajectories so they can get their certificate faster or get a certificate of a higher level (I: OCMW funding expert). Looking at the things participants learn in the Ten for Cooking project, the training is still very basic. People who have the ambition to become a sous-chef or chef will have to take several courses after this training to reach that goal.

The latest version of the training project consists of 90 hours of Dutch, 24 hours of mathematics and 87 hours of cooking techniques which include 20 hours focussed on waiting tables and other restaurant

related tasks. After this they have an internship of two weeks in the kitchen of Sodexo and then another internship with an employer of choice. The network of possible internship places is growing. In the first project, Dutch was not yet part of the curriculum. This changed after a request from the kitchen coordinator of Sodexo, a partner in the project (I: Kitchen manager of Sodexo). The focus on serving customers is new. It was an idea that followed from one of the dinner meetings catered by the participants and attended by the different partners.

Each cycle of the project lasts for six months. Almost five months are reserved for training and internships. After this, the coordinator from SPIT vzw has about four weeks to guide participants to work. If this does not happen, the client goes back to the Social Department of the OCMW Leuven. Throughout the project, the SPIT vzw coordinator meets the participant regularly for job coaching consultations. Strengthening key competences, rules and regulations, opportunities, work attitudes and motivations related to working in catering are the main discussion topics in these meetings. The job coaching consists of: an intensive follow up of the participants, leading the evaluations, the makeup and follow up of an individual trajectory and formulating an advice for the follow-up trajectory of the participants. After the training, the coordinator makes a synthesis based on her experiences and the evaluations of the different teachers, the internship supervisors and the participants. She makes a list of the strengths and weaknesses of a participant and a hypothesis of desirable future trajectories. This is discussed afterwards with the different participants and is also communicated to the social workers.

The coordinator has a lot of discretionary space to work with participants on motivation and working attitudes. It goes from calling participants two minutes after a lesson started, to buying a bike or visiting participants at the hospital. The coordinators believe that this personal touch can make the difference. She is aware however that at certain moments, her approach can be very controlling and even intrusive (Interview).

This freedom and flexibility for SPIT vzw coordinator is valued very highly, by herself and the project partners. It is deemed important to build trust and a shared engagement with the participants. Within this project, the caseload of the coordinator (ten to twelve people working eighty percent) is very low compared to other individual case managers in the VDAB or OCMW. This allows her to follow up clients closely and respond quickly when necessary. She describes her position as “luxurious, but I still have to work hard to get it all done” (I: coordinator SPIT vzw).

In order to forge relationships with possible employers the coordinator tries to be aware of opportunities also outside the formal hours and context of her job. For instance, the coordinator recalled here making new contacts that led to a new job position after she gave her card to a restaurant owner where she went for a private diner.

4.2 Matchmakers: coupling demand and supply

People supported by the OCMW are entitled to different support measures, like wage bonuses for employers and special employment statuses. Hence, different employment or training options are more or less attractive from the clients' perspective and also, at the end of the training programme, from the perspective of employers who could hire them. What is attractive to an employer, however, is not necessarily attractive for a potential employee or vice versa.

Several employers in the catering sector have reported bad experiences with job interviews by people under supervision by the OCMW or people of foreign descent in general. Many employers experienced a lot of misunderstandings related to the expectations and work ethic of job applicants during the interviews and afterwards¹⁹. In short, there rests a stigma on OCMW clients and people of foreign descent. OCMW clients often experience difficulties in expressing their motivation and ambitions to employers and are consequently deprived from chances on the labour market. Employers generally see it as time consuming and disappointing to work with OCMW clients. Also, the different possible measures that make it financially interesting to hire people from the target population are rather complex. It is not easy for most employers to know them all and to find out their best option.

Ten for Cooking aims to forge a match between OCMW clients and potential employers in the catering sector by using a variety of policy instruments: vocational training, supporting services, personal supervision, measures to influence the attitudes and motivations of OCMW clients (carrot and stick), financial incentives and services for employers and appealing to the social responsibility of employers. Most of the policy instruments used target the supply-side, but some also target the demand-side of the labour market²⁰.

According to the OCMW staff, for the OCMW programmes like Ten for Cooking have introduced a shift in orientation towards the demand-side (I: OCMW team coordinator; I: Director of the Social Department of OCMW). However, the training programme is seen as very intensive and prepares participants better for the real work floor experience than other trajectories (I: OCMW team coordinator and SPIT vzw coordinator)(focus group). So while there is a very modest demand-orientation, the stress is still firmly on the supply-side of the labour market. In fact, one could say that this supply-side orientation is informed by knowledge about the demand-side as it targets shortage occupations and learns about the demands of employers in the catering sector.

In practice, the coordinators are matchmakers. They mediate the difficult relation between employers and possible employees from the target group. To do so they use their knowledge of employment measures and of the background and ambitions of the participants they have screened before and monitored during the project. Employers appreciate a clear offer they can trust. In that case they are willing to think on the long term and to hire members of this target population for full time jobs, even people who do not speak proficient Dutch (which is often pointed out by employers as the main threshold). For big private players in the catering sector like Sodexo, Ten for Cooking is a quality selection procedure (I: Kitchen manager of Sodexo; I: Director of the Social Department of OCMW).

Hence, the idea of the project is that the coordinators create more and better opportunities for clients by being attentive for the demands of employers, but also by urging employers to revise their prejudices and organisation.

“It is also a bit of a strategic game, especially at the end of the training. Some people have no permanent residence permit, other have no Activa conditions²¹. There are so many things to take

¹⁹ An often heard complaint of employers is that unemployed people who have to do job applications to keep their unemployment insurance are not really interested to take the job. These people are often not on OCMW support, but they do contribute to the stigma of “OCMW clients”.

²⁰ It is noteworthy that the OCMW has both positive and negative incentives to use towards the unemployed and only positive incentives towards employers.

²¹ The Activa card or work card is an instrument designed to help long term unemployed to start working. An employer that hires somebody with an Activa card gets reduction on social security contributions. In some cases the RVA pays a work benefit to the employee on top of his or her wage. The card is valid for six months

into account in order to ensure that as many employees as possible are helped for as long as possible and to maximize opportunities for stable employment. Sometimes it feels even a bit like gambling: should we send this one or the other? Who deserves the opportunity the most?... Such an approach cannot be expected from the VDAB counsellors that work with so many clients” (I: SPIT vzw coordinator).

5 The innovative dimension of the initiative

In this part, the socially innovative dimensions of the Ten for Cooking experience are analysed in depth through three basic components of social innovation (Gerometta, Häußermann and Longo 2005; Moulaert et al. 2005a): (a) the satisfaction of basic social needs (content dimension); (b) the transformation of social relations (process dimension); (c) and the empowerment and socio-political mobilization (the political dimension linking the process and content dimension).

5.1 Content dimension

Ten for Cooking aims to guide people on social assistance benefits to paid labour or other trajectories to work. The notion of paid labour covers a range of employment statuses, labour contracts and experience trajectories. A wide variety of outcomes (a job in a regular firm, Article 60 statute, new training trajectories, etc.) is desirable from the projects’ perspective. Of all these options, work in the regular economy that is not subsidized has the highest status. Central to the Ten for Cooking scheme is that access to work (paid labour) is perceived as an important social need for the people on welfare assistance benefits because it provides access to basic needs such as integration in society, an income (from labour) and individual autonomy. From the project’s perspective the participant’s need of employment and his/her need for social integration are very much intertwined. This has to be understood in relation to the mandate of the OCMW in the context of the Active Welfare State described in part two of this report. More specifically, the RMI-legislation (see section two of this report) and the funding as an activation preparatory pathway, part of the Belgian ESF priority ‘Promotion of social and professional activation pathways’²², provide the framework within which this need for ‘social and professional activation’ is addressed. While the need for paid labour is clearly deemed important, both frameworks explicitly aim to address multiple dimensions of social integration and well-being. The frameworks hence facilitate more intense and multi-dimensional schemes for (vulnerable) people on social assistance benefits compared to people that receive unemployment benefits (see section two of this report on the dual structure on Belgian income protection). The recognition of multiple dimensions and interrelated social needs is inherent to the concepts ‘activation preparatory pathways’ and ‘social activation’.

Indeed, defending a “broad” or “holistic” understanding of activation, the members of the steering committee, and the coordinators in particular, recognize that a wide range of possible needs of the participants are intertwined with their “employability”. Focus group respondents refer to several needs met by the project that strengthen the chances of participants on the labour market: positive

and can be extended if the conditions still apply. See:

http://www.rva.be/d_opdracht_activa/regl/werkgevers/e1/SubcontentNL-02.htm

²² http://ec.europa.eu/social/esf_projects_117/project.cfm?id=88&project_lang=en

experiences, self-confidence, mobility, a supporting figure (the coordinator), support in solicitations for participants and advice about employment subsidies for employers (focus group). The coordinators try to be sensitive to the participants' aspirations and needs related to well-being. The coordinators evaluate the legitimacy of the need claims by participants and try to find trajectories that address these needs within the project or through referral and support after the trajectory has finished. It is clear however that the focus is on employability and that the concern with other issues such as well-being is instrumental to labour market activation. The instrumentalisation of non-economic dimensions limits the social innovation potential of Ten for Cooking, as we will elaborate on further.

Two examples to illustrate this 'instrumental' evaluation of needs by the project coordinators. One of the participants wanted to work as soon as possible because he wanted to bring his wife and child over from Nepal to Belgium. Ten for Cooking did not result in a job for him and because he was a strong candidate he was referred to the VDAB. When the VDAB coordinator called the Ten for Cooking coordinator for advice, she pleaded for a short trajectory to work that offered the best guarantee that the man would have a labour income in the near future. In the second example one of the participants told an employer during his job interview that he did not want to work on Saturday because he was in a football club and that meant a lot to him. However, working on Saturday is part and parcel of catering jobs. The coordinator was annoyed by the participants' remark and she told him that worries about leisure activities should come after worries about paid work. Today she tells this to all her participants during job interview training.

The instrumentalisation of non-economic dimensions, which in practice is contingent on the methods used by social workers in particular trajectories, essentially derives from the very design of the RMI framework. The triple tier toolbox to guarantee people's right to social integration – employment, individualized trajectories and social assistance benefits – clearly prioritizes (not subsidizes) employment and the other two are justified if the client is not (yet) able to take on employment. Hence this framework, which should be used based on the need of the client, clearly influences the way the needs of the client are interpreted (Fraser, 1989). Consequently, the instrumentalization of non-economic dimensions to get clients to work largely coincides with incorporating the interests of the same (able bodied) clients. OCMW's have the task to identify incentives and develop tailored trajectories to enhance their 'employability' and 'willingness to work'. The RMI-legislation and ESF framework allow quite a lot of discretionary space to do this and Ten for Cooking is an innovative attempt to develop effective individual trajectories within this framework, based on their experiences with other trajectories like Article 60 (explained in part three of this report on the genesis of the initiative).

5.2 Process dimension

In terms of process, the main social innovation here is in the way Ten for Cooking transforms the social relations between OCMW clients and employers in the catering sector in order to support the former to meet their social needs, in this case through employment. Employers mostly see OCMW clients as a risk population and hence tend to avoid hiring them as employees. The Ten for Cooking project aims to connect the aforementioned need for employment to shortage occupations in the catering sector by training employees and negotiating entry to the labour market for them in the catering sector.

One example of this has to do with proficiency in Dutch, which is an important barrier for labour market participation of migrants – an important target group of the project. For several participants the project helped them to overcome the threshold to work of not speaking proficient Dutch by establishing possibilities for direct contact between them and employers through internships. The coordinators of the project discovered that in contrast with popular belief, knowledge of Dutch is not the most important condition to find a job.

“Employers always tell you that this is such an important condition. But, when it comes down to it, it is often not the case. A big plus of this project is that people are in a training statute and they can do internships. If people do good during the internship, that is way more important than their knowledge of Dutch” (I:SPIT vzw coordinator).

Compared to many labour market activation trajectories for people in poverty, the demand-side of labour (employers) is more actively involved throughout the project. This refers to the distinction between demand-oriented and demand-led approaches. Simply put: in demand-oriented approaches the employers’ demands can be questioned and negotiated and employers are expected to be co-producers of the approach. In the demand-led approaches, the employers inform the activation programme in order to better meet their demands as the employers are regarded as clients for the activation programs (van der Aa & van Berkel, 2014). A demand-oriented approach offers more opportunities for social innovation than a demand-led approach, since the relationship between employers and employees is more equal and less asymmetric.

In Ten for Cooking one of the big private employers, which also offers internships, and the catering sector fund are actively involved in the project and the steering committee. Unlike purely demand-led approach employers are not only regarded as clients. In fact the kitchen manager employed by Sodexo in the OCMW kitchen regards his efforts in the project as a service for an important client and it fits with the corporate social responsibility vision of his company (I: Kitchen manager of Sodexo). In practice the distinction between demand-oriented and –led is not always clear and Ten for Cooking can be positioned somewhere in between demand-orientation and demand-led. On the one hand it is very much the intention of the project coordinators to influence employers’ demands in the interest of participants. For instance by pressuring employers to give their participants a full time contract instead of a part-time or be negotiating working hours or mobility problems. On the other hand coordinators try to get acquainted with the demands of different employers in order to find good matches. In that sense employers are also regarded as clients and their demands are used increase the effectiveness of the so called “adaptive policies” (Salognon, 2007) on the supply side.

From the governance perspective, Ten for Cooking also establishes new relationships between organisations in order to support the transition to work of OCMW clients. The initiator of the project refers to the governance model as ‘chain management’. This points to two distinctive characteristics of the project: (1) the flexible, deliberative coordination between different partners (suppliers) who are experts in their respective fields and make together a chain of services that make up the training trajectory to work and (2) the idea of managing a chain of processes from end-to-end in a specific economic niche: from screening people before and transition to work or referral to other trajectories after the Ten for Cooking training.

5.3 Empowerment dimension

Empowerment is a contested concept. The social innovation literature (see for instance Moulaert et al., 2013) associates the concept of empowerment often with social movements and political mobilisation of deprived groups, that aim to alter structural power relations in society. This tradition of thinking about empowerment was not explicit in this project, in which a more individualized notion of empowerment is used. Some even doubt whether empowerment is an appropriate term for the project and dispute the added value of this unclear, value laden term that is used in very different ways in different contexts (focus group). There is a consensus between the partners that the project is in the participants' interest, not on the question whether and in what sense it is empowering.

To the extent that Ten for Cooking is seen as empowering, it is about helping OCMW clients to be autonomous, self-responsible citizens. The fact that people from the target population learn skills and are getting (prepared for) a job through the project, is regarded as strengthening their position in society and hence it could be regarded as empowering. Also, the fact that the project "takes these people seriously" (focus group) and approaches them as capable, enterprising individuals that can and should learn the reality of working in Belgium, is regarded as empowering.

The coordinator of Ten for Cooking describes empowerment in terms of "flourishing", "getting a grip" and "standing stronger than before", clearly adopting a social-psychological perspective on empowerment (I: SPIT vzw coordinator). In her experience some people really rise to the occasion and develop competencies. She sees people transforming from people who seemingly need help to self-confident individuals. From this individualized perspective, more socially protective trajectories like Article 60 or working in the social economy is regarded as disempowering for certain groups as their skills and ability to learn is underestimated and they are deprived from opportunities on the labour market (I: OCMW team coordinator). Project partners feel that Article 60 statutes have become an instrument used by administrations to prove that they are doing their task of activating people, despite that fact that it does not enhance participants chances on the labour market. The support offered by the Ten for Cooking project and the consultations with the coordinator in particular are understood to have more individual 'emancipatory potential' than other, often more impersonal administrative procedures (e.g. the job search via the VDAB database). A more intensive, tailored approach by coordinators with a lower case load is regarded as both beneficial and necessary for this particular target population. Intensive supervision has, however, different functions serving sometimes competing interests. Hence it is not always easy to assess this procedure in terms of empowerment²³. For instance, the supervision offers opportunities (a) for different kinds of support from the coordinator; (b) for the participants to prove their motivations and learning process; (c) for the project to monitor and control their participants closely. To drop people out the project and to suspend them from social assistance benefits are the two most important and severe, possible sanctions.

This brings us to the limits – in terms of empowerment - of this project. The partners of the project are very much aware that freedom of choice for the participants is limited. The target population has to get to work and their best option is to take on jobs that other people do not want. The project gives opportunities but also imposes an activation paradigm that regards paid work as the most important pathway to social integration, a view which is established in the RMI-law of 2002. As the director of

²³ For an in depth discussion on the simultaneous application of different principles or logics in active labour market policies see Bonoli (2009).

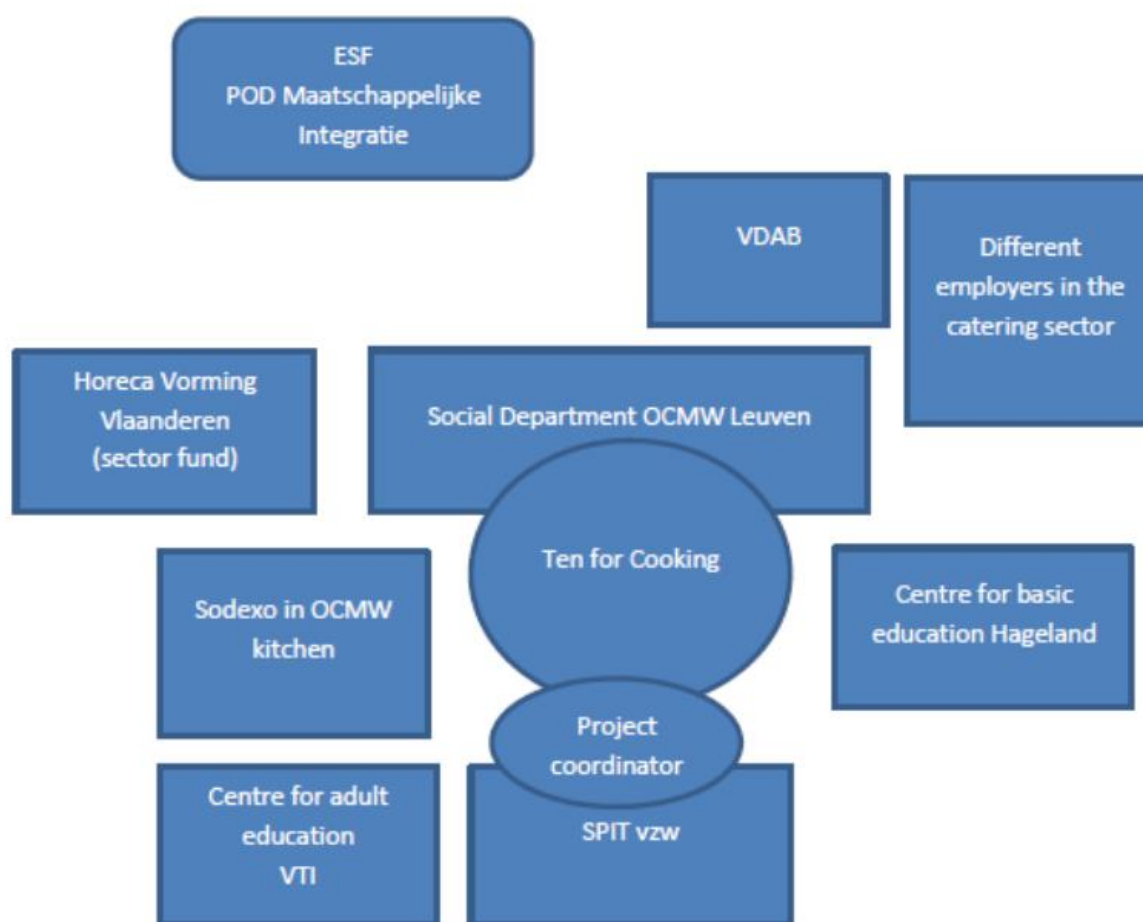
the Social Department of OCMW Leuven argues: “It is quite steering, directive and in that sense it is a little ... how can I say this? On the one side it is empowerment, but on the other side it is not value free. This means that people do not have the same freedom of choice we used to present to our clients. It is more about doing and less about dreaming. We offer some alternatives, we ensure to screen people in advance and we aim to ensure that people that go through a trajectory will be able to generate their own income, at least partially... It is not a non-committal approach ... people can refuse but this may have financial consequences if we stop our support”(interview). Here the idea of empowerment is very much intertwined with an image of an autonomous self-sufficient adult, an empowered self, imposed by social policy makers, but not necessarily following from any deliberation with OCMW clients. This view may hence have nothing to do with the desires for self-realisation of the individual client (De Dijn, 2013), let alone the target population as a group. This restrictive and top-down imposed view on empowerment potentially undermines the social innovation potential of Ten for Cooking as it narrows down the scope for participation of the target group in defining their own needs and the best way to satisfy them.

The RMI-law stresses that proving willingness to work is not the same as taking any job. Still, there is no doubt that the general policy tendency is one of putting more pressure on people to take on jobs than before. The partners of the project are aware that the project demands from their participants that they set aside certain dreams of professional careers and survival strategies (like undeclared work or preferring welfare benefits above low paid work) in order to take on work in the catering sector. Although this might not be totally fair or ideal, partners of the steering group are convinced that it is a reality that participants have to face if they want to build a good life in Belgium. In the words of one of the cooks: “They can take it or leave it. Once they engage we expect them to take on this opportunity with both hands. It is not so much a matter of free choice or empowerment, it is a matter of going for it”(focus group). Also, the focus group participants stress that even when the project has the most desirable outcome, the participants are still in a rather difficult position. They are still rather low on the social ladder with a relatively high risk at poverty, but the project partners believe that the project can be an important stepping stone to a further career.

6 Institutional mapping and governance relations

This part of the report zooms in on the governance relations around the Ten for Cooking project. Three elements are discussed in depth: the local network, the conflicts of interest between the partners and the experience with ESF-funding. Figure 3 shows the different actors involved and Table 1 provides more information about these actors and their contribution to the project.

Fig. 3: The different actors involved in Ten for Cooking



Source: Authors illustration based on communication with promoters and interviews

Tab. 1: Different partners, types of organization and their contribution to the project

Name of the partner	Type of organisation	Contribution to the project
Social Department of the OCMW Leuven; <i>Public welfare centre Leuven</i>	Local welfare centre; Public administration and service provider for people at high risk of poverty in the Leuven area. The Social Department assists people in different areas such as looking for a job, looking for a house or controlling their debts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoter of the project • Reports to the steering committee of the project • Administration and budgetary control of the project • Responsible for the guidance of the participants which includes trainees' administration (during the project the coordinator appointed by Spit vzw supervises the participants) • Organizes information sessions and screening procedures • Puts a kitchen at the project's disposal
Horeca Vorming Vlaanderen	Sector fund. Partnership of social partners in the catering sector that organizes training and support for catering companies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Officially recognizes the training • Facilitates contacts with employers • Supplies expertise and advise • Makes their services as accessible as possible • Financial support of the project
Centre for basic education Leuven-Hageland	Centre that organizes free training in basic skills and competences Non-profit organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • screening the basic competences in mathematics and Dutch prior to the training. • Offers a 'refresh program' in mathematics prior to the training. • Offers longer remediation trajectories in mathematics and/or Dutch as a second language as part of the training, based on the screening results
Centre for adult education VTI	School Non-profit organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offers the technical training (87 hours over 16 days) that are in line with the decree demands on recognition and certification. • Certifies the full training

Sodexo	Multinational private company that is active in many sectors, amongst others catering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offers internship places • Facilitates a labour experiences in a large kitchen
SPIT VZW	Third sector organisation; Non-profit organisation; Work integration social enterprise (social economy)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appoints a project coordinator who also works as a 'job coach' responsible for the job interview training and follow-up of the participants. • Offers a practice oriented training in the kitchen for the personnel of SPIT vzw, where the techniques the participants learned in the centre for adult education are refined.
VDAB: <i>Flemish service for labour mediation and professional training</i>	Public administration and service provider governed by the Flemish minister of Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognizes and certifies the training • Medical examination of the trainees • Insurance against physical accidents • Communicates with 10 for Cooking on which services are most suited for individual jobseekers that participated in the programme
European Social Fund	Fund that supports projects for labour market participation in Europe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subsidizes the project

Source: The response to our call for project and interview with the coordinators of the project

6.1 A local network with OCMW as coordinating partner

“Our advantages are, I think, that one we are working in a local autonomous context and two we are doing this based on the engagement of people who support the idea. I believe these are the two absolute conditions to do this” (focus group).

The partnership that forms Ten for Cooking is forged with different partners in the Leuven area, with which OCMW Leuven already established working relationships before the project. For instance: Sodexo organizes the catering for OCMW hospitals in a kitchen owned by the OCMW; Spit vzw supervises people that are employed by the OCMW with Article 60 statutes working in their kitchen; The OCMW and VDAB have communicated before on several occasions about clients and trainings. So when the OCMW Leuven decided to get different local actors in the catering and social employment sector together, they did not have to look very far for partners. To a certain extent this can be taken literally. Some of the respondents state that the physical proximity between the different actors – Sodexo is located in the kitchen very near to the OCMW headquarters – often works as a positive factor for a good cooperation. As the person responsible for the kitchen, paid by Sodexo, worked for so long with the OCMW, they are colleagues in practice, which makes it easier to engage together in a project like this (I: Kitchen manager of Sodexo). In short, the OCMW has an important coordinating and mediating role. The active involvement of the OCMW is for many partners an important factor that convinced them to participate. From the start this project was embedded in existing networks in which the OCMW takes a central position.

However, it is likely that this cooperation that is at least partly based on proximity, trust and a shared belief in the project will be replaced by a tender. The OCMW argues that they are legally bound to abide by the law of public procurement and is planning to launch a tender in 2015. As the project becomes better known, new possible partners want to join and the OCMW needs a 'fair and legal' procedure to select them. Some current partners fear that they will lose their position in the project, which would mean losing customers (in the case of the schools) or the cherry-picking of participants by employers (in the case of employers who organize internships on their work floor).

As discussed in part two of this report, the division of responsibilities between the OCMW and the VDAB is a politically sensitive issue and the cooperation between the two at the local scale is often difficult. Interviewees mention differences and tensions between the two organisations, but they also mention examples of positive cooperation and successful communication. The director of the Social

Department of OCMW Leuven explains why they involved VDAB: We make the VDAB recognize our training because it has advantages looking at insurances and the possibilities to make the transition towards the labour market. They can also have an important input from their ‘customers wallet’²⁴, although this is still minimal at the moment. It was a conscious choice to involve the VDAB. It could have been the other way around, the VDAB organizes similar initiatives in which they involve the OCMW”. (interview). Because of the overlap in mission and competencies it is possible, however, that in a similar project in a different municipality the VDAB would take on a more central role and the OCMW a more peripheral, supporting one. Even in Leuven OCMW and VDAB cooperate in projects in which the division of roles differ from Ten for Cooking. For this project, OCMW Leuven is convinced that its tailored, end-to-end approach and expertise offers advantages for this target group over the one of the VDAB but they do not want to generalize this to other projects or municipalities. It very much depends on the local context, the economic sector and the particular project.

The staff of the Social Department of the OCMW Leuven believes that the Ten for Cooking project benefits from active subsidiarity (Kazepov, 2008). They feel that they get the mandate and autonomy to experiment from the municipal government. The director of the Social Service realizes that this is often not the case in other municipalities where the OCMW is dominated by political interests. He is aware that this relationship of trust and cooperation could change when the political majority²⁵ changes or under pressure of the announced policy changes related to activation at the Flemish and Federal level. For now, because the Social Service is well-funded by the European Social Fund (see below), their relative autonomous position seems guaranteed, but in the future it is likely that they will have to look for Flemish and local resources to continue the project.

6.2 Cooperation and competition between different interests: a peculiar social dialogue at the local level

Based on the discussion during the focus group, which, according to the participants, resembled in many ways the discussion in the steering committee, the deliberation between the different partners takes the form of a social dialogue (albeit without trade unions). Organisations concerned with the target population of OCMW clients (future employees) and representatives of employers meet, together with experts in employment and education. In these meetings, they evaluate the project and try to find opportunities and compromises between the interests of the different partners. The coordinators of Spit vzw and the Social Department of the OCMW Leuven play an important, but often ambiguous role in balancing the interests of employers and participants. Tensions arise from the OCMW mission of safeguarding people’s well-being, the juridical responsibility for activating people to work as described in the RMI-law and the pragmatic necessity develop a network of employers which is willing to cooperate with the target population. The coordinators are both spokeswomen for the participants and matchmakers who want to convince and satisfy employers.

The screening of participants before entry into the training trajectory is an important and recurring point of discussion that shows the competing interest of the partners. Employers and supervisors of internships want to be involved in this selection procedure because they believe that it would enable them to maximise the ‘transition to labour market results’ and prevent problems on the work floor.

²⁴ The financial resources that the VDAB gets from the Flemish government for providing services to job seekers.

²⁵ Leuven has a social-democratic government under mayor Louis Tobback since 1994.

The coordinators do not want them to interfere in this process to avoid that they cherry-pick the strongest candidates. They also take into account motivations and claims related to well-being. The coordinator and OCMW staff use the argument that Ten for Cooking is a preparatory trajectory to defend this method of selection (focus group).

Respondent agree there is a tension between these different interests, but argue that they can be resolved to a certain extent by the shared engagement in the project. “The interest of the project has to transcend the interest of the individual organizations. Of course, you have to take into account who is around the table, because they do want to invest. But if a partner has the opportunity to select good employees from our project, I can demand from him that he gives them a decent contract” (I: Director of the Social Department of OCMW). Here the ambition to pursue a true demand-oriented (rather than demand-led) activation trajectory is visible.

In the case of individual employers who are not in the steering committee, the particular interests and demands are not deliberated with all these partners. They are negotiated between the employer and the coordinator (supported by the coordinator of the OCMW) who tries to find a match and make a deal. For the employers, Ten for Cooking offers a trustworthy, qualitative selection procedure of employees to address shortages in the labour market. The Sector Fund subsidizes the project based on this output of filling in positions. The coordinators have been surprised by the trust they received from employers. “ We have sold them people they have never seen in real life. They tell us: ‘ you will know best’. It goes very far in my opinion” (I: SPIT vzw coordinator).

6.3 Bureaucracy and opportunity: demand-oriented approaches and the organisational culture of the OCMW

“OCMW team coordinator: This projects demands from the OCMW a very different way of working. Because at the OCMW, we are all social workers. We are educated in caretaking, helping people. But now our team is entering that other world. It is really a different world.

SPIT vzw coordinator: The hard world.

OCMW team coordinator: If we have a match and a client has to start working within a week, I will tell my staff: He has to start within a week. Then the client has to go to the central desk, he has to go to medical examination, he has to go the personnel department and so on. So the staff has to drop other things to make this happen. If you cannot do this for an employer you are risking to lose him. You know, we at the OCMW act like we are professionals. Okay, if that is true we have to do away with our cumbersome way of working and be flexible...We are actually selling products, in this case jobseekers.

SPIT vzw coordinator: Yes we really are sellers. I feel like a saleswoman.

Coordinator of the OCMW: And you have to believe in your product. If you do not, you will not sell it. You will not. And this really new for us [Sigh]. Talking to other OCMW’s I realize it is really not evident” (I: OCMW team coordinator and SPIT vzw coordinator)

This conversation between the two coordinators of Ten for Cooking illustrates the way they perceive their job. People working in public administration and social economy do not typically describe themselves as sales women and their clients as products. While during the selection procedure and personal supervision the coordinators want to take into account the whole person in a holistic way,

this quote also shows that this is instrumental to ‘selling’ OCMW clients as labour commodities on the labour market. This ‘selling process’ largely happens after the training has been finished when the coordinator has a few weeks to find a job for the participant. Not only the competencies, motivations and internship reports but also employment subsidies and other rights are used strategically to close the deal.

The above quote reflects how the Ten for Cooking project triggers a shift in the organizational culture and the task description of OCMW Social Service employers, who are mainly social workers. The catchphrase of the director “I don’t need social workers, I need entrepreneurs” is often mentioned in interviews to point out this intra organizational shift. Not only beneficiaries but also the welfare agencies themselves are in a sense activated, meaning that they have to adapt their behaviour to opportunities, rather than to administrative procedures. As discussed in part four of this report, the quest to seize opportunities urges the coordinators to think outside the box, leave their desk and merge formal and informal strategies.

6.4 Experiences with ESF funding

OCMW Leuven is one of the biggest recipients of ESF funding in Flanders. They have six ongoing ESF funded projects, which is more than the OCMWs of other centre cities combined. For OCMW Leuven the big advantages of ESF funding are: (a) It is always a substantial amount of money, (b) it is long term (three years) funding compared to others subsidies who are increasingly short term project subsidies and; (c) there are not many substantive, content related restrictions which allows for a lot of flexibility. It is unlikely that the Ten for Cooking project would have been realised without ESF funding (I: OCMW funding expert).

The biggest disadvantages of ESF funding are the confusing regulations and the control procedures with financial penalties that often come several years after the project. In particular, the practice of generalized error percentage, makes promoters angry and scared. Based on samples, the inspector for the ESF calculates a percentage of error of all OCMWs. This percentage of the total amount of support is calculated as a fine for the federal administration that distributes the ESF funds to the OCMWs. The federal administration claims this percentage from each individual OCMW, with the exception of those who had a positive inspection that year. OCMWs who were not inspected in a certain year have to pay the generalized fine of that year. Thus, OCMWs like Leuven who have had positive inspections in year A have to pay a generalized fine in the years B and C when they are not inspected. The funding expert of OCMW Leuven explains the impact on OCMW Leuven: “If you have six projects like we have. And they demand up to twenty percent of each project as a generalized sanction, five years later. This is a lot of money! And you know that your project did not make these mistakes. Everybody thinks it is bizarre but it happens every year. I have written many letters asking them: Control us, I am ready for you, please control us. But it does not change” (interview).

In the past, Belgian OCMWs were notoriously sloppy with ESF money and project administration, which resulted in a more strict penalizing approach. For this reason, and the many confusions about regulations – due to ambiguities in manuals and the turnover in supporting staff – and problems with the online application in the past, many OCMWs avoid ESF funding. Amongst OCMW employees, ESF administration is experienced as very time consuming and confusing and therefore they rather stay away from it. In Leuven, someone with a master’s degree, specialized in European legislation, was

appointed to coordinate the ESF project administration. Many other OCMWs pass this task to social workers, which has had negative results in the past.

“Of course they will make mistakes. You need somebody who follows it up on the regular. And everybody knows that social workers hate paperwork [Laughs]” (I: OCMW funding expert).

7 Governance challenges

This last paragraph identifies the governance challenges to social innovation in the Ten for Cooking experience. They are described as they emerged from the documents and the field research, using the ImPRovE definition. First, the following SWOT analysis (Table 2) summarises the strengths and weaknesses of Ten for Cooking. It makes a synthetic final balance of the innovative experience’s contents and processes, also considering the opportunities and threats in its context. The remainder of this paragraph discussed the main governance challenges more in depth.

Table 2: The SWOT analysis of the Ten for Cooking experience: contents, processes and context

	Strengths	Weaknesses
Ten for Cooking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It is a short term, holistic (with which project partners mean that different relevant dimensions are addressed) package that is organized in an effective way. The transition to labour market results are much better than expected. Hence, both the OCMW and the clients invest in a training with high chances to find a job. - The limited number of participants (ten to twelve) and the resources available make a tailored approach with intensive guidance and supervision possible (#6). - Screening before the training and follow-up for solicitations and referral to other services afterwards (#3, #5). - Synergies and open dialogue between partners with different interests - The labour experience during this project is considered to be corresponding better to the expectations on the work floor of employers in the private sector, compared to Article 60 trajectories or working in the social economy. Therefore it succeeds better in strengthening the capabilities of those who are expected of being able to work in the regular economy. - The project mediates otherwise difficult relations between employers and future employees from target groups. The coordinators use their knowledge about participants (overcoming prejudices) and expertise on employment subsidies (financial and administrative advantages) to do this (#2). - It is a flexible project that constantly evaluates and adjusts itself 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The intensive and flexible coordination and support demands a lot of time and resources. The project is not financially self-sustainable and thus dependent on the resources from the ESF and the sector funds. - This project is possible under the current political climate. The future is hence always uncertain. - The project targets a very diverse group. Managers on the work floor and coordinators experience difficulties with such a diverse group in terms of the migration background and socio-economic status of the participants. It is a continuous challenge “teach them to have the right expectations”. Survival strategies and non-conformism to “how we do things here” threaten the aim of the project: preparing them for work in a ‘regular company’ (#7). - The project is not in tune with all the services relevant to the target population, which occasionally results in difficult situations. For example: a participant did not accept a job because earning more he would drop on the waiting list for social housing. (#2) - According to some, the return on investment is still too low and too uncertain. Others dispute this remark, saying this project is a preparatory trajectory and arguing that well-being is also a desirable return. - Employment policies have neglected immigrants in the past which created a difficult context to work in. (#6).
Context	Opportunities	Threats
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This model is applicable on very different shortage occupations in different sectors (#1). - Today the project is better known in the catering sector and there still seem to be some margins for employment of the target population in this sector. - The project develops a network of employers who are willing to employ OCMW clients and they might be willing to do so in the future. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The intensive support and counselling might have the adverse effect that some participants take this for granted. As a result they have too much, “unrealistic expectations” and do not develop the necessary skills (#3,#6). (This warning is very similar to the critique the focus group respondents voiced about the social economy and article 60 trajectories)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The deliberative structure of the steering committee of the project provides it with the capacity for developing innovative answers to challenges (#3). - Contrary to popular belief the project shows that people with a limited knowledge of Dutch can be valuable employees. All participants agree, but to a varying degree (#4). - For some of the actors, this activating approach changed their perception of the target population that was generally regarded as vulnerable, incapable, weak people. - Under certain conditions, the devolution of competences to the local level, the responsabilisation of municipalities and the fusion of municipalities could be a positive evolution for similar initiatives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The catering sector is under pressure. In the short term this motivates employers to look for cheaper employees, like people from target groups. However it is likely that jobs will be lost in the long term and this is a threat for people with a weak position on the labour market. - The durability of the project is threatened by an interplay of changing politics and change-resistant administrations at the local level. It is believed that a right wing ideology, strengthened after the last elections, will not support a project like this one. According to some, this will depend on the results of the project and not so much on ideology (#6). - This project fits within a “activation paradigm” that focusses very much on paid labour as the main avenue for social integration. This doctrine might have blind spots, especially with regard to the weakest amongst the unemployed. Some actors fear that they are indirectly contributing to the creation of a precarious proletariat (#6). The more activating approach towards people that receive unemployment benefits on different levels will urge this group to take on the catering jobs they reject today (#5). - Future reforms are expected to rearrange the coupling between work and well-being, shifting competencies to the VDAB and the CAW (centres for general well-being). This would make it impossible for the OCMW Leuven to take up the role it has today (#2). - ESF support is uncertain for the future.
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Source: our elaboration from document analysis, interviews and focus group

Note: #n indicates the connection with a governance challenge (described below).

7.1 Mainstreaming social innovation

Mainstreaming is not an explicit strategy or goal of the project. The practice is mentioned on some best practice websites of the sector and it is communicated with colleagues on meetings, but there it stops. In other words, there is no upscaling or dissemination strategy, only strategies to maintain and develop the project in Leuven in the future. The focus is more on sustainability, which is understood practically as broadening the network of employers, developing a long term vision and securing funds for the project in the future (I: SPIT vzw coordinator and OCMW coordinator).

Although the project critically reacts on practices that are very common in OCMW's the promoters of the project do not see it as their task to tell other OCMW's what to do in their municipality. Their task is to develop and maintain a project that is successful in the Leuven context. The partners argue that it will not be evident to develop this practice in other municipalities because it is a result of local opportunities, advantages of proximity, which other localities cannot mimic. The long lasting collegial relationship between the coordinator of Sodexo and the OCMW is one example of this. Also, municipalities will need to be of a certain size in order to start up a project like this one that needs at least ten participants (I: Director of the Social Department of OCMW; I: OCMW funding expert).

It is argued that local autonomy is a big advantage for working in project based and context sensitive ways, but it is a disadvantage if your goal is to disseminate practices and develop a uniform service offer across municipalities (see also #5). The lack of mainstreaming strategies is explicitly defended stressing the local 'embeddedness' of the project. The partnerships, the selection procedure and even the methods or the evaluation of results should not be detached from the context in which this practice emerged and developed. A deliberate mainstreaming strategy would need a discussion about the return on investment on this project. This is a political discussion and it is not given that the outcome of this discussion on a supra local level would result in the same possibilities and support for the project

that are available in Leuven today. The partners for the project have different opinions on whether such an approach could be supported by the new more conservative and liberal Flemish government. Some believe that this ideology would not support such intensive and expensive supervision. Others argue that the good 'transition to labour market results' for this target group are very much desired by this more right wing coalition (focus group).

7.2 *Governing welfare mix: avoiding fragmentation*

A project like Ten for Cooking aims to overcome the rigidity of an already fragmented landscape in which (a) different elements of the client's life world are cut up in functionally separated services and trajectories and (b) different strong players (VDAB, OCMW, CAW) have overlapping tasks and experience difficulties in cooperating. Ten for Cooking does this through a varied, adaptable training programme, deliberation between the different specialist focussing on individual cases and intensive supervision and tailored support. Gathering and adapting the different tools around the learning and job seeking process of the participants is very much in line with Supply Chain Management to which cross-function integration plays an important role (Lambert & Cooper, 2000).

Balancing the different interests of the partners is a continuous challenge in order to overcome fragmentation. This is not only a challenge. It is also regarded as a productive, deliberative process that has a large potential for coming up with socially innovative solutions to these and other challenges. The Social Service of the OCMW is the public actor and promoter of the project that has an important coordinating and facilitating role. This department takes on the final responsibility to look for sufficient funds, but different partners (and the sector fund in particular) contribute to make this project financially sustainable (Focus group).

One of the big challenges for the project was and still is to find new employers who are willing to give opportunities to the target population in terms of internships and employment. To extend this network in cooperation with the sector and the VDAB remains one of the priority objectives. For working with the target population the OCMW is legally bound to their territory, for cooperation with employers they are not.

7.3 *Governing welfare mix: developing a participatory governance style*

The project relies on a mix of responsibilities. The meetings of the steering committee are a platform for deliberation used to continuously evaluate and adapt the project and to keep the dialogue between the different public, non-profit and private partners going. The formation of such a platform was an important challenge in the start-up phase of the project. According to some of the focus group participants, the composition of the committee and its deliberative structure and culture is the core innovative element of the project. The recognition of each one's expertise goes together with a clear definition of roles. This results in relationships between the project and its partners that are characterised both by autonomy - it is the cooks' kitchen, the teachers' classroom, etc. - and accountability. The partners are flexible in order to make the project work and to communicate and deliberate their experiences with the coordinator and other partners. All the partners in the committee are professionals, so Ten for Cooking is not a totally new responsibility for them. It does demand from them that they work in a more flexible way in order to make the project work.

The target population is not represented directly in the steering committee. From a social innovation perspective this is a major deficiency of the project. The deliberation process can be regarded as a form of local labour market-corporatism but then without trade unions. The countervailing power to employers and the representation of the participants is taken up by the coordinator of the project and the OCMW. However, as mentioned in part four of this report, there is some ambiguity to the role of the OCMW as it both has to protect the well-being of the participants and tries to develop an engaged network of employers. This tension is resolved to the extent that finding a job is in the best interest of the participant and employers are flexible in their demands, but this interest is imposed from above and does not emerge from any process of collective interest formulation. The possibilities for participants to collectively (and even individually, given their dependence on minimum subsistence income) voice concerns in this regard are very limited. OCMW clients are a passive 'object' in negotiations between OCMW and employers.

The contact with the coordinator does offer opportunities for clients to voice needs and to deliberate about what is desirable, but this deliberation process is very much framed as functional for the quest of finding a job. The coordinator stresses that she respects her clients as autonomous adults, but it is clear that this relation is always a hierarchical one. Screening, supervision, follow up and evaluation of the project by the participants are considered important because this information is vital to find a good match with an employer and to contribute to the well-being of the client. The OCMW knows that its approach is more pushy and controlling compared to strategies in the past. The clients have less freedom of choice than they used to have. The "correct expectations and attitude" are taught, not deliberated (focus group).

7.4 Equality and diversity

Ten for Cooking targets people on minimum subsistence income and it is in particular, but not exclusively, oriented towards foreign-language newcomers. This is a very diverse group that faces many cultural, linguistic and administrative thresholds when looking for work. The background and competences of this group differ immensely. All partners share the conviction that clients benefit from a tailored approach. A one size fits all does not work. The screening procedure aims to take into account the stories and motivations of clients and the possible outcomes of the project are very diverse as well. This diversity is not met with a focus on equality of outcomes in a strict, administrative sense. The goal of Ten for Cooking is both integration and inclusion²⁶. According to Evers and Guillemard (2013: 366) the shift from equality to inclusion as the core value behind welfare provision is visible across Europe in different fields. Faced with such diversity equality is understood here as the intention to secure equality of opportunities. In this regard it is relevant to repeat that this group finds (or has to accept) jobs that are not taken up by others. So if anything, equality is an abstract possibility that can be reached in the future under conditions of inclusion and integration. It is a future horizon (Evers and Guillemard, 2013), rather than a concrete outcome or an enforceable right.

²⁶ Integration can be understood here in terms of the supply-side orientation of the activation programme: making people fit for work. Inclusion can be understood as the typical demand-side orientation: making structures and labour market demands more open for diversity.

The director of the Social Department of OCMW Leuven observes that the idea of equality of outcomes is “sometimes used as an excuse. To say: we cannot do it for person A because then we have to do it for B as well. Here, we approach a diverse public in diverse ways and we are not going to give a simple answer to a complex question. And so, yes this means that here we invest more in a particular group. Because in the end it is always about money. But I am convinced that everybody gets a fair chance to participate” (Interview). He goes on to distinguish his department from many others elsewhere that hide behind administrative rules and regulations. According to him the latter strategy is a form of negligent behaviour that has disregarded for too long the interests and competencies of individuals on assistance benefits and those of foreign-language newcomers in particular.

Surely, administrative matters remain part and parcel of the OCMW’s daily practice but in projects like Ten for Cooking it is increasingly valued as a skill or context and certainly not as an attitude. Respondents say that administration is still important because it guarantees a fair treatment for all, but in practice there is a consensus that small administrative thresholds have to be solved creatively in order to seize opportunities (focus group). Pragmatism and result orientation prevails. This way of doing things, that matches well with the ideas of a tailored approach, short-term activation trajectories and chain management, puts pressure on an organizational culture that regards good administration as the correct, prescribed application of rules who are the same for everybody.

7.5 Uneven access

This flexible, result oriented project shows that access to work is increasingly difficult for the target population and that support, either as a replacement income or as an activation trajectory, becomes ever more conditional. On the one hand access to labour via Ten for Cooking is made explicitly conditional on the motivation, skills, learning curve and labour attitudes of the participant. On the other hand access is contingent on the opportunities to find a good match between employers and future employees. This includes conditions that were deliberated by different partners involved. Important elements are: needs and demands of the employer, the work life balance of the participant and parameters set by the different policy instruments. For instance, in some cases the OCMW will urge employers to give at least a contract of eighty percent and not a half time contract in order to secure a stable labour position and decent income for the participant. Simultaneously they will urge the participant to accept weekend-work and drop sport activities to do so.

As mentioned above this approach shows a shift in focus from equality to inclusion and integration, which is very much in the spirit of the juridical frame of the Right to Social Inclusion law (RMI) of 2002. Looking at the conditions of access to work here the right to inclusion is about finding a match rather than an enforceable social right.

This experience was developed due to the autonomy of the Social Service of the OCMW Leuven and with the help of ESF funding. It is exclusively accessible for people on social assistance benefits in Leuven. The ESF funding conditions prescribe this. The coordinators believe that this is “a pity” because these practices could benefit jobseekers in neighbouring municipalities. However it seems that smaller municipalities often do not have the means, incentives or ambition to develop similar trajectories. The director of the Social Department reasons that fusions, creating bigger attendance areas of OCMW’s would provide more opportunities to coordinate training trajectories and job opportunities within

wider areas, holding actors in neighbouring municipalities more responsible for their efforts (interview).

7.6 Avoiding responsibility

Being the promoter of the project, the Social Service of the OCMW argues that it is their task to look for more effective activation trajectories and cooperation between local partners. Ten for Cooking is the result of this search. No respondents made any comment on the state or other actors not taking on responsibility. On the contrary, there is a feeling of shared responsibility. The resources and time available for the coordinator to supervise clients is experienced by the coordinator as “luxurious” (I: SPIT vzw coordinator). Others argue that it is a *conditio sine qua non* (focus group).

This active subsidiarity is largely possible because of rather generous ESF funding (but this not secured in the long run). The city of Leuven or the Flemish government do not have to take on responsibilities for this project and the project participants appreciate this autonomy. It will be a challenge for the future to convince different policy levels or actors to support this approach.

7.7 Managing intra-organizational tensions

The Ten for Cooking partnership was founded on proximity and existing relationships with the OCMW. This proved to be a good basis for deliberation, mediating between the conflicting interests. As the OCMW has started the process to install a public tender it will be a challenge to maintain these cooperative, deliberative relationships between the different partners.

From the clients’ perspective a project like Ten for Cooking is financially less interesting compared to other possibilities like the Article 60 statute. There is thus a tension between the possibilities offered by the project and other trajectories and survival strategies like undeclared work. Undeclared work is an often mentioned source of tension between participants and supervisors. Sometimes participants in this trajectory to work, turn down opportunities for internships because they are already working. Although this is understood from the clients perspective, it cannot be accepted from the perspective of the project.

Language problems are still an important source of tension according to supervisors on the work floor. Especially when the large majority does not speak proficient Dutch, conflicts between participants rise and the job of the supervisor becomes very heavy. These supervisors would prefer that the percentage of foreign language newcomers (which is now about nine out of ten each cycle) would drop. The coordinators understand this argument, but stress the importance of giving chances to this group (focus group).

7.8 Enabling legal framework

There is not a particular law or legal framework that is pointed out as a particular challenge for the Ten for Cooking project. Rules and regulation of public administration do hamper the chain management, opportunity and result oriented approach of Ten for Cooking. The new organizational culture within the Social Service expects that its employees approach these challenges creatively, in an entrepreneurial way.

The respondents do fear that state reforms and new laws that are announced will pose new challenges for the project. These can hold both opportunities and threats. The future is uncertain.

Now that the project is fully operative, the OCMW has the legal duty to set up a tender procedure. The OCMW has taken steps to do this and is planning to launch a tender in 2015. As the project becomes better known, new possible partners want to join and the OCMW needs a 'fair and legal' procedure to select them. As a result the current configuration of actors, which was formed at least partly from pre-existing trust relations and proximity, is likely to change (see also #1). Some current partners fear that they will lose their position in the project, which would mean losing customers (in the case of the schools) or the cherry-picking of participants by employers (in the case of employers who organize internships on their work floor).

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Appendix A

Interview respondents

- Director of the Social Department of OCMW Leuven; (I: Director of the Social Department of OCMW).
- The coordinator of the Ten for Cooking project appointed by SPIT vzw; (I: Coordinator of SPIT vzw)
- Team coordinator at OCMW Leuven and involved in the coordination of Ten for Cooking (I: Coordinator of OCMW).
- Funding expert for the Social Department of the OCMW Leuven; (I: OCMW funding expert)
- Manager of the OCMW kitchen for Sodexo; (I: Kitchen manager of Sodexo).
- The coordinator appointed by SPIT vzw and the OCMW team coordinator for the project reacted to the call for socially innovative projects together. They were interviewed together.

Focus group participants

- Researcher for ImPRovE and leader of the focus group
- Director of Social Department of OCMW Leuven
- Coordinator of the project appointed by Spit vzw
- Coordinator of Team Employment for the OCMW Leuven.
- Executive for the Social Service of the OCMW Leuven, responsible for subsidies
- Coordinator of the OCMW kitchen for Sodexo
- Teacher in Dutch for Open School Leuven
- Teacher in Math for Open School Leuven
- Sector consultant Horeca Vorming Vlaanderen
- Cook and educator for VTI Leuven

ImPRovE: Poverty Reduction in Europe. Social Policy and Innovation

Poverty Reduction in Europe: Social Policy and Innovation (ImPRovE) is an international research project that brings together ten outstanding research institutes and a broad network of researchers in a concerted effort to study poverty, social policy and social innovation in Europe. The ImPRovE project aims to improve the basis for evidence-based policy making in Europe, both in the short and in the long term. In the short term, this is done by carrying out research that is directly relevant for policymakers. At the same time however, ImPRovE invests in improving the long-term capacity for evidence-based policy making by upgrading the available research infrastructure, by combining both applied and fundamental research, and by optimising the information flow of research results to relevant policy makers and the civil society at large.

The two central questions driving the ImPRovE project are:

How can social cohesion be achieved in Europe?

How can social innovation complement, reinforce and modify macro-level policies and vice versa?

The project runs from March 2012 till February 2016 and receives EU research support to the amount of Euro 2.7 million under the 7th Framework Programme. The output of ImPRovE will include over 55 research papers, about 16 policy briefs and at least 3 scientific books. The ImPRovE Consortium will organise two international conferences (Spring 2014 and Winter 2015). In addition, ImPRovE will develop a new database of local projects of social innovation in Europe, cross-national comparable reference budgets for 6 countries (Belgium, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Italy and Spain) and will strongly expand the available policy scenarios in the European microsimulation model EUROMOD.

More detailed information is available on the website <http://improve-research.eu>.

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