

Converging Worlds of Activation? Activation Policies and Governance in Europe and the Role of the EU

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Outline

- Research project and research questions
- Conceptual issues
- Research design
- Research hypothesis and operationalization
- Domestic trajectories
- The role of the EU
- Conclusion (with some reflections on the ‘second generation’ of activation studies)

The Research project

- *Governance of activation policies in Europe* (coordinated by R. Van Berkel, W. De Graaf and T. Sirovátka) – within the RECOWE NoE framework
- Special Issue of *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* (Vol. 32, Number 5/6, 2012)
- Researchers involved: F. Sager, F. Ehrler, R. Minas, S. Wright, P. Saikku, V. Karjalainen, J. Winkler

Research questions

- is there convergence in European activation policies?
- is there convergence in the governance modes of activation?
- what is the role played by the European Employment Strategy?

Conceptual issues

- *Activation*: “social policies and programmes aimed at promoting the (more or less obligatory) participation of people dependent on unemployment benefits or social assistance in work” (van Berkel and Borghi, 2008: 332)
- *Activation policy* types (Bonoli, 2010: 440-441):
 - incentive reinforcement (strengthening work incentives for benefit recipients)
 - employment assistance (removing obstacles to labor-market participation)
 - occupation (the depletion of human capital associated with an unemployment spell)
 - upskilling (providing new job opportunities via upgrading vocational training initiatives)

Conceptual issues (cont'd)

- *Governance types* (Newman , 2001: 38):
 - Hierarchical model ('old public administration', based on formal authority)
 - Rational goal model ('new public management', based on managerial power)
 - Open-system model (focus on partnerships, based on flows of power within networks which are involved in decision-making)
 - Self-governance model (focus on devolution and participation, based on citizen and community power)

Research design

- Three-step design strategy:
 - map the activation (policies and governance) supported at the EU level
 - trace the evolution of activation (policies and governance) in the selected cases (France, Germany, Netherlands, United Kingdom, Italy, Finland, Sweden, Czech Republic)
 - assess the role played by European ‘pressures’ (guidelines, communications, recommendations)

Research hypothesis and operationalization

- *EU-induced policy diffusion*: we expect changes in the domestic activation policy menu and mode of governance due to the EU ‘pressures’
- More specifically, we expect:
 - rebalancing of active and passive policies in favour of active policies (*indicator*: share of active expenditure on total expenditure)
 - increasing expenditure on activation policies (*indicator*: ALMP expenditure per unemployed)
 - increasing expenditure on specific activation policy types, namely employment assistance and training (*indicator*: expenditure on OECD categories)
 - diffusion of an ‘open-model system’ mode of activation policies

The EU model

- Since mid-nineties, the EU has supported activation policies, especially:
 - vocational training
 - employment assistance
 - (incentive reinforcement)
- Since mid-nineties, the EU has supported an *open-system or network* mode of governance of activation policies

Domestic trajectories

- Since mid-nineties, overall increase in *employment assistance* expenditure (i.e. expenditure on public employment services and administration/job rotation and job sharing/start up incentives/employment incentives)
- Since mid-nineties, overall decrease (!) in *training* expenditure
- Since mid-nineties, mixed findings with respect to the convergence towards an ‘open-model system’/network governance (yes in several countries, but not in all – for example not much in France).

The role of the EU

- *Activation policies*: relevant only with respect to overall reorientation of active/passive policy expenditure balance, clearly not with respect to training
- *Governance modes* of activation policies: decentralization and marketization have been experienced by all the countries to a certain extent, but the role of the EU was relevant only in some (limited) cases – especially in Czech Republic and Italy

Research answers

- is there convergence in European activation policies? *VERY LIMITED*, only with respect to employment assistance
- is there convergence in the governance modes of activation? *LIMITED*
- what is the role played by the European Employment Strategy? *VERY LIMITED* (basically only CZ and IT)

Conclusion (I)

- With limited exceptions, no clear and solid evidence of EU-induced convergence
- Domestic activation policies and governance modes remain strongly in the hands of domestic governments...
- ...which may only *selectively use* EU pressures in order to reform domestic employment policy menus.
- In other terms, at best we detect *limited, i.e. selective EU-induced activation policy and governance convergence.*

Conclusion (II)

Towards a Second Generation of Activation Studies?

- *Focus*: From *what* activation is to types/worlds of activation (*policies* and *regimes*)
- *Theory*: From a-theoretical activation trajectories to theoretically-driven activation empirical studies
- *Territorial level of analysis*: from domestic governance and implementation of activation studies to local governance and implementation
- *Impact*: from *expected* impacts to *observed* impacts (and more nuanced analyses of effectiveness – from different perspectives)