Abstract

This talk addresses a problem in the labour market and social policies which has emerged from the radical labour market reforms of 2004 in Germany. Part of the reforms was a significant change of the formal definition of the ability to work. The new definition lowered the threshold, so that any adult being able to work three continuous hours is considered to be capable of work and thus not entitled to employment disability benefits anymore. International comparisons have shown that the German definition of formal working ability is stricter compared to the UK or the US.

The new definition of the ability to work resulted in a large number of unemployed suddenly classified as being able to work on while not having any chance to find work. Despite the impossibility to find work, they are “activated” by the execution of public labour market policy, knowing that this activation is senseless as long as no employer is willing to hire them. Recent studies estimate that this is reality for 250,000 up to 500,000 unemployed persons in Germany. Politics and political administration are aware of the problem but fail to develop an efficient solution.

The core group of the jobless persons whose labour market integration can be considered as highly unlikely, is defined as unemployed with person specific placement obstacles (“in der Person liegende Vermittlungshemmnisse”). The only solution to this problem so far is subsidized employment which has been tested in different regional and federal employment tools and programs, unlimited or limited to 24 months.

It is questionable if these programs will solve the problem and will be an activation in the true sense of the word. The consequences for the executed programs are that they are dealing with numerous and heterogeneous problems without providing a clear concept or definition in what placement obstacles consist. We are presenting some results of our new research dealing with unemployed persons who participate in publicly subsidized employment programs.

We will reveal the heterogeneities within the investigated population and show that the programs lack for differentiation between various types of personal employment histories as well as an examination of patterns of coping with the subsidized employment. Furthermore, we will try to shed some light on the nebulous expression of “person specific placement obstacles”. Does it contain anything fruitful for a theoretical-empirical perspective on disadvantaged or excluded groups? Can it be conceived as an analytical category clarifying the reasons for long-term unemployment or is it just an unclear blurry description?
Subsidized Employment in Germany for Unemployed with so-called „Person Specific Placement Obstacles“ – The Creation of a Group by a New Definition and the Truth lying within

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Introduction

In terms of labour market, Germany had been considered as the sick man in Europe\textsuperscript{1}. Since the labour market reforms in 2005 the situation changed significantly. As the expected labour market catastrophe after the worldwide economic crisis in 2008/2009 failed to appear, some tend to call it the German Job Miracle\textsuperscript{ii}. The resilience of the labour market regarding the general economic situation can be seen as a result of the positive developments since 2005, when a fluidization of unemployment began. The amount of unemployed persons was reduced and the amount of employment reached new levels, and there are even complaints about a lack skilled workers. But the widespread euphoria obstructs the view on a problem that characterizes the German labour market, namely its separation into two segments.

In one segment, we find unemployed persons who are entitled to receive benefits from the unemployment insurance, because they have paid the insurance contributions for at least twelve months and having not yet received benefits for more than one year. This is usually described as seeking unemployment. This segment is regulated by the Social Code III, while long-term unemployment is dealt under the Social Code II. The Social Code II addresses unemployed persons who have been unemployed for more than one year and have not gained any entitlements from the unemployment insurance. They do not receive unemployment insurance benefits which are usually between sixty and sixty-seven per cent of their former average income. Instead they receive welfare benefits to the amount of the subsistence minimum.

Both segments are considered capable to work and therefore “activated” within the paradigm of decommodifization (see Esping-Andersen). The part of the last group of the long-term unemployed is about four fifth (eighty per cent) in some regions. Looking at
the dynamic, we can assume that, without exaggeration, a trend of hardening, of petrifying of the long-term unemployment is likely. Since 2005 1.6 million people drew welfare benefits within the framework of the Social Code II. 4.6 million received benefits at the amount of the subsistence minimum for more than twelve months, and eighty percent of these for more than twenty-four months accumulated.

In that group of petrified unemployment one group is of special interest: those, who are highly motivated to get into work, and for whom the local employment offices already have tried to find a work placement, but who, as a result of personal restrictions concerning their work abilities, do not have a chance to get work even under the advantageous conditions on the labor market.

Since 2007 this problem is well known and a lot of labour market participation and integration offerings had been invented in order to include these 200,000 to 500,000 people into work again, all with moderate success. Right now, all programs designed to foster these people are reduced, probably as a result of a certain kind of helplessness and vacuum of real working concepts for integration.

**The problem**

In the public debate the question came up, of how to treat these persons, who are considered to be capable to work, but do not have a chance to be integrated into labour market. The most appealing possibility would have been to lower the threshold of capability of work which would make it possible to treat them as being entitled for disability benefits. This option has been rejected for the reason, that in a work society gainful employment is not only a restraint, resulting from lack of assets, but also an intrinsic drive of human beings and, at the same time, fundamentally for a dignified life, for which it is crucial to gain economic independence, social respect and a status in the society instead of depending on others’ donations.

Moreover it has been argued, that there is also a human need to work, as man wants to pursue his self-fulfillment in dedicating himself to a certain matter and wants to prove and show his ability to work. Also the feasability of an unconditional basic income which tries to disconnect economic autonomy and the necessity to work, has been rejected due to this concept of values of personal autonomy.

But the possibility of publicly subsidized employment requires attention, as it matching with a laboustic societal consensus as well as with the intrinsic needs of the
unemployed person. Being a market compensating tool, publicly subsidized employment is supposed to provide ordinary work for people, who do not have any chances to get work under usual conditions. It is assumed that only by the prerequisite of ordinary work, as normal as possible, work can have lasting personal effects which are always more than just earning money.

Vital for the success of these measurements is not only the accurate design of such kind of concepts and its implementation, but also the adequate definition of the target group. Hence, it would not make sense to support people who would have good chances on the general labour market and who would or could find work by themselves, and it would also not make sense to give people work, who suffer from certain slight physical or psychical handicaps that impede to pursue an ordinary work anyway.

The definition of the target group used for years is that they hold at least three so called “person specific obstacles”, and who because of that have no chance to get into work in medium term. Further, it is presumed that their abilities to perform on the job are limited, with the employers’ obvious aim to get financial compensation.

Our research aim

Since eight years we have been investigating different programs of publicly subsidized employment in Germany, all using that target group definition assuming a homogenity of the target group, meanwhile neither the civil servants in the federal or local employments offices, nor those of the political sphere who are inventing and promoting these programs can explain, what is meant by that. As a result, inevitably selection problems, unrealistic expectations regarding the effectivity of the measurement and implementation difficulties occur and recur permanently. Furthermore the ascription of personal problems as a reason for the disparing situation on the labour market is an obvious stigmatisation, producing even more problems.

Our aim in that paper now is to shed some light onto the target group’s heterogeneity. Because research is always an open process, we have tried to identify real nameable clear problems lying in the person, their impact for the people, and if they play a role for the issue of finding work.
It should be emphasized that defining the target group by using personal obstacles or barriers, the reason for their professional failure is not seen as a result of the radical change of the labour market starting in the eighties or the acting of the political institutions of the labour market, but of a personal deficiency and a lack of normality of personal integrity. We do not deny that there are personal deficiencies that could be a barrier for entering the labor market, but in that case it would be more useful to name that kind of obstacle only for those ones, for whom it is appropriate to.

We conducted more than sixty interviews with thirty-eight subsidized employees, twenty-three interviews with instructors and coworkers. In addition to that, we made observations of work places at non-profit organizations executing subsidized employment in the years 2008 until 2014.

The employees have been interviewed a few months after they had started the new job and after twelve months on the job. The selection followed the principle of an accumulating contrastivity, always on the basis of already revealed structures, and has been realised by the helping hand of agency managers of the labour offices and social managers as well as jobcoaches and social workers, who we also recruited as interviewees. The interviews were non-standardized and followed a thematic map of a brief biographical section, then more detailed the work biography so far, the experiences of being long-term unemployed and the transition into subsidized employment. At the end we asked for objective undeniable biographic facts like year of birth, place of birth, marital status, numbers of children etc. In the second interviews the experiences since the first interview and the perspective of an enduring manifestation of subsidized employment have been relevant topics. The interviews took forty to ninety minutes and the verbatim transcripts have been analysed in team sessions with the method of objective hermeneutics (see Wernet 2014).

Facing the heterogeneity of the interviews it was necessary to come to a sorting frame out of the empirical variety which is not just a subsumption, but the revelation of a structure out of the phenomena. It was important to come up with categories out of the interviews which would allow to survey common and different patterns of coping, motives of and experiences with subsidized employment. We developed a two dimensional table, in which every variable has three items. The first dimension concentrates on the sequences of unemployment, work and participation in unemployment programmes, the time of
being unemployed and its interpretation by the interviewees. The second dimension is
dealing with the motives of the subsidized employees of participating on these programs
respectively on the labour market.

**Development in work**

Starting with the work development and their personal interpretations, the first item
according to Mutz e.a. (1995) is called “discontinuity in normalised instable work
courses”. These persons are long-term unemployed have not entered a continous life
with life-long unlimited professional or skilled work. Their working life so far has been
caracterised by short episodes of employment, then turning into a blended mixture of
unemployment, participation in labour programs and occasional work. They have spent
more of their life-time in unemployment or unemployment programs, than in usual
employment. For these people the situation of working short term without stability,
without routine and only occasionally has become normal and they do not expect that it
will change at any time in their life, neither do they expect a retirement pension
expanding the minimum income.

We differenciated from these ones a group of persons of “broken normal biographies”
who still have an orientation to normality and who had already achieved a state of
skilled professionalism, continous work orientation, societal advancement in the past
before a biographic breakdown, e.g. divorce, employer’s bankruptcy. They had spent a
life of moderate, but secure economic wealth which they suddenly lost. And even under
conditions of subsidized employment this is still their benchmark.

This is also valid for the third group, the “petrified unemployment at the border to
employment”. For reasons of illnesses or disabilities they did not enter into work life yet,
although they have already passed the age of thirty. Programs for younger unemployed
provide fostering support for person under twenty-five years of age, something the
before mentionned group no more entitled to. In accordance to former investigations
this group has a strong orientation towards economic independence, a normal
biography, achievement and work performance.

**Motivational threads**

In addition to that, we distinguish three main threads of motivation for participating at
the labour market in general which can be separated for reason of an analytical
perspective, but usually appear as syndrome. The most obvious and the most striking motive for work, consists in selling work force to earn one's own living. This is a necessity resulting from the lack of assets forcing men to work under conditions of monetarian income and earnings. This motive of earning could be amplified in the way that it is important not only to earn your living, but also get money to achieve a certain level of consumption defined individually, but always attended by the will of economic autonomy and independence. This motive derives from and has its biographic place by the end of the adolescence crisis that moment when the individual becomes self-responsible and independent from his parents, also in respect to economic issues.

It has sometimes been argued that the treatment at local employment offices is a manifestation of bossing around the benefit recipients pretending just following the regulations of the activating labour market. This has often been seen as an unappropriate way of demanding for justifications and apologies. But in fact, these persons are in an awkward situation, because their financial situation forces them to ask for stately benefits which documents their in-autonomy (not yet heteronomy) and in-autarchy for not being able to take care for themselves. This situation itself constitutes an unpleasing status.

The second motive consists in the will to adapt oneself to the task which constitutes the work and defines the work place. Christoph Deutschmann (Deutschmann 2002, 145) pointed out that there is a certain societal problem in each kind of work that has to be solved by working. This requires that the worker, who is in charge of that task, has understood and deciphered the problem and impropriated it in order to make it its own, solve the problem and takes care for it. As a result, he will be able to not only recognize the task but also has to be able to identify quality standards, to internalize how the work has to look like when it is done. This is not only valid for high scale occupations, but also for very simple or repetitive tasks like tiding up and cleaning a car-workshop. Here too, you ought to have an internalized image of how to keep something in a good shape and how it should look like.

Regarding the differenciation between crisis and routine we also have to distinguish tasks in respect to their degree of crisis affinity (crisis potential) (see Loer 2009), for which Offe used the term ,warranty‘ (Gewährleistung), meaning the degree to which a task cannot be codified or entirely described (Offe 1985, 275).
The solution and the accomplishment of the task is the source of satisfaction and acknowledgement gained by working and also can be seen as the source of community building aspects at the workplace. Regardless whether the specific work is very sophisticated, meaningful or quite uninspiring, the fulfillment of a required task has to be considered as an identification supply base for the individual (Kronauer e.a. 1993, 31).

The third motive takes the work performance into its focus. It is about the intensity, in which the task has to be performed, better, faster, more effective, and it refers to the aspect of competition to acquire desired and promising positions to advance in the status system. The field of work is the societally acknowledged and legitimised place to pursue competition and to show-off. This motive of work performance encourages the agents to improve work procedures and to optimize themselves in comparison to other’s work performances and to their own, too.

It has to be emphasized that these three motivational threads can be perceived in each kind of work usually as a well-balanced bundle, but also should be distinguished for analytic purpose. Without the motive of task fulfillment and without the motive of performance orientation it is impossible to maintain an occupation. Without the motive of gaining, a certain occupation would only be an honorary post, because it requires being adequately materially supplied by elsewhere (e.g. a real business, husband). Without the recognition of the task lying underneath the occupation, one would hyperactively start optimizing, but not really accomplishing the matter of the task. Therefore, the interplay between these three kinds of motivations is crucial.

Research findings

Amongst those persons having no chance to get integrated into labour market and showing person specific placement obstacles, are above-average a lot of long-term unemployed without educational or professional certificates and without much work experience in general and as well in our sample. The biggest part belongs to this group, for which instability of occupation had become a normal fact, and still features the most severe problems. The group of those ones, who have entered work life yet is much
smaller and the same for the group of persons whose stable lifes have been broken
down and who still cannot find the way back to a middle class pattern.

Looking at the last two groups, we can reveal that they have a well balanced relationship
between the three motivational threads of work performance, gaining and task
orientation. These persons are middle class representatives, who would actually have
some chances on the first labour market. They do not show any interfering or
imbalanced biases and neglecting enhancements of one of the motivational aspects.

*Some cases as exemplification*

First, Mr. Schiller, who is born in 1981 and to whom a lethal tumour in the maxillary
sinus had been attested. At the age of eighteen he recovered from it unexpectedly. After
having quit school without degrees, and drug abuse, with which he tried to handle the
apprehension of an early death, after some periods in rehabilitation facilities he,
retarded, did not achieve an autonomous state of an adult self-responsability. At the age
of thirty Mr. Schiller is subsidized employed as nursing staff in a retirement home.
The sheltered conditions of his occupation help him to stabilize his goals towards life
conduct under usual circumstances and to figure out his possibilities regarding his goal
of getting a job, being aware of his restrictions at the same time. His placement
restriction is among others, facing a situation of excessing demands, he seeks to vanish
for a couple of days. In his work, for which a common welfare aspect and the ability to
work physically is important, he could prove himself. This is why he has been appointed
without subvention in that elderly retirement home finally. After having signed the
contract he commented this step with the words “Welcome to middle-class” which is his
benchmark. His first pay cheque and the growing experiences in his work abilities, let
him see his future objectives in the dedication to meaningful, caritative work, something
he knows well from his parents, both working as social workers.

For persons, whose long-term and apparently stable work biography broke down, a
former controller, Mr. Hildebrand having passed the fifties, unemployed after the
bankruptcy of his employer, might work as a good example. Under subsidized conditions
he now works as a street worker for homeless people. The position, he holds, has been
created and established by himself. His challenge was to manage the task, but yet, he
cannot identify himself with his new job. He prefers an employment, matching his
degrees, but nonetheless he handles his works quite ambitiously because he provides a
habitualised setting of performing and earning. He is even so successful that he also has
an appointment without subvention. Except his age, no obstacle or restriction is
perceivable.

Amongst persons with a normalised stable work biography particular motivational
biases do appear frequently which can even impede the pursue of the subsidized
employment. For instance, they are bent on proving as very diligent and powerful in a way that
the accomplishment of the task could be harmed.

Here, the case of a janitor in an animal shelter, Mr. Sauer, is to mention, being
unemployed for the last ten years, and who was demanding constantly for a One-Euro-
Job at the local employment office. The motive of proving himself as very high-
performing comes into conflict with the other motivational threads of work. Essential
for him is his almost unlimited availability, disregarding the contractually defined time
limits for working hours; over-time hours and working week-ends without being payed
are naturally. He was even willing to perform his work without payments, in case a
subvention will not be possible anymore. And also the obvious demonstration of
overwhelming work performing qualities and an adamantly criticism towards persons
with a lower level of working abilities was part of that pattern. His last work relations
have failed because of violent acts between him and his coworkers, he even left the
country to escape from further trouble. In his most recent subsidized employment it was
striking that he tended to permantly improve the work procedures and shows a
compulsory disposition to remorseless criticism against others. In his employer's sight,
he appears as a querulant person with stubbornness and a lack of team spirit which had
already almost lead to a notice of cancellation of the work contract. Moreover, many of
the projects that he began with a lot of energy, commitment and dedication, have not
been accomplished and broke down.

Another constrasting case of our sample is a woman, Mrs. Keller, who emphasizes the
motive of earning in a way, the motive of work performance or task orientation is almost
unperceivable. Mrs. Keller, who is only capable to work under special circumstances as a
result of health problems, the aspect of gaining money is important. She is able to
execute those repetitive hand movements that are required at the conveyor belt, but she
has no idea of what she doing, what the product ought to look like. Now, it is astonishing to see that unlike someone who has a strong orientation towards work improvement and performance, she does not criticize her coworkers, whose reduced work ability is responsible for the speed reduction of the conveyor belt, but welcomes the slowliness of the belt as comfortable. This shows that she is not interested in working faster, but appreciates that she is not forced to work high speed, a burden which she already had to adapt to. She esteems that her work is not really challenging her and that is what she likes about it.

Investigating this group of persons to whom person specific placement obstacles are ascribed, shows that they suffer of remarkable biases in their motivational constellation, unessential emphasisments and neglectances that in particular ways hindered procedures at their former work places and impede their subsidized work, too, at least it makes things more complicated for them. To conclude, these biases lead to disturbances of work procedures and become obstrusive to their will to stay and to keep the employment. One could even say, these are mild forms of pathologies which in no way could be called clinically, but these are conspicuities which could be noticed as unpleasing in daily encounters.

From our point of view these conspicuities are easy to recover by making the persons conscious about it, and probably they are able to correct them on their own. For instance, showing a pleasing face, respect others opinions, compliance to existing and approved work procedures. It has to be pointed out that people with these noticeable problems also do appear in firms and enterprises under usual employment conditions, too, because everyone seems to tolerate their tics, as they are doing a good job, apart from that. In summary, these features fall in the area of the activity of social workers, who ought to recognise these deficits and be able to activate the self-healing potential. It is agreeable that the persons show problems in their behavior, hindering the integration into labour market and which could be rectified under conditions of subsidized employment. And in fact, a considerable amount of subsidized employment programs provide an attendance to the work challenges, usually performed by social workers, who are professionally in charge to discover behavioral difficulties and to regulate them to stabilize the employment relations.

But here it has to be mentioned that on the one hand, not all people without a chance of labour market integration need such an attendance, on the other these forms of
attendance are only appropriate in cases of mild forms of behavioral deviance. Completely different are those cases in which real pathologic injuries of the person's integrity are obvious, what also quite often happens in the common definition of being able to work.

A few examples that we found that show where the borders of socialpedagogic intervention have to be drawn. If these people should have a chance to participate in work life, clinical therapies or permanent adaptations of the work place according to their restrictions are necessary. This last group is characterized by obvious personal pathologies to an amount that a usual manner of pursuing work is out of discussion, without having taken therapeutic measurements, but not yet to the amount of disability pension. In due cause it could be drawn into consideration to foster the therapeutic measurements in order to benefit from the disciplining aspects of work. We found chronified forms of physical restrictions to which the work environment has to be adapted, a necessity for particularly shaped work places. For this last group the ascription of person specific obstacles seems to be quite suitable, but it blurs the degree of impediments and hindering aspects. Using this ascription for the others too, can produce stigmatising effects.

In respect to this group we can exhibit a man in the end of his thirties, suffering of narcolepsy, especially when he feels under pressure and if the work is highly monotonous he cannot control his falling asleep. While he was young and healthy he really tried to advance on his work, but with unstable results. The last employment he had, was working as a truck driver that he quit for obvious reasons. He now is unemployed for five years and also at his current work, where he works alone, he is suffering of falling asleep. In his work he has to feed and count earthworms, and if he feels that he is likely to fall asleep, he stops working and continues after having taken a nap. This reduces the pressure and gives him the feeling of being a regular full-time employee. His employer is willing to give him an appointment of non-subsidized employment. We see here a massive pathological obstacle for work which in reason of an extraordinary flexibility of work circumstances enables this man to perform his work. Similar are these cases in which elder workers suffer of allergies (flour, dust, pollen) and who have to quit their subsidized jobs, but are considered as capable to work. In these cases
we found accumulations of illnesses, especially chronified ones linked to back aches and infections. The consequence is that the ability to work is severely lowered and that there are difficulties to find a place to work at, without a complete change of the work procedures. Our research shows a qualified amount of persons featuring physical and social obstacles which have been revealed by our project and which have been underestimated by social welfare agents.

Some people, unemployed for more than ten years, received social attendance, because they could not handle their daily life and formal requirements. Others, also conspicuous cases, as it could be shown that even the lowered standards of subsidized employment have been beyond their limits although they make all efforts to fulfill them, and that it would be more suitable for them to work in a workshop for handicapped people. The struggle for achieving a normal level has been a permanent concern, a permanent requirement that they could not be on par with because of alcohol abuse, homelessness, proletaroid episodes as day labourer on faires for instance. Therefore working in that new work place was a kind of release for them.

It is also noticeable that dependancies and their consequences like loss of the drivers licence, debt overload, divorce and other faults appear as problems attacking the ability to perform on work especially concerning the reliability and narrow the fields in which one is able to work. Further, these symptoms often indicate psychic diseases lying behind of it, seeking for therapeutical interventions.

Going back to the question of the adequateness of the term “person specific placement obstacles”, we may conclude, first that it does not cover the heterogeneity of the group to which it is ascribed. Second that there is a huge amount of employment seeking persons with a strong desire to work, who are chanceless, whose joblessness may nevertheless not be reduced to a specific behaviour. If the labour market would be constituted in a different way, they could doubtlessly find a work and pursue the job in a regular manner. Third, in some cases we could find biases in respect to motivational dispositions, usually appearing as a syndrome which not have yet reached a pathologic degree and which could be corrected easily. Fourth, there is a little group of long-term unemployed who really suffer of personal, namely pathologic deficits. However, labelling this group with “person specific obstacles” underestimates or misjudges the severity of the symptoms they suffer from.
References:


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i http://www.economist.com/node/209559