Peter Bartelheimer
Capability and public employment services

HDCA, TG Work and Employment
Webinar: Capability as informational basis for work and employment politics
21st April, 2021
CAPRIGHT: »Integrated Project« – but really quite diverse

WP 3 – a laboratory of thought on capability in working lives
- Intervention of public employment service (PES) in situations of unemployment
- Bring in life course research

Period publications
- »Individual working lives and the capability approach«, »Transfer«, Vol. 18 (1) (2012)
- »Sen-sitising life course research?« Actes du Séminaire CAPRIGHT, Goettingen 2008

Later work
- Socio-economic reporting (quantitative)
- Program Monitoring and Evaluation
Two thoughts on framing the capability perspective

- **Capability was a dissenting view**
  - Activation paradigm was in its prime, prescribing outcomes
  - In program evaluation, concern with individual agency was often not shared by contracting agencies

- **Being a paradigm, capability is incompletely theorized**
  - Application to situations of unemployment is in need of complementing theories
  - Particularly helpful:
    - Sociology of the life course
    - Sociology of interactive (co-productive) service work
    - Labour market theory, e.g. job search and segmentation theory
    - Account of employment and care work in households
    - Account of firm-based employment systems
Two points on method

**Service work needs to be observed**
- Non-participant observation (~ 250 jobseeker interviews in ~50 agencies)
- Techniques to invite reflection of interactions

**An alternative to randomized control-group designs: realistic evaluation**
- Operations trigger mechanisms, effects contingent on context

---

Pawson/Tilley 1997
Standard model of institutional intervention on employment capabilities

Entitlements for cash benefits, placement and guidance services, training

Resources
Income supports, entitlements

Employment system
PES rules of entitlement

Structural conversion factors
employment systems

Capability to leave unemployment

Personal conversion factors
life course, household

Information on job matches, search monitoring, guidance

Activation portfolio

Functionings
Employment, training, »inactive«

Assistance
Comments on standard model (1)

Capability space
- »capability to leave unemployment« - an intentionally slim concept?
- Two contested accounts:
  - Unemployment is involuntary (mobility / turbulence is imposed)
  - Situations of unemployment are biographically critical key points
- »Employability« is a contested concept
- Individually valuable exits are intrinsically valuable and instrumental for other capabilities (cap. for work, professional development)

Resources
- In activation, income supports are disincentives (moral hazards, lock-in)
- In capability perspective, they are basic necessity and search subsidy
- Comparison Germany / Spain – compared to strong activation regimes, transfers are »capability friendly« by default
Comments on standard model (2)

Personal conversion factors
- Labour force is life course sensitive (cumulative functionings reflecting a set of capabilities, evolving over time)
- Households enter into exchange between workers and employers
- Activation locates the »damaged good« exclusively here

Structural conversion factors
- Conversion is co-production
- Business process of guidance and placement services and »operation models« of case workers can be »fertile« or »corrosive« on conversion
- PES intervention in matching, labour market regulation needed

Outcomes
- Individually valuable outcomes vary
- Three outcomes are institutionally defined
Comments on standard model (3)

A template for reflexion on intervention models
- PES operations are managed interactions of case workers and unemployed (underemployed) workers
- All factors of the »conversion function« can be points of intervention
- To be efficient, intervention portfolio needs to be tailored (person centered)
- Selection of objects of intervention can be normatively biased

Static model is not enough
- Unemployment, labour market transitions are sequentially ordered, proceed over time
  - E.g. episodic, recurrent, continuous
- Cumulative evolution of capability is insufficiently theorized in capability approach
How to bring sequence into the standard model

State / Episode t1

- Structural factors
  - Employment system, PES t1

- Resources
  - Income supports, entitlements t1

- Capability to leave unemployment t1

- Personal factors
  - Life course, household t1

- Functionings
  - Employment, training, »inactive« t1

State / Episode t2

- Structural factors
  - Employment system, PES t2

- Intervention

- Resources
  - Income supports, entitlements t2

- Capability to leave unemployment t2

- Personal factors
  - Life course, household t2

- Functionings
  - Employment, training, »inactive t2

Dr. Peter Bartelheimer, 21-04-2021
Why this may matter (1): Has activation passed its prime?

Mass produced monitoring of job search strains PES resources
- Persistent long-term unemployment raises doubts about effectiveness
- A tendency towards more segmented client services
  - More intensive, comprehensive support for target group
  - E-channels (»virtual labour market«) are used for routine matching

Specialisation of recruitment services for employers is less rigid
- Financial incentives or special advisory services serve as leverage on recruitment
- Comprehensive support for disadvantaged jobseekers include intervening with employers in favour of individual jobseekers

Growing doubts about the macro-economic effects
- Is growing inequality to high a price to pay?
Why this may matter (2): Beyond activation – towards a new paradigm for public employment?

- Offer public career guidance over the course of working life – from rhetoric towards implementation
  - Revaluation of counseling in context of placement services

- Facilitate co-production by clients as a service resource

- Interest to retain and rebuild PES qualification for counseling and comprehensive casework

- Need for a new normative key concept
  - Increase options for individually valuable exits from unemployment
  - Demand-driven individualized assistance in conversion
  - Use a comprehensive portfolio addressing resources, personal and labour market conversion factors and targeted assistance