Editorial:

The many rationales for welfare-to-work regimes

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During the 20th century, the socio-political regulation of labour market participation has long been confined to income replacement schemes, setting aside a small number of programmes for improving professional skills and inciting employers to hire disadvantaged workers. Subsequent to this, welfare states have created more all-encompassing programmes to help provide opportunities for training and qualification, with these programmes becoming referred to as an "active labour market policy". However, until the 1980s, social benefits were merely connected to such programmes, while social interventions aimed at supporting unemployed citizens were confined to counseling activities run by job centres and, albeit for a limited number of marginalized citizens, by social work departments. Overall, social welfare provision and labour market regulation inhabit two different worlds, both institutionally and in the mind-set of policy makers.

However, from the 1990s onward we have seen a movement towards merging these two worlds. This movement started in the US, though other Anglo-Saxon countries, as well as some Nordic welfare states, followed the American pioneers in what became referred to as "welfare-to-work", "workfare" or "labour market activation". Meanwhile, most Western countries have embarked on this movement, although remarkable differences exist concerning the design of activation programmes (Lødemel & Trickey, 2001; Barbier & Ludwig-Mayerhofer, 2004; Daguere, 2007; Clasen & Clegg 2011). The key idea prominent in all activation programmes consists of interlinking income replacement with various ways of making the jobless engage proactively with the labour market, which includes participation in training measures meant to improve the "employability" of jobseekers and to lead the latter into gainful employment in the short term. As major Western welfare states have faced high unemployment from the 1980s onward, activation programmes also embraced special work integration schemes that were sometimes run by distinctive organizations (social enterprises) receiving public subsidies for this purpose (Bode et al., 2006).

Moreover, new regulations have obliged jobseekers to follow standardized procedures regarding the way they react on the supply side of the labour market. For instance, they were often compelled to consider the involvement in one of the aforementioned transition programmes. For those unwilling to comply with the respective expectations, income replacement has come to be viewed to be undeserved, with job centre agents suspending payments for at least some time (Handler, 2003), which thereby hinted at a new general philosophy proliferating in Western welfare states. The welfare-to-work approach implies that unconditional social (insurance) entitlements for those outside of waged work are contained, even as citizens are required to neatly adapt themselves to what is on offer in the labour market. In this sense, the approach chimes with a greater commodification of work within society. In

addition, for those excluded from the labour market for a while, the right to work in a former profession close to home, and with a salary corresponding to prior earnings, is considerably constrained as many welfare states urge long-term jobseekers to accept any job under (almost) any condition. Furthermore, the relationship between welfare state institutions and those meant to be covered by them has changed fundamentally, with "contractualisation, individuation, personalization" (Newman, 2007) becoming key concepts of welfare bureaucracies.

All these policies have been justified by suggesting that unemployment can only be reduced by improving the match between (a rapidly changing) labour supply on the one hand, and existing human capital on the other – regardless of what jobless citizens actually prefer in terms of professions and working conditions. Reformers have argued that the long-term unemployed would end up in a poverty trap once there are options to refuse job offers or training opportunities, which is in line with the current expectations of employers. This is not the place to discuss whether these justifications have ever been substantiated or, in hindsight, been proven to be pertinent. There has been quite a bit of debate around the assertions and theories corresponding to welfare-to-work policies, e.g. with regard to whether greater sections of jobless citizens have actually refrained from taking up work when available (Wright, 2012). It has also been discussed whether "activation" makes any sense at all in cases of high unemployment, or if programmes treating jobless citizens as "workfare" clients can avoid poverty traps over the longer term, given the emergence of what is referred to as working poor internationally (Andreß & Lohmann, 2009). To help find pertinent answers to these questions, we would need sophisticated studies with a strong input from open-minded researchers. Therefore, what one can say thus far is that government reports and arguments put forward by mainstream economics have not provided the proof that "workfare works" in that respect.

Be that as it may, new institutional links have been established between social policy and the employment system, as well as between welfare bureaucracies and their target groups. In the current welfare state, social intervention – which embraces activities of information, counseling, orientation and control – extends to large cohorts of citizens, and obviously connects with a new way of thinking about social citizenship (Evers & Guillemard, 2012). It is no surprise then that "welfare-to-work" has become a big issue for the social sciences. Indeed, there is much to discover when looking into what has changed regarding this institutional sphere since the movement towards activation programmes has a multifold background. No single rationale explains welfare-to-work policies; instead, the latter settles within a complex universe of institutional rules, cultural contexts and social behaviours.

This complexity is echoed by a literature that observes "double dynamics" (Newman, 2007) in the activation of both institutions and citizens, entailing new power relations and tensions between the target groups of welfare-to-work schemes and among those managing these schemes. Moreover, such schemes involve ideational patterns around social duties and self-management, over-layering or even superseding traditional concepts such as social rights or social insurance (van Aerschot, 2011). Further issues are the relationship between discourse and practice, and between the contents of the programmes and their actual implementation (Dostal, 2008). Activation schemes involve a wide set of agencies and actors, among which new actors (such as private integration firms) and remodeled public institutions (e.g. "managerialized" job centres), with governance arrangements being of critical importance here (Dingeldey & Rothgang, 2009).

While the rich and highly diversified literature provides evidence for the many rationales underlying the welfare-to-work movement, this movement deserves further research and theory making as regards the aforementioned dimensions and many others. One of the challenges consists of sharpening the *sociological* lens through which this movement is investigated. While economists, political scientists and, to a lesser degree, social work students have written extensively about the afore-sketched developments and issues, the *sociology of welfare-to-work* appears to still be in its infancy. This pertains to different issues. One is the analysis of social norms or types of policy rationales (values, declared purposes) instilled in the regulative framework of welfare-to-work programmes (Wright, 2012), which includes, among other things, the character of instruments used in activation regimes (coercion, incitements), the role of social control as opposed to benevolent empowerment, and, last but not least, the gendered nature of activation policies. In most countries, however, these policies are predicated on the "adult worker model" that sometimes sits uneasily with cultural traditions and social practices (for more on this, see Syltevi, 2006; Breitkreuz et al., 2010 or Cook, 2012). The relationships between welfare-to-work schemes and other social policies are of interest as well, e.g. regarding those concepts that govern the categorization of target groups (by both beneficiaries and welfare agents).

A further object for sociological enquiry is the level of collective action at the organizational level. This pertains to "activation agencies" and to the operational codes that orient their activities (Berkel & van der Aa, 2012). It also embraces the changing architecture of welfare bureaucracies involved in frontline implementation (including by social workers), as well as the role and situation of specialized enterprises receiving public subsidies for taking disadvantaged workers on board (Aiken & Bode, 2009). In this context, the interlinkage of activation programmes and *social work* appears to be of

particular interest (Hoefer & Midgley, 2006). Among other things, there is the paradox that key *concepts* of social work have become marginalized at the discourse level and sometimes in the institutional design of labour market policies as well, while at the same time, *activities* typical of the social work profession have grown in importance in the practice of workfare. With this evolution, "activation work" (Berkel & van der Aa, 2012) may become a new professional role that replaces social work in public administration settings. More generally, welfare-to-work can be viewed as a challenge to social work at the conceptual level since the traditional approach of the latter, centring on a "life first" philosophy, is facing a strong institutional impulse towards "work first". This means that major efforts of welfare bureaucracies and the profession they involve are geared towards making clients employable without much concern for social empowerment (Perkins, 2008).

The papers contributing to this special issue

This special issue is an outcome of paper sessions held during the 10th conference of the *European Sociological Association* (ESA), which took place in Geneva during September 2010. These paper sessions had been organized by the *Research Network* (26) and labeled as the, "Sociology of Social Policy and Social Welfare Provision". This network aims at providing a broad arena for the discussion, dissemination and development of research on all aspects of social policy and social welfare in Europe. Looking at these aspects through a sociological lens, its research agenda includes the theorizing, empirical analysis and evaluation of welfare institutions, organizations and policies and how they connect with the living conditions of citizens. This explicitly embraces fields such as social work or health care. The proceedings in Geneva embraced different panels, with some of them including contributions dealing with the topic of welfare-to-work from various perspectives. The five papers submitted to this special issue are all dealing with sociological aspects of welfare-to-work regimes, and provide an interesting mixture of perspectives in accordance with the afore-sketched research agenda.

In his paper entitled, '*Unemployment insurance, normativity and social work*', Jean Pierre Tabin takes issue with Esping-Andersen's theory of welfare regimes which, he argues, neglects the normative impact of the social programmes. Tabin argues that social security schemes define norms that have societal repercussions. This is the case, for instance, when citizens are exempted from obligations related to job searches because they are entitled to compensatory benefits from health, accident or disability insurance, or when they are covered by maternity or parental leave schemes (with the latter involving gender biases). Whenever the conditions under which benefits are

granted are met, social security schemes evoke normative frames that go beyond macro institutions such as national citizenship. Among other things, such frames include the idea that the lack of employment is involuntary or relates to a specific condition with regard to one's health; in other configurations, they require citizens to demonstrate an "active" participation in integration measures. Embarking on a comparative enquiry, the article looks at social protection against unemployment in 11 European countries, and posits that the norms arising from unemployment benefit schemes imply a certain value bestowed upon employment, e.g. by taking selected types of activities or parental roles into account. In a final outlook, Tabin elaborates on the data needed to analyse this normativity for the case of social work.

An article by *Yoann Boget* entitled, "*Comparing « dispositifs » in Bismarckian Social Protection Systems*", nourishes this comparative assessment by focusing on two countries in which welfare-to-work policies have proliferated in similar ways. Aimed at comparing legal provisions concerning poor employable citizens in Bismarckian welfare regimes, it looks at how France and Germany, while having seen similar transformations in the field of labour market policies, differ in a number of regulatory provisions. After describing the evolution of the related benefit systems in both countries ("Hartz IV" in Germany, "RSA" in France), Boget discusses the rationality of the existing "dispositifs" through a Foucauldian lens. While being based on the same axiological value orientation ("Wertrationalität" in the sense of Weber), he argues that the respective policy frameworks resort to two different patterns of instrumental rationality ("Zweckrationalität") in order to implement the workfare approach. The French system places an emphasis on financial incitements, whereas the German model resorts to a more punitive rationale. The comparative analysis opens a more general discussion on types of governmentalities and their impact on individual citizens, including with respect to the dynamics of subjection.

In her article entitled, "*Integration through Activatio?*", Tomoko Watarai continues this debate by exploring the particular case of immigrants in Germany. The paper starts by sketching a paradigm shift in social policy concerning both the activation agenda and "integration policies" that target these groups. Exploring the logic behind this two-fold paradigm shift, she engages with what he labels a "paradoxical structure" of the activation project. Drawing on social system theory (based on Niklas Luhmann's version) and related concepts of "inclusion" and "communication", her analytical framework is applied to a case study conducted in a big German city (Munich). From her findings, Watarai derives insights on how social work activities take shape in the local practice of activation, and concludes by discussing general relationships between activation, integration and inclusion in the current welfare (-to-work) state.

A similar perspective is taken in an article written by *Eva Nada,* which is entitled: "*The « making up » of the category young unemployed and unqualified in the implementation of a new activation measure in the Swiss Unemployment Insurance system".* Looking at the labeling of welfare-to-work target groups (as "unqualified young workers") in Switzerland, the paper provides insights into the rationalization of activation policies in this country with an eye on the normalization effect of these policies. Based on a qualitative study on the implementation of programmes addressing young jobless citizens, she finds that labeling is highly problematic for placement agents facing a heterogeneous target group. It is argued that the introduction of instruments for the evaluation of skills and psychological aptitudes produces a distinctive conception of what constitutes a "good measure" in this assessment exercise. Using Ian Hacking's theory of the "making up of people" and exploring social categorization from both a philosophical and sociological perspective, the article elucidates the effects of the normalization process and its impact on the professional identities of frontline agents. The findings are further discussed with an eye on the changing landscape of social policy in Europe.

The final contribution to this special issue is provided by *Cordula Zabel* and entitled, "*Adult Workers in Theory or Practice*?" Zabel examines lone mothers' participation in German active labour market programmes since the 2005 workfare reforms. One emphasis on the latter had been to (re)integrate lone parents (more neatly) into the regular labour market by "enabling" measures, with considerable discretion left to job centre caseworkers. Zabel assesses whether the policy objective geared towards the enforcement of an "adult worker model" in Germany has been achieved. Exploiting large-scale administrative data and an event-history analysis, she finds that many lone mothers are actually treated as "adult workers" by involving them in workfare and training programmes, even when their children were young. Nevertheless, in the case of programmes providing direct pathways into regular employment, such as job subsidies or in-firm training schemes, the aforementioned target group's participation rates prove to be substantially lower than for childless single women. Hence, in Germany's workfare regime, the adult worker model only partially works.

With this series of papers, the special issue sheds light on the many rationales both behind and within the movement towards workfare and activation from a sociological perspective. Particular attention is paid to the role of social intervention (including social work strictly speaking), with the contributions providing evidence for notable international differences beyond a broad tendency towards the establishment of a global workfare model. Among other things, they hint at contradictions and tensions in this movement that

have to be dealt with by the organizations and agents involved in the infrastructure of welfare-to-work, while also shedding light on the crucial role of the normative framing and local processing of policies, including that done by social workers. Further research is needed to enlighten this complex world of welfare-to-work schemes, as what is being sought for is an empirically informed critical assessment of a policy approach that has been among the most influential over the past three decades. The Research Network (26) of the ESA will continue to take up this challenge, with the next opportunity coming at the upcoming ESA conference in Turino in August 2013).

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