



Exploratory Workshop Scheme

Scientific Review Group for the Social
Sciences

ESF Exploratory Workshop on
**Young People's Access to Support –
Non-Take-Up of Welfare Services
as Social Disadvantage**

Bielefeld (Germany), 19-21 February 2015

Convened by:
Hans-Uwe Otto and Holger Ziegler

SCIENTIFIC REPORT

1. Executive summary

The workshop was held at the City Center Hotel Arcardia in Bielefeld over three days from the 19th - 21th of February 2015. The conference site was excellent, the accommodation at the same place, the catering very sufficient and the surroundings gave a lot of opportunities for informal talks. This “all in one” atmosphere had a very positive impact on the participants. Another advantage was the direct tram connection to Bielefeld main station. Altogether 15 colleagues, all eminent European welfare service researchers, from different disciplines, such as Social Policy, Economics, Sociology, Education and Social Work came together to collect evidence on the issue of non-take-up, barriers to access to services and discussed methodological problems of grasping “non-users”. Despite the fact that European countries supported by the European Social Fund are investing a considerable amount of resources in order to create and implement services and policies to support the growing number of socially disadvantaged young people, the policy question of how to promote an appropriate infrastructure for integrative well-being and the common good is still raising a lot of research questions, in particular how to reach the problem groups who are not able or willing to gain from these programmes to promote their integration, well-being and the access to the common good. There is evidence for socially and culturally selective take-up of services and programmes and for the crucial relevance of the “dilemma of prevention”. In a nutshell: the needier and the more socially vulnerable a group is, the lower is its probability to access and utilize these services. While the issue of non-take-up of cash benefits is meanwhile adequately researched the more complex issue of non-take-up of services – which programmatically becomes even more important – is still a black-box which urgently needs to be opened in order to increase the institutional capacity to provide services which beneficiaries are entitled, capable and enabled to utilize effectively.

Access to services, and relevant probability of non-take-up, seems to be structured by a combination of social and cultural factors, the general landscape of welfare policies, organisational features, settings, core areas, professional practices of welfare agents as well as personal traits of the beneficiaries.

On the basis of different country reports and different topical analyses a great number of examples were discussed on how services and welfare agents need to be organized and equipped in order to avoid barriers to access and to be ‘capability-friendly’ in terms of enabling (disadvantaged) young people to effectively utilize the services and programmes. The discussion helped clarify main aspects and requirements of a European strategy for enhancing the institutional capacity for providing access to effective support for (disadvantaged) young people. It also became clearer what is necessary for service organisations in order to put more emphasis on recipients’ capacities to make their choices and needs count in welfare decision making processes and processes of service delivery.

The exploratory workshop was a very important step towards understanding how to relate different aspects of the current empirical knowledge and how to elaborate and discuss theoretical considerations on the underlying dynamics and causal mechanism of the phenomena of ‘non-take-up’.

The participants decided to pursue further theoretical and empirical research on this problem also in a proposal for collective research work.

2. Scientific content of the event

After an official welcome by the Dean the introduction by the conveners (Otto, Ziegler) emphasised the main research questions, which had to be taken into account by the workshop. The general consensus with the program gave a fruitful basis for a necessary understanding to open up new directions in this research field about non-take-up of welfare services.

The first part of a very lively general discussion focussed on the “Policy Discourse” was framed by further clearance of the research topic itself. The workshop has shown that the issue of non-take-up (NTU) of services in Europe urgently needs systematic research. While to a certain extent findings from research on the NTU of benefits also may apply for services (cultural dimensions, e.g. sense of constraint and entitlement, time aspects, “burdens of access” and the “costs of claiming”), they are not really analytical and lack a sound “theorization”. NTU research is sometimes a-theoretical thus, lacking systematic attempts to develop generalizable claims. The state of the art has been summarized as follows: Many studies on the NTU of benefits exist, but in the domain of services, quasi no research has been done. What are specificities of services when it comes to NTU (in difference to benefits? A broader clearance came up focused on efforts to provide interpretation of non-take-up among potential recipients of social benefits and provisions. In this regard the discussion highlighted the added value of considering both agency- and context-related factors while assessing claiming or non-claiming attitudes (Baillergeau). It often argued that empirical research has to take into account at least three times of non-take-ups in relation to welfare services: non-take-ups as opposition, as a fact and non-take-ups as an aim (Kessl). Research in NTU of services, that would be clear, is an art to fulfil tasks. Normally it would require an epidemiological study to evaluate the extent of a problem and to compare it with the provision in terms of.

Despite these methodological challenges, the interest in an international working group resides in the possibility to analyse the structure of entitlements within different countries (obligatory vs open, etc). Furthermore, while all else is benchmarked (EU 2020 indicators etc.), there is no benchmarking on such a crucial issue. So the main question has been: Is NTU of services a problem and to what degree? How does it relate to different welfare cultures (e.g. attitudes to welfare claimants and the welfare state, legal entitlement structure, service structure, governance of public services)? Demand and supply side also came up in the central problem. A very good example has been given by non-take-up in occupational training and retraining measures in Spain (Verd). A lot of factors have to be taken into account: For instance, when youngsters have neither voice nor choice; also, the economic necessity of families and the absence of information are always relevant. This depressing situation became clear very quickly. To increase agency development and personalized (re-training) measures it is necessary to provide good information, as the key for empowerment and to ultimately changing the labour market itself.

Discussion also revolved around the need to be cautious with the term NTU. NTU is not per se problematic, there might be “good” reasons, e.g. in case of a low quality of services, with the consequence that any research proposal would have to clarify the terms and conditions of thinking about NTU and describe why it is a problem. Some discussants assert that it might be a problem a) because of resulting disadvantage, b) because it is an indicator for the promise enshrined in social citizenship being not realized anymore. Could NTU possibly be conceived in terms of Hirschman’s exit/voice/ loyalty allowing for a better differentiation between different forms of NTU?

It was a mutual understanding that NTU provides a new perspective on classical research on welfare services. NTU questions the paradigm according to which specific services or professions are specialized to adequately respond to a specific, well-defined problem. NTU might be an indicator that a gap exists between the problem description of the professionals/services and the problem that beneficiaries have/that beneficiaries see, which has to become a main topic in empirical research.

The question about institutional practices was a systematic focus in a variety of research examples from Switzerland, Poland, Spain and Belgium. The aim of this discussion was to elaborate first steps for a multi-level analytical design exploring e.g. NTU of services or NTU of benefits. Relevant questions in this context are relevance of conditional benefits versus purpose-bound programmes or how far eligibility criteria are more subjective in the case of services: informal and formal gate-keeping activities. The importance of the human service organization and “street level bureaucrats” as primary transmission belts of policy are also central issues (Bonvin/Dahmen). Further the question of reproduction of inequalities or disadvantaged social groups which are not able to face institutional expectations due to a lack of various capabilities was also the focus of a broad discussion. These groups are more often eliminated from those services that are more profitable for a future social position. Altogether on the example of unemployment it came up very clear that non-take-up is unthinkable as a public problem, rather regarded as a positive phenomenon (Sztandar-Sztanderska). Also the question of the quality of the social services has to be followed up with an analysis of what could be done to increase support of special problem groups, e.g. young unemployed (Verd). At the other end, one also has to examine when occupational training do not always meet the needs of qualified workers (low level of contents) and women (care responsibilities), and increase the polarization of qualifications in the labour market. In the resulting debate, one of the main issues identified was the problem of non-take-up of rights or non-complaints by ‘hard to reach’ young unemployed (van Parys).

Following this debate the topic of comparative research came up. It is needed to analyse the approximately same phenomenon across the different countries. The implementation of a European Youth Guarantee (EYG) might be a good start for empirical research: The provision of a training or a job within 4 months, as advocated by the EYG “creates” in a certain sense a new right, and thus a new category of “NTU”. It exists in different countries (see the country specific recommendations of the Commission). For NTU it might be particularly interesting as it problematizes the “NEET’s” – problem (which could be considered as a form of NTU) on the basis of a potential loss in terms of human-capital in case young people “do nothing” during a certain period of time. In addition, it entails a strong “sticks and carrots” dimension (see EC proposal for a EYG 2012), thus allowing to analyse NTU in the context of a conditionalised service provision, in which citizenship switches from rights to a contract.

If we focus on services, we will have to go beyond the issue of access, and better define which services we might analyse – in term of EYG, the Public Employment Service (PES) might be a starting point but additionally other services might be relevant (education, third sector service providers). The local context (options of other services, taken up as an alternative) or the local welfare system (e.g. communalities) might play a central role.

The issue of NTU of educational pathways is interesting in itself and might allow to analyse processes of self-exclusion and administrative exclusion from schemes. This topic is closely related to the EYG topic.

Another topic has been the question about user practices. Based on the examples presented at the workshop, a map of understanding about the position of the non-take-ups has been

developed. What are the ways from entitlements to provisions and why do we see differences between access and accessibility of care services? For whom is non-take-up really a problem and are there good reasons not to use the welfare services? The issue of non-take-up has always to be connected with a new broader perspective concerning the welfare state itself. Here one needs to take into account the principal new shift in emphasis from capability to functioning, constitutional and conditional factors. The theoretical frame for this discussion has been the so called “social quality” (Korver). Also a problem of a service for hard-to-reach Youth between low-threshold status and compulsory usage is a challenging issue. The idea to set up a special instrument as a low-threshold status and how the latter could work was the focus of the debate following the presentation about the Austrian situation (Knecht). Can Youth coaching be a “counselling” in the case of early school leavers without ideas about their occupational future? Youth coaching is mostly organized as an outreach programme offered at schools, during classes and during the last school year. It is supposed to determine with the help of a ‘diagnostic’ form which students could need or should use this service. A quite different position was put forward in a report from the UK about biological factors as a rationale for parents to avoid child welfare services (White). Here a broad debate came up under the topic of “Early Intervention” as a new religion, defined as the biological embedding of social adversity. This policy approach has been designed to build the essential social and emotional bedrock in children aged 0-3 and to ensure that children aged 0-18 can become the excellent parents of tomorrow. This approach shed a completely different light on the NTU interventions for and in the future. The warning from the critical reception in the UK was by all sceptics not to take it simply as an utopian idea.

The final decision focused on methodological challenges: the research on non-take-up naturally invites to a perspective “from below”, taking into account the utilization patterns, subjective (non)-appropriation of services by (non)users. This all refers to the possible rational choice bias of classical models of NTU according to which NTU is a simple trade-off between negative utilities and benefits of the service. Investigation should comprise the discussion on service quality, accessibility, etc. At the same time, the conception of the NTU phenomenon should allow to differentiate service (non-)usage by different types of capital/resources of beneficiaries – thus also allow to analyse as a phenomenon of disadvantage, and eventually, as a “middle class bias” that specific services might entail.

3. Assessment of the results, contribution to the future direction of the field, outcome

The intensive debated during the workshop resulted in a mutual agreement by all participants that a great step in the clearance, the frame and the possibilities for further research had been accomplished. The topic in itself, the method and a comparative way to handle empirical research in different countries has become much clearer, also that the welfare state becomes more service-based in the future. Obvious is a retrenchment of benefits but at the same time an expansion of services. Under these circumstances NTU becomes a growing problem. There are a lot of open questions, which have to be answered e.g. why NTU is problematized in some cases, but not in others. There are three research foci. The state with explicit and implicit administrative requirements at the stage, the service and their professionalized status, their management and their normative indicators, the beneficiaries and their living situation, their informational competence and their self-determination as an independent person. Also the difference between take-ups and non-take-ups in different countries is a central issue for a comparative research.

All participants unanimously supported the proposal from the convenors to develop as a next step an application to the Center of Interdisciplinary Study (ZIF) for a research group (6 month period). The proposal is under preparation and should be send to the ZIF by the 1st of October 2015. The group of researchers will be enlarged, to include also scholars from non-European countries.

To sum up: The ESF-Exploratory Workshop has developed important insights into a new problem field of NTU and underlined the necessity for further research especially through the lens on changing welfare programmes from entitlements and beneficiaries to provision as key element of new social services.

4. Final programme

PROGRAMME

Thursday, 19 February 2015

- 14:00 Welcome
Holger Ziegler
Dean of Faculty of Educational Science,
Bielefeld University
- 14:15 Presentation of the European Science Foundation (ESF)
- 14:30-15:00 Introduction: What's the problem
Hans-Uwe Otto/Holger Ziegler (Bielefeld)

Policy Discourse

- 15:00-15:45 Common interpretations of non-take-up reconsidered: the contribution of micro-sociology of social policy
Evelyne Baillergeau (Amsterdam)
- 15:45-16:00 *Coffee-Break*
- 16:00-16:45 The impact of Societal Gender Relations on (Critical) Social Policy
Sabine Schäfer (Bielefeld)
- 16:45-17:30 Children of mentally ill parents challenging health literate organizations. Non-take-up as non-existence of systems providing health and social services adequate for the complex needs of the target population
Ullrich Bauer (Bielefeld)
- 17:30-18:15 Opposition, fact, and aim: non-take-up as a relevant pattern of the existing welfare state(s)
Fabian Kessl (Duisburg-Essen)
- 19:00 *Dinner*

Friday, 20 February 2015

Institutional practices

- 09:30-10:15 The non take up of Welfare services of young persons: Exploring policy-design related, individual and organizational mechanisms leading to non-recourse
Jean-Michel Bonvin/Stephan Dahmen (Lausanne)
- 10:15-11:00 Non-take up as a phenomenon produced by public policy: theoretical and empirical insights from the study of public employment services in Poland
Karolina Sztandar-Sztanderska (Warschau)
- 11:00-11:30 *Coffee-Break*
- 11:30-12:15 Non-take-up in occupational training and retraining measures in Spain. Who to blame?
Joan-Miquel Verd (Barcelona)
- 12:15-13:00 Non-take-up of labour market services by 'hard to reach' young unemployed: evidence from the central policy and organisational level to the street-level in Belgium/Flanders
Liesbeth van Parys (Leuven)

13:00-14:00 *Lunch*

User practices

14:00-14:45 From entitlements to provisions – and back
Ton Korver (Den Haag)

14:45-15:30 Access and Accessibility of care services
Rudi Roose (Ghent)

15:30-16:00 *Coffee-Break*

16:00-16:45 What is the problem on 'non-take-ups' and for whom?
Alban Knecht (Linz)

16:45-17:30 Is it rational for parents to avoid child welfare services? Biologising
poverty and neglect in UK policy
Susan White (Birmingham)

17:30-18:00 General Discussion on the insights and their research implications

19:00 *Dinner*

Saturday, 21 February 2015

Methodological Challenges

09:30-10:15 Approximating non-take up for the special arranged youth education for
young people with special needs (STU) in Denmark: A-functionings to
analytica Population Ratio (SFPR)
Christian Kjeldsen (Aarhus)

10:15-11:00 The French academic work on the issue of non take-up especially with
regards to the perspective developed by the French observatory of
non-take-up
Thierry Berthet (Bordeaux)

11:00-11:30 *Coffee-Break*

11:30-12:00 Summary of the debates
Holger Ziegler

12:00-13:00 Perspectives for further networking
Hans-Uwe Otto / Holger Ziegler

13:00 *Lunch*

End of the workshop and departure

5. Final list of participants

List of Participants

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6. Statistical information on participants

Geographical distribution

Countries	
Austria	1
Belgium	2
Denmark	1
France	1
Germany	3
Poland	1
Spain	1
Switzerland	2
The Netherlands	2
United Kingdom	1

Gender Distribution

M: 11	F: 4
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