

Nos-HS Workshop “Rethinking Youth Employment– Work, Policy and the Changing Welfare State in the Nordic countries”, June 16-17th, 2016

Abstracts

Practices of Making Active Citizens: Disciplining the body, governing dreams and assembling the self in Finnish youth activating workshops

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In our presentation we analyse the everyday practices of activating labour market policies targeting young people. We analyse how these practices concentrate on developing the self-governance of the youth, which is put into practice through taking care of one’s body, controlling time in the present as well as in the future and managing sociality. Our analysis is based on ethnographic research in youth activating workshops in 2014-2015 in the metropolitan region of Finland. The workshops form part of the ‘Youth Guarantee’ that Finland introduced in 2013 to struggle against increasing youth unemployment and as a means to implement activating labour market policies. According to ‘Youth Guarantee’, a young person (16-25 years old) should be offered education, training or employment within three months of the registering as an unemployed job seeker. The official goal of the specialised workshops is to develop young people’s professional and transferable skills. However, our research shows that the workshops follow a more or less implicit curriculum, which emphasises the construction of decent citizens through disciplining the body. The proper disciplining of the body as well as the self are seen in this curriculum as the basis for citizenship.

Feminist critique of the marshallian tradition of citizenship as duties and rights has emphasised that citizenship needs to be perceived as historically constituted set of rights and duties, but also as an embodied and gendered practice (Lister 1997). However, in our data the disciplining of the body and managing of time precedes rights. Thus, our conceptual argument is that citizenship needs to be understood as *a priori* embodied and practical – at least in the context of activation policies.

On-call employees – an alienated reserve army?

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The purpose of this paper is to understand on-call employees working life and everyday life in terms of the Marxian term alienation. On-call employees is a growing group in Sweden, characterized by great mobility both within and between workplaces. Their working situation is a kaleidoscopic one, where they have to move between different workplaces to get a liveable salary. Because of their situation of underemployment and difficulties to get a liveable income they have to be on stand-by and are on a constant pursuit for working hours. The chase for income and the characteristics of the work contract affects their life to a great extent. Since they work few hours and often at many different workplaces the social relations to other employees are affected and they get alienated in relation to other employees. As a consequence of the employments characteristics they seldom know when they will work and for how many hours, and thus face great difficulties planning their economical and social life, which has an high impact on their everyday life. The division between leisure time and working time fades and the instrumentality in the employment relation is, because of their standby status, spilled over on their personal life. Because of the economical precarious situation they have a hard time knowing if they will be able to pay their monthly bills, and sometimes even to buy food. This

leads to a situation where they constantly have to make economical calculations of their future and the present, and plan their life accordingly. In this sense, they experience a reification of their life. The paper is a part of my PhD-project and is based on analysis of 15 interviews with on-called employed youths in Sweden.

Employment Activation as an Infrastructure of Feeling

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Across OECD countries the use of employment activation programmes is intensifying. We focus on one programme operating in Finland which aims to activate the labour of the highly credentialized unemployed via programmes of unpaid training. Drawing on blog data from programme participants, we suggest that while apparently offering individualized solutions to private troubles, this programme affords particular structures of feeling regarding work and working. Specifically, it opens out a situation whereby people feel compelled to work even as this work does not offer strategies to organize and make everyday life. This situation should be understood as part of the new normal of contemporary capitalism in which work and working offer not a wage or an activity that supports life but only hopefulness for such a wage and life. We propose that activation programmes be understood as sites through which the affective registers of the new normal are actively constituted.

Keywords:

unemployment

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Accommodation of diversity in Nordic youth inclusion policies. New policies to promote employment?

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Including youth in the labour market is a major challenge facing many European countries, including the Nordic countries. Since 2007, many European countries have witnessed an increase in the rate of young adults neither in education, training nor employment (NEET) and an increase in the number of young adults registered as 'unemployed'. Despite efforts at adopting counter-offensives to change the negative economic conjuncture through new measures to promote education, training and inclusion in the labour market the rate of inactive young adults has increased the last decade in Europe. Possibly, we also see the impact of more long-term trends and structural changes making transitions from school to employment more difficult or variable.

This paper discusses how the Nordic governments have responded to diversity in the youth population and whether country differences in policy measures may account for the differences in unemployment and NEET rates in the Nordic countries. The paper demonstrates that the Nordic countries have responded differently to the concerns about the public expenditures and financial disincentives for

the individual to participate in the labour market, the need for an up-to-date and relevant educational and vocational training services and social regulation of the market to ensure an inclusive labour market.

The paper argues that gender, ethnicity and disability represent social categories of high policy relevance for understanding the present challenges to the Nordic welfare states, including their efforts to promote the inclusion of new generations of men and women in the workforce. While the Nordic countries have been at the forefront in adopting policies to promote gender equality the Nordic countries have been more reluctant to adopt policies to ensure equal opportunities independent of disability and ethnic origin. The paper identifies the challenges for the Nordic countries and concludes by identifying the policy lessons between the Nordic countries.

“My resume is still full”: Potentiality and the value of unpaid work for the unemployed in Toronto, Canada

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Unpaid and underpaid work is now central to un- and under-employment in post-Fordist societies, whether it is mandated for welfare recipients or promoted by employment programs for un- and under-employed youth and migrants. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in Toronto, Canada, conducted in 2015-16, this paper examines government policies, programs, and events that promote “active” un(der)employment through work placements and volunteering. In particular, it examines how such un(der)paid work creates various kinds of value. As policy makers purport, its value may be increased employability for individuals, which leads directly or indirectly to employment in the future. As Marxists and post-Marxists have argued, for private companies the value may lie in “free labour” which creates surplus value. As Foucauldians have shown, the value of such employability schemes may lie in creating certain kinds of neoliberal subjects and citizens, who accept responsibility for the risks of their unemployment. Drawing on post-Fordist affect theory, I argue that the value of such work may also lie in merely keeping one “active”, in engendering potentiality and eluding anomie through attachments to particular kinds of work. Indeed, employment programs aim to prevent “at-risk” youth from becoming NEET (not in employment, education, or training), while programs for underemployed migrants aim to foster the social inclusion of racialized Others. In all of the above instances, activation schemes create the conditions for productive events outside waged labour. Unemployment is thus no longer a site of exclusion, but rather full of productive activity (Adkins 2012) and socially necessary labour (Cooper 2012), inscribed in the “full resumes” of the jobless or the “active” case plans of welfare recipients.

Young migrants' encounters with labour activation as skills misrecognition

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Activation policies focus on enhancing 'employability' of the unemployed through skills enhancement. This makes the concept of 'skills' the central notion in activation of the unemployed. In this paper we look at institutional processes of recognition of young unemployed migrants' skills and ideas of the employment gatekeepers of what skills mean in the Finnish context. We argue that existing sociological approaches to activation reproduce a neutral and unproblematic

notion of skills. Our ethnographic fieldwork in the employment office, career counseling for young people, integration services and language courses has shown that young people's skills and education, including higher education degrees gained outside Finland are perpetually devalued, misrecognized and overlooked by institutional agents. Career counsellors then channel them to take lower level jobs to obtain "Finnish" skills or do unpaid work trials to obtain Finnish references. Moreover, the employment paths and skills enhancement programmes offered by career counsellors are based on the nationalist understanding of skills, which produces migrants as gendered holders of "embodied" rather than "embrained" skills. Such processes of skills misrecognition and a nation-state construction of knowledge and skills produce a constant flow of unpaid labour force for employers' profit. We thus argue that migrant employment paths are not a rational process of matching migrants' skills to the jobs but are institutional process of recognition of what it means to have skills and knowledge.