

How do Activation Reforms Challenge Social Citizenship?

Activation policies have been realized in many EU member states within the last two decades. They include reforms of benefit systems, labour law and active labour market policies and reflect shifting policy objectives and a new understanding of social citizenship. The fact that labour market re-integration is increasingly prioritized at the cost of social protection basically questions the traditional logic of social security provision and might in the long run also modify underlying culturally and historically rooted beliefs and norms of the Western European social model. To better understand this transformation we suggest to focus on the citizen's autonomy whose enhancement can be seen as one major objective of public social policy and labour market regulation. To protect the citizens' autonomy requires more than material support alone as autonomy comprises an individual, a social and a political dimension: Social policies may support or constrain the development of individual identities, strengthen or weaken a citizen's relative social position or encourage her to commitment and participation in the public sphere. The case studies explore the impact of activation strategies from the autonomy perspective by identifying and analysing instruments or policies which represent typical features of the respective countries' activation strategy. Altogether, they illustrate the rise of typical tensions which occur when given patterns of social citizenship are challenged by activation policies.



The Social Citizenship Regime: Substance & Governance

Common research framework

We were interested in exploring how the new ideas and objectives were transferred into regulation – mechanisms, instruments or policy programs. As three main mediating policy criteria (or principles) we identified:

- the of benefits and services
- the regulation concerning the social , or, more precisely, the conditions of to benefits or employment and
- the instruments which allow for the citizen's or encourage his or her to common rules.


The work based on this common framework has been largely explorative: Each member of the team selected one specific example or feature from her or his country as a typical illustration of the most recent reforms in order to demonstrate the changes according to one or more of our three criteria in the fields of labour market regulation, income maintenance and labour promotion schemes.

Overall findings

Analyses of present change following the social citizenship perspective highlight the occurrence of new social divides as well as the erosion of the core category of the European Social Model, the employment status of the citizens. The emerging tensions illustrate the fundamental challenge of the given patterns of social citizenship:


A. Tensions between equality and diversity: We observe new tensions as the attempts to transfer the Universal Adult Worker Norm to people with different backgrounds and needs often hurt those rights to self-determination and respect (migrants (DK), lone mothers (UK), women, more generally)

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Since 2002, Denmark has repeatedly reduced social security provision for unemployed immigrants. In a first step the social assistance benefit has been replaced with the lower so-called 'start assistance /introduction allowance' for newly arrived immigrants. A second reform has reduced the social benefit under certain conditions and introduced the requirement for couples to work 300 hours. These reforms have a clear impact on unemployed immigrants' social citizenship in a material and redistributive manner in that they constrain the individual autonomy of the immigrants and affect the principle of gender equality.

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Lone parents in the UK provide an example of the gendered impact of activation reforms in Europe. The character of reforms (1997-2010) reveals constricting opportunities for citizens to fulfil informal and deeply embedded caring obligations that, while fundamental to interdependent human life, remain largely unacknowledged by policymakers. The extent to which paid work can promote autonomy depends on: the balance of household needs, choice, quality of jobs (e.g. pay, retention, advancement and conditions), supportive mechanisms and opportunities for self and family development.

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Activation strategies challenge the traditional pattern of gendered labour division by promoting an adult worker norm resulting in a shift in women's social citizenship. The gender dimension of activation strategies is comparatively explored between five European countries, with a special attention on France and Germany. Vulnerable groups of women are particularly concerned by activation policies, especially lone mothers and migrant women. The comparison shows that labour market policy reforms have specifically targeted these groups of women but without providing sufficient support for caring needs, thus reinforcing the tension between work and care, while structural inequalities still persist.

B. Tensions between the core and the periphery come along with a more or less pronounced erosion with social status of reference. We may find the re-enforcement of classical dividing lines like in the Southern Welfare States (ES, IT) or the blurring of boundaries between the core employment status (D) or the status of being unemployed (F).

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The German activation strategy pursued since 2002 challenges the specific normative and institutional patterns characterising the German model of social citizenship, above all, the (male) core worker status. Continued labour market deregulation, the introduction of a restrictive means-tested benefit scheme for the large majority of the unemployed and low-waged workers, and a re-orientation of labour promotion policies make it more difficult for workers to attain or maintain a decent employment status. Hence the reforms turn out to jeopardise the citizens' social security and autonomy.

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For Bismarckian welfare states, the activation paradigm is particularly challenging as it questions the traditional pillars of social security: the employment and family statuses. The French strategy stands for a 'moderate' one, as compared to Germany. Nevertheless, it well illustrates present pitfalls of Bismarckian activation: by reshaping unemployment compensation and social assistance schemes, it weakens the social status of non employed citizen, while by stimulating both the labour supply and demand for "bad jobs", it erodes employments statuses and the quality of employment.

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The employment crisis in Europe has brought a strong demand of flexibility that, in different intensities, has resulted in a process of deregulation of employment. In Spain temporary jobs and a reduction of dismissal costs became clear components of a strong deregulation process in the last decade that affected especially the young and migrants, eroding their status of social citizenship. This shows that labour market flexibility is difficult to sustain without effective improvements in social protection for the unemployed through both active and passive policies.

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Over the past 20 years, several Italian social policies have been significantly challenged by the presence of both national and European constraints. In different policy fields, such as employment policy and social assistance, some fundamental principles of the welfare state have changed. The activation rhetoric, especially, has become increasingly relevant both in the political discourse and in employment policy reforms. This chapter argues that the main activation reforms adopted and implemented in Italy had a negative impact on social citizenship.

instruments like contracts or agreements (N) or new

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In the context of activation, social citizenship is not merely the result of national policies, but also of sub-national policy-making and practical policy delivery processes. This conclusion is reached on the basis of an analysis of developments in Dutch Social Assistance during the last two decades. As a consequence of considerable decentralisation and deregulation of concrete decisions concerning activation, local welfare agencies and their frontline workers play a key role in 'defining' social citizenship in the context of broad and generally defined national policy goals.

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From the 1990s the language of welfare contracts has gradually pervaded social policy discourses and reforms in Norway. This move towards contractualism is expressed both through a comprehensive administrative reform (the Nav-reform) and the establishment of different kinds of policy instruments directed towards activation. It is too early to present any reliable empirical conclusions but normatively the development towards contractualism affects the balancing of citizens' rights and duties and thus the relationship between individual autonomy/participation and state control in

WP01 Tensions between Flexibility and Security

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