

„Regimes of Activation“?

Comparing British and German Policy Discourses

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Agenda

1. Introduction
2. Differences between Activation Policies - State of the Art
3. The Role of Discourses
4. Research Design
5. Discourses in Germany and the UK
6. Conclusions

1. Introduction

- Activation reforms in unemployment policy since the 1990s changing rights and duties of benefit recipients (Gilbert 2002, Clasen and van Oorschot 2002, Lodemel 2004)
- But differences between different countries (Barbier 2005, Lodemel/Trickey 2001, Serrano Pascual 2007):
- Role of Regimes?

Research Question:

1. What can explain differences between countries' activation reforms despite significant change?

2. State of the Art

- How can we explain differences between countries' activation reforms?
- **Two answers in the literature** in regard to regime differences
 - **Political Economy** (Rueda 2007, Pierson 2001, Clasen 2000)
 - **Regime Legacy** (Serrano Pascual 2007, Barbier 2005)
- **Problem:**
 - explains only persistent diversity not diverse policy change
 - as policy hybrids are increasingly being identified (Dingeldey 2007, Aurich 2011) need for an explanatory factor that aims at explaining both influences, that of the structural background and that of the new policy agenda
 - Discourses a solution to this dilemma?

3. The role of discourses for policy change

„(Discursive institutionalism means) demonstrating how and when ideas in discursive interactions enable actors to overcome constraints which explanations in terms of interests, path dependence, and/or culture present as overwhelming impediments to action.“ (Schmidt, 2010: 4)

- Discourses until now mainly used for explaining policy change in single cases (Aust and Arriba, 2005, Seeleib-Kaiser and Fleckenstein, 2007, Torfing, 1999)
- My approach: investigate discourses comparatively and utilise them to show differences within change

4.1 Research Design

Case selection

- Countries with activation reforms
- Countries previously belonging to different regimes
- UK (New Deal), DE (Hartz)

Method

- Qualitative content analysis of political discourses accompanying the implementation of the reform (Keller 2007; Mayring 2003)
- Material: Media coverage and parliamentary debates

4.2 Designing meaningful categories

Two perspectives of activation:

- Workfare: motivate the unemployed to work via emphasising duties and sanctions
- Enabling: supply of ALMPs and services in order to facilitate labour market access

Categories

Workfare:

- Should the unemployed be given generous social transfers or do such transfers risk that the unemployed have no incentives towards working?
- To what degree is it the fault of the unemployed that they are unemployed? Is the use of penalising instruments necessary?

Enabling:

- Should the state provide ALMPs? And why?

4.3 Hypotheses based on regime theory

Germany

- status-preserving high transfers
- no sanctions
- more focus on ALMPs

The United Kingdom

- low transfers
- emphasis on incentives and sanctions
- less focus on ALMPs

5.1 Discourse in the United Kingdom

Tony Blair (Green Paper „A new contract for welfare“ 1998):

*“... we want to cut the cost of economic failure; not by lowering their standard of living but by **raising their life chances**”. (DSS 1998, Cm 3805: IV) > **Provision of ALMP argument***

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, Alan Howarth (Dep. for Social Security)

*“We are providing opportunities and **support for education and training**, not just the **full-time option** but within the other options, and the effect will be that those who participate in the new deal will emerge from the experience with a **higher level of skills** than they otherwise would have done.” (House of Commons, Session 199/-98, 1998) > **Provision of ALMP argument***

5.2 Discourse in the UK

Green Paper „A new contract for welfare“ 1998:

*“The Government's commitment to **expand significantly the range of help** available therefore alters the contract with those who are capable of work. It is the **Government's responsibility** to promote work opportunities and to help people take advantage of them. It is the responsibility of those who can take them up to do so..” (DSS 1998, Cm 3805: 31) > **Provision of ALMP argument***

The Guardian, 01. January 1998:

*„Labour's New Deal is, in effect, a revamp of the existing Conservative measures which consist of a patchwork of 42 different schemes But Labour's two main additions could be crucial. First there is a **lot more money** (pounds 3.2- pounds 3.5 billion including reserves) to make it work. Second, Labour's "Gateway", under which 18 to 24-year-olds are **counselled for up to four months before being required to take one of four options** (a private sector job, a voluntary job, education or training), is designed to be much more positive than its predecessor.” > **Provision of ALMP argument***

5.3 Discourse in Germany

Chancellor Schröder, Parliamentary Declaration AGENDA 2010

*„It will be necessary to cut entitlements and transfers ... We will **limit the receipt** of unemployment insurance to 12 months for persons younger than 55 and to 18 months for persons older than 55, because it is necessary in order to get a grip non wage labour costs. But it is also necessary in order set **incentives** ...“ (Bundestag 2003a: 2489) > **reduced generosity of transfers***

*„In future, nobody will be allowed to retreat from the labour market on the account of society. **Declining suitable work** – and we will redefine such suitability criteria – must lead to **sanctions**.“ (Bundestag 2003a: 2485) > **reduced generosity of transfers***

5.4 Discourse in Germany

Franz Müntefering, Chairman of SPD in parliament 2003

*„There is not only the problem of unemployment, but also the expectation that a certain job comes with a **certain status** with certain wage in a certain location. This doesn't fit. I ask you urgently to discuss how we can change this. It is unacceptable that there are a high number of people unemployed here in Germany while there is work that is so unpopular that employees have to be recruited from abroad. It is unacceptable that work is simply not done because of ist status.“ (Bundestag 2003a: 2508) > **reduced focus on status***

Wolfgang Clement, Minister of Economy and Employment 2003

*„Our aim is to bring those, that can and want to work, **into work as soon as possible**. It is important that we merge the work of the Federal Agency and its placement services with the work of the municipalities in common jobcenters ... This will also reduce **financial burdens**.“ ((Bundestag 2003b: 5107) > **reduced duration of transfers, spending orientation***

5.5 Discourse in Germany

Die Zeit, 26.06.2004

*„The ‚believers in redistribution‘ ignore the tomorrow: their activities are harmful for economic dynamic, job mobility and jobs themselves. **Money, that is being spent on transfers, cannot be spent on education. Money, that is spent on publicly subsidised employment, is out of reach for research or other investments for future prosperity.**“ > **reduced generosity on transfers and on provision***

*„**More inequality** for more jobs, that is the honest answer.“ > **reduced status orientation***

6. Comparison of discourses

- Both countries share a view on fighting social exclusion through labour market participation, i.e. on activation

BUT:

- ***Germany focussed on quick placement***
- ***UK focussed on skill development /ALMPs***

- ***German policy departs from status protection > aim to decrease social rights***
- ***UK departs from minimum provision > aim to increase social rights***

7. Conclusion

- The UK more generous than the Germany Activation Policy?
- No, remaining differences between policies, BUT the intended aims differed a lot and the schemes certainly moved into very different directions.
- Activation policies are argued for and understood with reference to the previous policy context: only those parts of the new agenda are supported, which add significant value to the previous scheme
- Likely that policy change is always based on both, stabilising and destabilising factors at the same time, leading to potentially hybrid combinations through reconstruction of policies via discourses.

Thank you for your attention!

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